

*Capital Punishment*

who have been short-changed by our society because they are poor, natives or are of some minor ethnic origin. These people do not happen to fit in with the mores and practices of a western, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant society. Those who did not receive an equal opportunity for an education, those who grew up in a violent home and those who have been so short-changed by society, know not what they do. There is no sure cure unless we do more, much more to destroy the causes of crime of all kinds.

It does not matter whether we pass or defeat this motion, murders will still occur in lesser numbers, the same number or larger numbers. Surely this Parliament should be directing its attention to reducing the causes of crime. We fail to provide conditions to reduce crime and murders. Our police forces are under-manned and under-financed. I speak as one who represents the home of the RCMP. We used to train 400 excellent officers. Two years ago we were down to 40. We are now starting to climb back up. But the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have a lot of catching up to do and they are forced to do that in the name of reducing a deficit, in the name of cutting back on government expenditures. The police forces of our provinces and municipalities are held back. Their capability to do a better job is reduced because of cut-backs, restraint, and the elimination of funding for churches, for volunteer organizations, for parole officers, and for education and training, all in the name of restraint. The same applies to how families live. Our schools and universities could do better with each student. The system breeds the vigilante syndrome, the Texas cowboy practice of the immediate and irrevocable penalty, hanging. As the former Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Member for Prince Albert, said: "They have not hanged a rich man yet".

While we discuss the death penalty in this Parliament, hundreds of thousands line up at food banks, the modern day version of soup kitchens. We have a million more Canadians living below the poverty line than we did just a few years ago. Tens of thousands are either homeless, jobless or otherwise disadvantaged. We have driven them to the last resort. We have driven them to desperation. Some murders are committed by those who are mentally deranged, but most crimes are committed by those who were not born that way but were brought up in an environment which took them down that path. Those who turn to crime are those who have been short-changed in a society which puts a priority on greed and selfishness: "What is in it for me? And the hell with everybody else. It is a state of mind which flies in the face of everything that is decent in each and every one of us. The clamour for the death penalty is nothing more than an appeal to the worst in all of us. And all of us have some bad in us. For Christians, it flies in the face of the teachings of Christ.

● (1740)

We create criminals and murderers, they were not born that way. This motion is before us because of that crass appeal to so-called initiative, self-reliance and to apply the same

standards to people who are left out of conditions and opportunities to grow, prosper and exercise their initiatives and their self-reliance in an egalitarian society.

I wish to say to my friend, the Hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr. Domm), that a Member of Parliament has to be more than a one or two-issue MP. Is all he has to talk about death and metric?

If the Hon. Member can no more than subscribe to whatever is the majority view of his constituents, or what he perceives to be the majority view, on a couple of his own pet peeves, it seems to me that that kind of representation in Parliament is one of those basic appeals to the worst in all of us—greed, selfishness and revenge. It is the urge to feel better if someone gets hung. It is some sort of vicarious and puerile peeping Tom satisfaction when some murderer goes to what they call their "just desserts"—death.

I will not be party to that, no matter what, no matter which way the majority of my constituents feel. If it is logical to take a poll of constituents on capital punishment, and every Member of Parliament votes exactly that way, then it is equally logical that we take a poll on every issue that confronts the Government and this Parliament.

In that event, it follows, quite logically, that MPs would then vote according to those wishes of a given day in any given year on any given issue according to the views of the majority of their constituents. If we are to do that, then what do we need Members of Parliament for? With our technological capacity today we can specially equip every telephone and television set in Canada and let the voters have their say from one day to the next on one issue to the next. Then you, Madam Speaker, and the Clerks at the Table and the Governor General could tally up the results and sign new laws.

Surely, in the evolution of society Members from all Parties now oppose the death penalty. Some 10, 15, 20 years ago that was unthinkable, just as many other matters that we now have in place in society were unthinkable. Now, more and more Canadians want a society that is more tolerant, more compassionate and more understanding of the causes of crime. There is more determination and commitment to eliminate those causes, eliminate those conditions which drive people to do the terrible things which they do.

I would rather that a thousand proven murderers spent the rest of their lives in jail than to run the possibility, no matter how remote, of any one innocent person being put to death. We are not from the bygone ages of the Old Testament, or even from the ages of the New Testament. Those were the Scriptures of those times. Men and women—civilization—has grown. We are of a new age, of a new testament, a new testament to decency, humanity and civilized behaviour. We must oppose even the countenancing of the death penalty in our society.

I pray that our children and our children's children will perpetuate that and enhance the condition of all our citizens so