

Capital Punishment

Prime Minister who will allow that. The promise that was made during the 1984 election campaign was to bring back the debate on capital punishment, not to return capital punishment. It was to let the House of Commons decide that issue, not that we will decide it right now.

Obviously members of the New Democratic Party do not believe in democracy. I do not know if they have free votes over there on that side. I do not think they have free votes on any issues. The Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy) depends on free trade. The majority of the workers, 7,500 workers in Churchill, depend upon mining and export, but the Hon. Member cannot vote for free trade. He must oppose it. That is the kind of democracy they have in that Party. When members of the New Democratic Party talk about democracy, we know where they stand on a free vote on any issue.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise my hon. friend that free votes originated in our caucus in 1933. I heard the Hon. Member say that the people of Canada have a right to feel protected from murderers. I do not want to put words in my hon. friend's mouth, but—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. I do have difficulty hearing the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) because there seems to be a crossfire exchange going on. The Hon. Member for Regina West has the floor.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, is the Hon. Member saying that every citizen of this country would then automatically become suspect as a potential murderer? I believe I heard the Hon. Member say, and I believe I heard him correctly, that the people of Canada want to be protected from murderers. Therefore, every citizen of Canada is suspect because it could happen to any one of us. The hon. gentleman could snap and he might kill somebody tomorrow, who knows. Does he want to have all of us examined and watched? That is the logical result of what he said. I wonder if he could enlarge upon that statement.

As well, could the Hon. Member tell me if he has ever read Edmund Burke's address to his constituents—

Mr. Nystrom: A good Conservative.

Mr. Benjamin: He was a good Conservative, by the way. He spoke of a Member of Parliament owing his constituents diligence, the fullest consideration of his constituents' opinions and maximum work on their behalf, but he is not their delegate but their representative and does not owe them his conscience. Has the Hon. Member ever thought of that?

Mr. Minaker: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the Hon. Member's logic comes from. I do not know if he was sitting in the House or he was in the lobby watching me on television or what, but I cannot follow the logic of what he has suggested about what I said.

I said that naturally people want to be protected from murderers, but the reference I was making was that I believe that the return of capital punishment will be a deterrent. I firmly believe that. In that way, there will be some protection from first degree premeditated murder.

I would suggest that the Hon. Member read the statement of Edmund Burke to his constituents because I would think that in Regina—

Mr. Benjamin: I did.

Mr. Minaker: The Hon. Member has said that he did. I think he had better keep reading it—

Mr. Benjamin: When they were mad at me.

Mr. Minaker: He knows that the majority of his constituents want the return of capital punishment in order to let a jury decide if it wants to apply it. That is the key. Perhaps juries will not apply it but at least, if we follow through on this, we have said that if a crime is committed that deserves this punishment, a jury can use it. That is what we should provide to the citizens of Canada. That is what they want in our justice system.

Mr. McCurdy: Mr. Speaker, I heard the Hon. Member from the "PCP" Party talking about consistency. Let us rephrase the question and steer it away from the matter of free votes, although I am puzzled as to why he should have raised the issue of free votes. There has been no clear demonstration on the government side that they have any particular commitment to free votes. After the shenanigans of the last couple of weeks, it is entirely doubtful.

Having committed himself to follow the dictates of the majority of his constituents, will the Hon. Member always do that? That is question number one. Question number two is a little different from others he might anticipate.

Among those of us opposed to capital punishment, there are those who are concerned about the problem of judicial error. The Hon. Member may remember an occasion on which someone was made a victim of capital punishment as a result of judicial error. That victim said: "Forgive them, Father, for they not what they do".

I wonder if the Hon. Member would not see some inconsistency between that statement made by an historic victim of erroneous capital punishment and his own position on capital punishment.

Mr. Minaker: Mr. Speaker, I could read a number of lines from the Bible indicating that capital punishment is correct, if he wants to get into that type of debate. Perhaps the Hon. Member heard me say earlier that I did not wish to get into religion when debating this issue. I said that that is what I believe in and what a majority of people in Canada believe in. I believe that it is right for that type of crime.