

Capital Punishment

know my position, and I told them the following: Even if that was to cost me my re-election to Parliament, I will not support capital punishment. I will not cast a ballot that would send this country back to the *lex talionis*, because there is nothing that can force me to have even the worst criminal sent to the gallows for the most horrible crime imaginable—there is nothing that can force me to delegate my power. Because basically, what am I doing when voting the re-instatement of capital punishment?

I am delegating to officials the power to rule on matters of life and death. I am delegating to the judicial system, to judges, to average citizens that are selected to a jury and have no other choice than to sit on that jury. We will be delegating that power to them. We will be delegating to lawyers, police officers who will have a duty, as is their responsibility, to make honest and sincere investigations and to prove that an individual is guilty of something. It has been proven on a number of occasions that errors were made, perjuries committed. There have been all sort of things. Not that police officers did not do their jobs well! Quite the opposite! They had done an excellent job. But in the judicial system errors were made in the past. Those who support capital punishment say no. The system is so perfect, so safe there is no way an error can be made in cases of first degree murders.

On the other hand, we have examples of errors on second degree murders—just recently, a young man was sentenced to 11 years in penitentiary—11 years—he was deprived of his freedom because of a judicial error. But there is no way it can happen on first degree murders. An error can be made on second-degree murders, but not on first-degree murders. That is false.

There is a quote from Victor Hugo where he wrote something that is truly very real in my view, that I find very touching anyway. Victor Hugo said:

There are three things that are God's own and that belong to no man: the irrevocable, the irreparable, and the indissoluble.

Irreparable punishment implies infallible judges.

I believe that Victor Hugo was right in saying that. Because in fact nobody is perfect in this Parliament, even though he may have been elected with a majority of 25,000 votes in his riding, anyone can make a mistake. Any government can be mistaken, but the mistake is not irreparable. But any individual sentenced to death and executed simply cannot be revived by the state. If the state has made a mistake there is no way it can atone for it. Some people would argue that abolitionists defend criminals rather than victims. Mr. Speaker, even if the state chooses to execute a criminal, the worst possible option, it will not bring the victim back to life. The victim will remain dead, nobody will bring life back, that is impossible.

Mr. Speaker, young Canadians under age 25 have never known the death penalty. Unless I am mistaken, the last hanging took place in Toronto 25 years ago. All youths, boys and girls born in this country, have never known the death penalty. The immigrants from every corner of the world who

chose Canada as their new homeland probably came here because ours is a different country. There was no death penalty in Canada, it was legally abolished in 1976. And over the past 25 years, people who were born in this country or who chose it have never heard of a state execution. There has been none.

Mr. Speaker, are we so lacking in ideas and hope in the people of Canada and its young people that we have to resort again to an eye for an eye to solve a problem which commands a far wider-ranging approach? A previous speaker alluded to violence which can be seen on television day in and day out. Not long ago I spent about an hour and a half watching television: 36 dead, 36 people killed on the TV screen.

While we speak about violence and the fact that there is a problem, have the Canadian society and this Parliament done everything possible to prevent crime? If we put as much effort and money into crime prevention as in our penal institutions and police forces, would we now have to discuss reinstatement of the death penalty?

As for me, Mr. Speaker, I believe that if this Parliament votes for this, if one single Member of this House votes for reinstatement of the death penalty, we are capitulating in the face of a problem.

As for me, I am not a man to capitulate. There is a problem to solve in our society. There is a serious problem of delinquency and criminality. But why does such a problem exist? Nothing much has been said about that. Those who are for reinstatement of the death penalty have not spoken of this real problem which is at the source of criminality.

I would like to say something else, Mr. Speaker. What difference is there between a violent mental defective locked up in a psychiatric hospital and a criminal condemned to twenty-five or thirty-five years in prison? I can tell you the difference. One of them has had the misfortune of killing someone. If we reinstate the death penalty, if we agree to euthanasia in Canada, we shall start with criminals and the resolution says that we shall choose the type of criminals who will be euthenized. But how far will this go? I challenge anyone to find me a single normal human being who is able to commit a murder in cold blood.

I asked several psychologists and psychiatrists a number of questions. I have been considering this issue for quite a long time. Those who are in favour of euthanasia will say: keeping in prison these people who are beyond rehabilitation costs a lot of money. It would be like saying that we should get rid of all chronic mental patients because they cost a lot of money to society? Why not do the same with terminal cancer patients? We might as well finish them off, for they cost society a lot of money. These are unacceptable arguments. We cannot use them.

To those who rely on both the Old and New Testaments to support their position, I can say that I found in the Bible all the evidence I would need to support both sides of the issue.