

Capital Punishment

In this respect let me quote the words of Edmund Burke, who said: "Your representative owes you not his industry only but his judgment, and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion".

Ours is not a "punch button" democracy. Each of us has been forced by the media to take a position on this question before having had the opportunity of engaging in a reasoned discussion or debate. Ours is not a country, either, of common referenda or plebiscites. We are expected to debate and fully reason any issue before the House before making a decision thereon. When the vote is finally taken on this issue, I expect the result to be a reasoned decision.

Those of you who were in the Chamber this morning to hear the words of the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) will know whereof we speak on this matter. For those who were not in the Chamber this morning for that speech, I commend it to you for your reading.

The real bottom line, as has been mentioned, is not the continued abolition or the reinstatement of the death penalty but our system of justice. It is our justice system that we have to look at and our justice system that we must be concerned with. I have always said that the taking of a life is the last thing that we should do, and I am not satisfied that we are anywhere close to having to take that last step.

One of the reasons that my constituents and your constituents feel as they do is that they are displeased and discouraged with our whole judicial system. They feel frustrated, ignored, and sometimes fearful for their own safety. They want to see that justice is being done. The public confidence in the judicial system is undermined by the discrepancies in sentencing. Confidence has to be restored in our parole system.

Canadians do not have faith in a system that they no longer understand. They read and hear little about it, and they do not believe that it reflects the kind of system that they were brought up under. Media coverage has led the people of Canada to believe that the crime rate is far in excess of what it is in fact, and they are now of the belief that only with the restoration of the death penalty will they be able to restore the law and order that was the norm in past times.

We are all concerned with violence in our way of life; far too many acts of homicidal violence take place in our society. But I sincerely do not believe that the return of the death penalty will resolve those problems. Rather, the problems of our society must be addressed by vigorous law enforcement measures, law reform measures.

Canadians want a society that is both just and humane. We want a criminal justice system that will respond effectively to the real needs of our citizens, who must be protected from crimes of violence. We, in our life-styles, cannot, at home and in our schools, continue a life of permissiveness without the counterbalance of restraint, discipline, and personal responsibility. Having disapproved of the use of the strap in our school system, the use of corporal punishment, we cannot now call for

capital punishment for the weaker among us who did not learn discipline and responsibility.

Society can, through its courts, express clearly and forcefully its profound condemnation of murder and other flagrant crimes against the person without resorting to the death penalty.

When the Lord put his mark upon Cain, the first biblical murderer, and cast him out of his family and into the wilderness, he did not kill him; he forced him into a life, remembering each day the wrong that he had committed.

This debate will be followed by a vote of conscience, free of dictate, partisan or Party loyalty. In good conscience, I shall cast my vote against the motion. I cannot do otherwise.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), on a question or comment.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, before putting my question to the Hon. Member for St. Catharines (Mr. Reid), I want to commend him for his excellent speech. It was a speech given with much feeling and much insight. I was certainly touched by what he had to say. In prefacing my question to him, I want to indicate that today was a day chosen by the Canadian Labour Congress to remember men and women who died or have been injured and possibly disabled in the workplace over the last year.

• (1620)

Those who would return capital punishment to the books of Canada have argued that it is essential to protect the innocent. Does the Hon. Member not think that it may be far more worth while for us to talk about corporate responsibility, for example, in terms of preventing deaths and injuries on the job, as there seems to be a far greater problem in that area? Is that not something on which we ought to spend more time and energy in trying to find the laws and processes that would prevent unnecessary deaths or maiming in the workplace?

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) will not catch me out in a moment of softness. The problem of employer-employee relations is not a subject for this debate. However, I believe much progress has been made in respect of safety in the workplace. I support measures which are being taken to introduce a greater degree of safety in the workplace.

I do not take the position that accidents, which happen as a result of carelessness or otherwise, can be brought into the same realm of consideration as deliberate homicides. I am sure that safety in the workplace is a matter of concern that all of us are addressing.

Mr. Manly: Mr. Speaker, I join in congratulating the Hon. Member for St. Catharines (Mr. Reid) on his first-rate presentation on this subject.