

Capital Punishment

Mr. Speaker: I think in the interests of informing all Hon. Members and the public which is watching and listening to this debate, that it should be made very clear that under the rules, for Party Leaders and the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), there is no mandatory provision whereby the usual following 10 minutes of questions and comments would be directed at the Right Hon. Prime Minister, unless of course it was with the unanimous consent of the House. I think it is quite clear that there is not unanimous consent. Resuming debate.

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, first I want to take this occasion to express my gratitude to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) for his helpful observations and his excellent speech on the subject of capital punishment. We all listened to him intently and find his reasoning to be most helpful to us.

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I also want to commend the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) for his contribution, and the Leader of the New Democratic Party. In this case, all three Leaders gave us the same leadership and word, so I wish to commend them in this regard. Even though it is true that we come here as Members of Parliament to speak as individuals, nonetheless, as Leaders of their Parties, they have certainly given to us the direction in which we may look.

One principle in this debate on capital punishment on which all Members of Parliament can unite is our abhorrence of murder. We all agree it is the worst of all crimes and it is especially heinous if it is premeditated, if it is planned ahead of time and then carried out. We all feel horror, anguish and revulsion when multiple deaths are involved or when children are victims of murder. We all share the anguish for the innocent victims and for their bereaved families. This unites us all. But where this House is divided, and many people of Canada are divided as well, is on whether the death penalty should be restored. Should we kill someone who is convicted of having committed murder of whatever kind, and perhaps kill someone who might in fact be innocent?

What I hope and pray is that through my thoughts and words I may be used by God to speak to at least one Member of Parliament, or one Senator, who is presently in favour of capital punishment and speak in such a way that they will hesitate and give the matter further renewed consideration. Since the debate began in the House of Commons on April 27, public opinion has moved in the direction of being less and less in favour of the death penalty. This is not just because the debates have taken place in this House. After all, up until last week, only some 20 people had a chance to speak. Rather, I suggest, the reason that opinion is shifting is because we have been seeing through the media and through our discussions the facts, realities and truth being brought more and more to the attention of the public. Then, too, almost all of the experts and opinion makers are lined up against capital punishment.

It is said there is still a majority of Canadians who favour it in one or another special circumstance, but this majority is dwindling. Surveys of opinions of Members of Parliament definitely show that their views are also changing. I suggest again the reason is the same. Great leaders and parliamentarians of the past have struggled and agonized over this issue. They have weighed the evidence and have eventually concluded that capital punishment in all its forms must be totally abolished.

We have more reasons than ever before to come to the same conclusion. However, I suggest that one of the most persuasive reasons for our leaders in the past and, indeed, for our present parliamentarians is that every country in Europe, except Turkey, has voted out the death penalty in totality because they realize that being concerned about the potential victims of murder and their families is the most important of all priorities and that capital punishment in fact distracts us from getting at the root problems of violence.

It is because I believe that everyone of us is, or should be, most concerned about how to prevent murders, that I think we can all unite and vote against capital punishment and deal with these real issues. We know the death penalty does not prevent murder. As long ago as 1966, the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker said: "The argument is that hanging is a deterrent but history does not support that argument". I quote Mr. Diefenbaker because he is a former leader of the Conservative Party. I hope his opinions, and the opinions of succeeding leaders of the Conservative Party, will have their influence on Members of that Party, as indeed have the words of the various leaders of the Liberal and NDP Parties upon their constituents.

The statistics in Canada, in the United States and elsewhere, support the idea that capital punishment will not deter, discourage or prevent the number of murders which take place. Simply put, capital punishment does not prevent murders. What we do know is that killing the alleged killer can serve only one purpose. It satisfies the hunger for revenge, of vengeance, of making the victim's relatives, friends or society feel that something was done about it. Of course, we find that this is not always the case. In fact, some of the most publicized cases of people who have spoken against capital punishment are those whose relatives were in fact victims of murder. I remember that Pauline Maitland was quoted in this Parliament by Andrew Brewin in 1976 as having pleaded as the wife and widow of a policeman who was murdered that the capital punishment of his alleged murderer should not be carried out. In the case of Lesley Parrott, whose daughter Alison was abducted and murdered last year, her plea was the same. One could go on with any number of cases both in this country and throughout history where the relatives of the victims have realized the futility of such an act and have not wanted revenge in that form.

By killing in revenge, one can perhaps feel something was done to get rid of the existing anger, frustration and feeling of loss, but it is a primitive way of dealing with murder and murderers and a very ineffective way. It only provides an