

Capital Punishment

In any case, while the press has kept a pretty good score card on the members who have spoken, I believe they have missed the real point in this whole exercise. What is more important, particularly in this case dealing with such an emotional issue, is that the people of Canada have spoken more strongly than ever before. People are flooding their members' offices daily with demands for a return to the death penalty for the crime of murder. They are not only flooding the offices of Conservative members, or even uncommitted members, but they are calling and writing to all members of every party and applying persuasion. We have also seen a great number of polls on this subject, both on a regional and national basis, polls that were taken by retentionists, by abolitionists and by the uncommitted. Each and every one of these polls, whether they were taken in a riding or nationally, indicates emphatically that a great majority of Canadians—I believe it is over 80 per cent—demand the return to capital punishment, in opposition to the bill before us today.

The imperative question that one must ask oneself is whether or not an elected representative should vote on these important issues relating to law and order in accordance with the wishes of his constituents, or according to his conscience. It is understandable that in fiscal and monetary areas, where a member of parliament has available to him statistics and all other pertinent information relating to the issues at hand, he would be in a better position to judge the subject matter and therefore he could make a calculated decision based on the information available to him. However, if the issue is an emotional one—and certainly there is no more emotional issue than the one on capital punishment—then it is my strong belief that an elected representative should, and indeed must, vote in accordance with the wishes of his constituents. I, personally, cannot understand the attitude that certain members on both sides of the House are taking when they know that more than 80 per cent of their constituents favour capital punishment and yet they still insist on playing the role of the Almighty by voting against the wishes of the same people who gave them the power to vote in the first place.

On an issue of this type, an issue that is probably more emotional than any other, the government cannot afford to ignore the will of the people. No government has the right to ignore the voice of the people, especially when that voice is raised to the level that we hear on the issue of capital punishment. If this government chooses to ignore this call for action to combat the rise of violent crime in Canada today, I believe it will do so at its peril.

Judging from the tone of the vast majority of speeches in the House so far on this bill, the government seems to have boxed itself in with no visible avenues of escape. They have outsmarted themselves in the past ten years by abusing the cabinet's right to commute the death sentence, and they have chosen to ignore the law passed by the majority of members in the House, a law which prescribes the death penalty for convicted murderers of police officers and prison guards. This government, and particularly the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford) and the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), has introduced its own law. They govern self-righteously by the rule of the conscience instead of the rules laid down by this parliament. Imagine all of us governing our lives by the rule of our conscience even when our own rules run counter to the law!

[Mr. Jelinek.]

Many times, when I have waited for a red light to turn to green, my rule of conscience would tell me to go through the red light, but because the law of the land forbids me to do so, I wait for the light to turn to green before I go forward. This is not what the cabinet has been doing for the last five years. We see the government breaking its own laws in other areas as well, not only capital punishment. It is breaking its own laws in respect of legal strikes and in respect of immigration. However, I shall not dwell on these subjects today.

Mr. Speaker, may I call it five o'clock?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions and public bills.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' NOTICES OF MOTIONS

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): The first is motion No. 2 in the name of the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander). Shall that motion stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Shall motion No. 15, in the name of the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. O'Sullivan), stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Shall motion No. 19, in the name of the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson), stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Shall motion No. 20, in the name of the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Shall motion No. 4, in the name of the former member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter) stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Shall motion No. 10, in the name of the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers), stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Shall motion No. 48, in the name of the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Maine), stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.