

*Capital Punishment*

emotional quick fix. That is what militant advocates of the death penalty want to give to their constituents who are frustrated, a quick fix, a solution which appeals to a shallow politician. However, parliamentarians I know in this House would not find that an appealing conception. Real parliamentarians will look for a real solution and make decisions because he or she is wise and moral rather than because they look for what is popular and momentarily satisfying.

I said we should join together to vote against restoring capital punishment. What I mean is that restoring capital punishment is a quick fix. The real challenge is to come to the real issue. The real concern should be to prevent murder and to provide greater safety for the enforcement officers and all those who have to deal with the social work in the community. It is misleading, distracting and a primitive diversion to beat the drums for capital punishment or to try to buy off a society by giving it revenge. It is a backward and regressive move which delays us from the tough demanding issues we must face.

All of us, I suggest, are truly outraged at violence and murder. Instead of having a group of Members of Parliament travelling around the country to ask for opinions on how to kill a human being, as this motion which is before us suggests, what about having a committee which deals with asking how to prevent murder? What if we were to replace a committee which goes around the country asking which one shall we kill and how are we going to put them to death with one which seriously addresses the real issue and asks how to deal with the matter of preventing murder? Should we not be taking another look at how we are sentencing people who commit their first crimes and what we can do more effectively to rehabilitate and to redirect them? Should we not take another look at what we do with people who repeatedly commit violent crimes?

● (1930)

What about our sentencing and parole system? Is it fair? Is it adequate? Is it effective? What about our halfway houses, probationary assessment, psychiatric assessment and care for the violent and mentally ill? Is it adequate? Do we really seriously feel we have done an adequate job in this area? Instead of talking about capital punishment, should we not ask whether or not the courts are overcrowded and whether justice is too long delayed? A quick fix of having capital punishment after a murder is not even as good as locking the barn after the horse is stolen.

What about our justice system? Is it adequate? Do police have enough latitude in cases of doubt to protect themselves? Do police and law enforcement officers and those who work in penal institutions and in halfway houses have enough staff and enough safety? Do they receive enough respect, appreciation and rewards from the community? Will capital punishment solve that or will it not in fact provide us with a false sense of security and, by revenge, a feeling of satisfaction which will distract us from these our real problems?

What about the problems associated with drugs, poverty, alienation, unemployment, mental illness, child and wife abuse, of hunger in slums and illiteracy, all of which make certain small pockets in our country the major breeding grounds for most of the homicides that do take place? Will capital punishment prevent those violent crimes from occurring? We know it will not.

What about the entire phenomenon of violence in our society, the way our media deals with it, its commercialization and mystique? It is not only government that has a responsibility, not only the House of Commons and politicians, it is the people of our country. Do they tolerate perhaps and even encourage violence in sports and entertainment and in relation to our environment? Will the quick fix of capital punishment not distract us as Canadians from dealing with the violence which is the breeding ground of murder and so many other tragic criminal acts?

To kill an alleged killer is to provide a scapegoat instead of dealing with the issues. We know that it is not a deterrent, that it will not save lives, that it will not prevent murder. Morally, we know that capital punishment is absolutely wrong. It brings to risk the possibility of killing an absolutely innocent person. Even if the person is guilty it is still, in any case, immoral.

While the evangelical Baptist churches and a number of some of the independent churches have indicated their support for capital punishment, and I would be inaccurate not to mention this fact, the overwhelming opinion of all the major religious communities in the country and throughout the world condemns capital punishment. Within the Christian community in Canada I only need to point to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Anglican Church, the United Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, the Canadian Unitarian Council, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Reformed Church of America, the Religious Society of Friends, the Salvation Army, and so on. These institutions, these churches, these leaders have absolutely and completely condemned capital punishment as being immoral and cruel.

I go on to point out that not only are these Christian organizations expressing their views against capital punishment but a multitude of religious communities throughout the world that are not Christian, and which are also in this country, are also expressing their views. They include, for example, the World Jewish Congress, the World Muslim Congress and other organizations that are involved in human concerns on behalf of religious people such as the World Young Women's Christian Association, the World Student Christian Federation, the World Federation of United Nations Associations, the World International Zionist Organization, the Union of Arab Jurists, Amnesty International, and the list goes on and on.

The world community of people who work in the area of religion and in terms of alleviation of human suffering