

*Capital Punishment*

Results of a survey published on May 7 last in several newspapers of this country confirm that statement.

[English]

Proponents of capital punishment are often reported as proclaiming that the people should be allowed to decide. Over the last few months people from my riding, indeed from all over Canada, have spoken to me about this issue. I have heard from them by letter, telephone, and postcard. They have sent me speeches, news clippings, and have even come to see me in person. These people have been doing a lot of soul searching and I would like to take a few moments to share with this House the sentiments of a few who have had a strong impact on me.

First I heard from Mr. Edwards of Toronto who said "Let us not demean ourselves or our nation by resorting to violence to control violence". Then there is a Mr. Epp, the former chief keeper at a Saskatchewan prison who in 1965 had in his prison an inmate who was convicted of murder and sentenced to death by hanging. He asked at that time why we were killing this man. Presumably it was to teach people that killing is wrong. That seemed very strange to him since we do not steal from thieves to teach that stealing is wrong. We do not assault violent people to teach that assaulting people is wrong. We do not rape people who have raped in order to teach them that raping is wrong. The Reverend Charles Eddis of the Unitarian Church of Montreal wrote to protest against capital punishment. He said it only brutalizes us all and cheapens the value of human life itself. Then there was the father of a young Ottawa girl, Celia Rygrok, who was a murder victim. He said nothing can give him his daughter back. Killing another person would not make him any happier. I have had hundreds and hundreds of postcards from across this country telling me that they oppose the death penalty. They say: "Don't kill for me". We have been told continually that the majority of Canadians favour capital punishment. The hundreds of people who have contacted me are not giving me that message.

[Translation]

It remains however, that in the bottom of their hearts, many Hon. Members across the way, many fellow citizens and even constituents support the reinstatement of capital punishment. To those people, whose views I respect but I totally oppose, I would like to point out three specific reasons why I am an abolitionist.

First, a societal reason. We are fortunate in being a democratic nation that finds violence totally abhorrent and immoral. The situation is different in totalitarian states, where torture is an inherent feature. By reinstating capital punishment, we meet violence with violence in a spirit of retribution. We will join the ranks of countries such as South Africa, most Iron Curtain nations, a few Third-World countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia, where a human being is a negligible quantity whose life is subject to the State's pleasure. This would be a major step backward that would bring dishonour to this civilized society.

It is time we knew where Canada stands and where it wants to stand. Around which banner do we want to rally? As an answer. I am reminded of a very pertinent comment a member of the National Coalition Against Capital Punishment, Mr. Pierre Beauregard, recently shared with readers of *Le Devoir*.

And I quote:

"Contemporary history provides good examples of the relationship between capital punishment and power. In 1934, General Franco reinstated capital punishment in Spain for certain terrorist crimes. In 1938, the range of crimes punishable by death was widened. That was a sure way of eliminating political opponents. After the dictator's death, the new democratic government in Spain abolished capital punishment in 1978.

In Argentina, the very day it came to power in 1976, the military junta reinstated capital punishment that had been abolished in 1972. And it is the civilian government that abolished it once more as soon as it returned to power in 1984."

I shall not insist on the conclusion I draw from those comments.

A second reason is discrimination. The restoration of capital punishment would bring back in the country a cause of discrimination on two grounds: race and economic status.

Race: Several surveys made in the United States since over 15 years have shown that the legislation on capital punishment is often applied in a discriminatory fashion to black people. In a report published in February last in London, Amnesty International agrees. In our country, this kind of discrimination would affect another group. A recent study shows that in this country native people would be put to death more frequently than the white.

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[English]

Like the American statistics on race and class which bear out the fact that them without the capital get the punishment, a recently completed survey of state executions in Canada between 1926 and 1957 by University of Victoria Economics Professor Kenneth Avio, found that while 17 out of 21 non-whites found guilty of murdering a white person were executed, only one out of five English Canadians was executed for the murder of a native Canadian. Using a model based on 440 capital murder cases, he further found that there was a 21 per cent chance of an English Canadian being executed for the same factual situation. As a Liberal I cannot tolerate this injustice and inequality. The scales of justice are unequally balanced.

From an economic perspective—

[Translation]

Economic status: The poor can also be the victims of discrimination in our legal system. Good lawyers are costly