

Capital Punishment

As I look back and read popular press, I ask myself who it is who is really hung for murder. It is not the rich, not at all. When a policeman carrying out his peace-keeping duties is murdered by a criminal we all correctly feel a loss because, collectively, we have experienced one.

I live in a mining community and for years and years we have known that corporations gave no concern to health and safety on the job. In fact, workers died on the job. But nobody in this country prosecuted a corporate owner of a mine.

In fact, some very interesting information was published by the Federal Law Reform Commission which issued a report last month. It stated in its report that employers who make workers risk death or serious injury should be subject to a proposed new offence of endangerment. The report also stated that as many as 3,600 Canadians die each year from cancer caused by workplace pollution. There are 175 health and safety inspectors in Labour Canada for all of Canada. But imagine 3,000 people dying in the country each year because, in fact, the environment in their job was not safe.

● (2310)

If I were to say to the movers of this motion that capital punishment should be applied to the corporate bigwigs of this country, those who turn a blind eye to the health and safety of workers on the job, they would immediately say: "Hold it; hold it. This wasn't meant for those people. Those are good citizens. Those are productive citizens. They contribute to the life of Canada." No one ever talks about that kind of white collar homicide, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me that those the movers of this motion want to hang are those who belong to minority groups, to the poor.

If this House of Commons this evening votes in favour of bringing back capital punishment, bringing back the rope, we would be accepting a culture of violence; we would be sinking into a state of barbarism. I, for one, will not cast a ballot to take Canada down to that level.

If this motion is in fact passed, a committee will be established to study the question of capital punishment. We have already spent a lot of time on this question over the last several months. That would have been time better spent in trying to find more positive and progressive ways of dealing with violent behaviour, of dealing with crime in this country.

Some of those intending to vote in favour of this motion have said that they will do so on the basis of the majority of their constituents wishing the reinstatement of capital punishment. Those constituents sent their respective Members of Parliament to Ottawa because they believed them to be intelligent and thoughtful. They considered that they had the ability to read and to draw some positive conclusions.

For those Hon. Members to say now that, while they themselves are against capital punishment, they will vote in favour of it on the basis of how their constituents feel, is an

insult to their constituents. To take that position is an abrogation of the responsibility of an elected representative in a parliamentary democracy.

We are not delegates. If one were to extend that argument to its logical conclusion, we should take the same position on tax reform, and other matters. We would be mere puppets. We would turn over to the poll takers what is rightfully the responsibility of Members of Parliament, that being to deal with the issues facing society: social programs, tax reform, free trade. Truly then it could be said that the poll takers would be the legislators of the nation. I know that Percy Shelly said that poets are indeed the true legislators of the world. But to say that the poll takers should be the legislators is ridiculous. As much as we love Angus Reid these days, I would hardly want to concede to Angus Reid the responsibility of legislator of the nation.

We have a responsibility to our constituents to think a problem through. We have an obligation to read the appropriate material relative to a given issue, and then to cast an intelligent decision based on the facts that we have assimilated about it.

Indeed, our constituents are much wiser than we are. To those Hon. Members who take the position that they should vote in accordance with the view held by the majority of their constituents, I say: Be not faint of heart, you who hide behind polls. If you are thinking of re-election, the polls show that 73 per cent would not regard a vote on capital punishment contrary to how they feel about it as a reason to vote against their Member in the next election. I realize that that is only a poll, but certainly it indicates very clearly that our constituents are very wise; it indicates that they understand the process very well.

I have said that we have two choices, Mr. Speaker. As we go along the road, it forks. We can take the fork that takes us in the direction of Chile, Iran, and the Soviet Union—societies that are not noted for their human rights, societies that are not noted for progressive thinking in terms of how to deal with violent behaviour. We can go down that road. But, I am not prepared to travel down that road along with those who have proposed this motion. I am not prepared to go down that road. There is a better road, one that offers us greater security, and that is the road toward a more enlightened way of dealing with violent behaviour.

We have recently had brought down a White Paper on Defence that calls for expenditures over the next 20 years amounting to some \$200 billion, and certainly the defence of our country is a legitimate undertaking. But how much are we spending to defend the country internally? How much of our Gross National Product are we prepared to commit to a study of the cause-effect relationship between poverty and violent behaviour, between unemployment and the effects of that on one's behaviour?

Are we prepared to spend a greater portion of our Gross National Product to defend the very nature of our democracy?