

against the abolition of capital punishment than there was in the Conservative party, and if one wanted to draw an analogy, one could say that the party leadership in the Conservative party put on greater pressure to follow one particular lead. I think it was significant, however, if we consider leadership as defined by the positions held by the party faithful, that three out of four party leaders voted for the abolition of capital punishment.

The leader of the Liberal party, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau); the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), and the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), all voted for the abolition of capital punishment. That indicated an interesting trend in Canadian society where obviously the leadership of the parties had some difficulty coming to grips with this problem and, by and large, the leadership of the three major political parties decided that it was worth taking a gamble to vote for the abolition of capital punishment.

Whether we agree with the decision they took or not, I think Canadians can be proud of the leadership of their political parties for having had the courage, under very difficult circumstances, to take a stand. That stand was not widely supported throughout the country, as I believe most of us in this debate have admitted, but I believe it says a great deal for the leadership of the Conservative party, the NDP, and the Liberal party that they supported the motion. The motion carried in spite of the fact that all of them had to deal with splits in their parties, which indicated that there was not 100 per cent agreement in their parties that this piece of legislation ought to have been passed. I believe that is significant and very important.

I say that the last vote was very important because we can go back 14 years to when the debates on this matter in the House of Commons in the modern era began, and the result of those debates really culminated in the last vote when the motion carried by a very narrow margin. I believe that it carried by only a narrow margin because there were significant splits in the various parties.

We had an all-party consensus that abolition should take place, and that is what took place.

Mr. Friesen: Come on!

Mr. Reid: I point out to the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Friesen) that if it had not been for the leadership of his party voting for abolition, it would not have carried. The margin was that close. All we have to do to prove that is go back and count the votes, and I think the hon. member does himself, his party, and the position he takes, a disservice by not admitting that the fundamental fact is that this is an issue which has split parties. That is why the leadership of the three major political parties were prepared to allow free votes.

Quite frankly, I cannot think of any other matter in the House of Commons in the 12 years I have been here on which the whips have been off. Only on the issue of capital punishment have the whips been off, and while members of parliament are quite free to vote against their parties at any given time, and to take the consequences which apply, this is the

Capital Punishment

only issue upon which the leadership of the parties have seen fit to remove the discipline which normally applies.

I think the question of abolition of capital punishment has a unique legislative sanction which is not given to many other pieces of legislation which pass on a divided party vote. I put this in a position which I would rank second highest in terms of my concept of the kind of consent the House of Commons gives to legislation. The first, of course, would be legislation receiving a majority consent, which most legislation in this House receives. The fact that abolition took place in the face of party splits gives a profound voice to the abolition of capital punishment.

Members of parliament have obligations, and one of those is to give leadership to ensure that, even though there may be many things we are unable to agree upon, there are things that we can bring to a conclusion, and there are things upon which we can make a decision. It is not always easy for many of us to make the necessary compromises between our own opinions, our own interpretations of the facts, and what the folks back home, our constituents, feel. However I believe in this particular set of circumstances significant numbers of members were able to look into their consciences and say, "I am elected to the House of Commons for what I am, and I will cast my vote for what my understanding of the facts is". I think many members of parliament made their decision on that basis. At the same time, I do not in any way want to denigrate those who voted the other way, according to the dictates of their consciences, or those who voted the other way because their constituents wanted them to do so. I believe that either of the two positions is appropriate for a member of parliament to take. However, I want to let it be known that in any case I always vote the way I see things, and I am prepared to accept the consequences from my constituents.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Armand Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on the motion introduced by my colleague and give my full support to his bill.

I had the opportunity to hear the previous speakers say that the only party which was unanimously in favour of the death penalty was the Social Credit Party of Canada. It is true, Mr. Speaker, that members of the Social Credit Party of Canada were unanimously in favour of the maintenance of the death penalty in our country. Why? We have always felt that we were the representatives of the people in Parliament. All the members of this party made an inquiry in our constituencies to see whether our electors wanted or not the restoration of the death penalty. This is why it is easy for us today to take position in support of the bill, since we have been asked by our people to say to the government that they wanted the restoration of the death penalty.

We are referring today to a referendum. We also agree because I remember that the late Réal Caouette said on many occasions that we should hold a referendum for the guidance of all members of Parliament on that serious issue of the death penalty. I also heard the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) say that we should try out the measure we adopted