

Capital Punishment

capital punishment. I have to conclude that for every argument for, there is an argument against. I will not go into that *ad nauseam* because some Hon. Members may want to ask me questions, but I will just mention three or four items.

First is the question of whether or not it is a deterrent. I sat here this afternoon and this evening and heard very compelling arguments on both sides. Statistics are trotted out applying to one or the other. We have had very compelling arguments as to why the state should not take a life. On the other hand, we have had the argument that the state is protecting other innocent lives by doing so. There is the argument that doing so discriminates against the poor and minorities. The rich people always get good lawyers and always get off. Yet you and I know that not so long ago in my Province of Ontario a man by the name of Buxbaum hired as his defence counsel someone who is considered to be probably the best defence counsel in the country. That counsel could not get him off and he was convicted of murder.

Then there is the argument that the wrong person may be executed. There have been some very compelling stories there. On the other hand, the other side says there is no evidence that anyone in this country has been wrongfully executed. The only case I have heard where it is said perhaps an innocent person was put to death was a case I have not heard much about. That case is that of William Coffin in Quebec.

About a year ago I was in Montreal for a great political convention which I think you attended, Mr. Speaker. I picked up the *Montreal Gazette* on a Saturday evening, March 15, and there was a big article about the Coffin case. That was long before this motion was introduced, so perhaps someone anticipated this debate. That article contained a lengthy interview with the widow of William Coffin. She was asked if, after 30 years of anguish, she favoured a return to capital punishment in Canada. Mrs. Coffin said: "Hang them. They brag about killing and then they're out after just a few years even where there's absolutely no doubt about it. They hanged Bill despite the doubt. The stupid asses give murderers weekend passes today and houses so they can visit with their wives."

I do not put that forward as a reason for supporting capital punishment. I do so to show that for every argument against there is a compelling argument for.

The conclusion I have come to and the judgment I have applied in this case is based on the fact that, given all this evidence, I think a rational person could come to the decision to support capital punishment and a rational person could come to the decision to oppose it, all on the same evidence. The typical rational person could come to two different conclusions. I mean no reflection on anyone else in this House because I believe this is a matter of deep personal conscience, but I personally believe it would be arrogant for me to decide on that sort of evidence, and on the basis of the fact that a substantial majority of people in my riding favour capital punishment, that I am so right and they are so wrong.

There are other things that come into this decision to support the views of my constituents. Some of those things were raised by the Hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) in his comments. One was the fact that there has been a growing lack of respect for the law and a rise of vigilante-ism. We have seen that in Calgary and Montreal. As the Minister said, the public has lost confidence in our criminal justice system. If there was a way of assuring the people of my riding and other Canadians that we could institute a criminal justice system in which they could have confidence, then I think the results of public opinion polls on this question would be different. Yet I have heard no one in this House, and I have questioned several Members, put forward their views on how we can restructure our system to meet that goal. I have heard no one give us a reasonable answer on that.

I took a survey and professional poll in my riding. The results of the survey were 69 per cent in favour of reinstating the death penalty and 24 per cent against. Going on an across-the-board basis, whether they were males, females, young, middle-aged, older people, family income was less than \$20,000, \$20,000 to \$40,000, or over \$40,000, whether their education was high school or university, the lowest percentage in support of reinstating capital punishment was 59 per cent. In the professional telephone poll conducted, it was 68 per cent the same way. Again across the board, depending on whether you were male, female, your age, family income, and so on, the lowest was 61 per cent in favour. Based on all of that information, I have come to the conclusion that the message from my constituents is clear and overwhelming, and I will be voting for reinstatement of capital punishment with this motion.

I want to conclude with this. I do not believe even while voting for this that if it passes, and it may not, we have come to the end of the debate. Even if capital punishment is reinstated, the debate will continue to rage. The same is true if it is not reinstated. When you and I are out knocking on doors in the next election campaign, I do not think we will find anything different. There will still be a lot of people who want the issue back before Parliament one way or another. I think we are in for a long one on this issue. The ultimate conclusion in my mind is to find some other reasonable alternative, something where people have some confidence that the system works and they are not being threatened. I have not heard anyone suggest that in this Chamber today or in the two and a half years I have been here. Neither have I seen it in any of the studies the Government has published or is in the process of publishing to date.

● (2020)

Mr. Greenaway: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member raised an interesting point. He said that upon examination of the evidence a rational person could conclude either way. If that is the case, how does he explain that a preponderance of Canadian people are in favour of the death penalty? Should it not be 50-50? Is he saying that the people of Canada are not rational or have not examined the evidence?