

Calling for a referendum on the issue of the death penalty is a simplistic solution to a complex problem. Following the same logic, why not ask for a referendum on the budget or social reform?

Since they do not form the government nor are they the official opposition, the Reform members are trying in every possible way to usurp power by sneaky moves.

The Reform Party, especially the member for North Vancouver, wants to govern without being in power. Not content with representing a minority of the far right, for whom coercion is the solution for every ill, they now want to impose upon us their form of gang rule government. They want to pass statutes indirectly for which they have never received a mandate. Their hunger for power is equalled only by their cheap opportunism. You have to have a really colossal nerve to make political hay at the expense of victims and their families. In my opinion, calling for a referendum on all issues is not the way to fulfill the role of member of Parliament. Is this the only way the Reform Party has been able to find to divert attention from the only true referendum which will be held on October 30?

In 1994, 596 homicides were reported in Canada, 34 fewer than in 1993. This was the third year in a row that the number had gone down. The homicide rate was 6 per cent lower than the rate in 1993, the lowest rate recorded in Canada in the past 25 years.

Since we started gathering statistics nationally on homicides in 1961, two trends have emerged. Between 1961 and 1975, the rate of homicides rose consistently. Between 1975 and 1994, the rate decreased regularly, despite yearly fluctuations.

The transition period was therefore between 1975 and 1976. It was in 1976 that the death penalty was abolished in Canada. So much for those who contend that the death penalty is the way to reduce the number of homicides. Since the death penalty was abolished, murders in this country have decreased by 33 per cent.

The wind of the far right blowing over the United States is sending breezes of repression our way. Let us have a closer look. Many states already have legislation making it possible for a jury to condemn an individual found guilty of premeditated murder to death.

New York state has just joined the club and enacted legislation providing for the death penalty in cases of murder. Despite the fact that the United States has the death penalty, the homicide rate there has generally been three times the rate in Canada. The FBI reported more than 23,330 homicides last year, a rate of nine murders per 100,000 inhabitants. To give you an idea of what these figures mean, 18,390 homicides have been committed in Canada in the past 33 years.

Private Members' Business

Let us be wary of handing over our criminal justice system to the Reformers. The Reform Party will put us back 1,000 years into the middle ages, when anarchy was the rule.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby, Ref.):
Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague and friend, the hon. member for North Vancouver, for his carefully considered motion.

It is an honour to speak on the issue of capital punishment, which has created a lot of debate in the country, perhaps even as far back as Confederation. It is not a pleasant topic to discuss. No one wishes to discuss the issues of death and tragedy. However, Parliament ought to be the place where we can freely discuss the issues that most concern Canadians.

Today in my area of British Columbia the issue discussed at coffee shops, in the barber shops, and in most local meeting places is the issue of accountability of murderers and how we as a community should respond.

Canadians are fed up with our justice system. Justice has gone. Perhaps it is seen as merely a legal system that does not represent mainstream Canadian values. Constituents observe how their local courts operate and how they produce fear and disgust rather than any sense of relief that officials are minding the store and doing their duty on behalf of the public.

The rationale that capital punishment does not deter really misses the point. It is 100 per cent effective to deter the individual murderer, as it would prevent the current practice where these kinds of criminals are released only to kill again. This happens in Canada.

My reason for speaking today is simple. The people have spoken. It is my duty as the member of Parliament for New Westminster—Burnaby to make those voices heard here in the House of Commons.

Reform MPs were elected because we agreed to vote the wishes of our constituents. That is something the Liberal government does not agree with. In fact, the Liberal government punishes its own members for doing so. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce was recently removed from his position as chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. It seems that if a member votes differently from the pack the Prime Minister will punish them.

My colleagues opposite do not agree with me that community representation is important. That really makes me begin to wonder who they represent. Do they represent the interests of those who elected them to sit in the House, or do they represent only themselves?

I know that the hon. member for North Vancouver did not put forward the motion simply to cause debate in the House, nor did