

Capital Punishment

up. They are a scourge, a plague upon the political culture of our country, and I hope that someday they will receive the obscurity and derogation which they so richly deserve.

It is only when I perceive that members of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada are as morally outraged by the death through poverty and starvation of millions of children throughout the world as they are about the homicide statistics, that I will listen to them. They could not even permit a debate on the North-South dialogue. That is how cheap they are. Only when I perceive that members of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada are as outraged about the damage that is being done to future generations through the laissez-faire introduction of chemicals, toxins and radioactive wastes into our environment for commercial purposes, will I listen. When I perceive that they are genuinely morally outraged about the thousands of people who have been tortured, maimed and murdered by military regimes which they support for the barefaced, disgusting reason that these regimes are friendly to their rapacious friends, the multinational corporations, only then will I listen to them, but not before. But in the continued absence of such outrage on their part, I can only regard this motion as an act of political deflection or hypocrisy, or both.

What of the Liberal Party? They pride themselves in the fact that they abolished capital punishment. This is one of their few claims to fame as a party of humane and progressive values. They often hang their whole self-image on this one hook, with a kind of intellectual snobbery that many, quite rightly, find irritating. The Tories seem conceptually unable to graduate from seeing morality as anything other than individual in nature. Talking about collective political morality, about social and economic justice, about exploitation and oppression, just rebounds off their thick skulls. But the Liberals seem at times, and I say this in all sincerity, to have lost the ability to be outraged about anything anymore. They are the cool trippers. They are in charge, and they are, for the most part, protected from the consequences of their indifference to human suffering, whether it be the James Bay Cree, children dying in Northern Quebec, the poor of El Salvador, the consumers who are victimized by dangerous products on the market, or the generations to come who will have to live with the folly of their nuclear program. It is not cool around here to really care about anything.

Setting up a committee to look at capital punishment will not get to the heart of the matter, but neither will the defeat of this motion in and of itself. That will take more courage and more clarity than I at this point have come to expect of the present government.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to address the argument that those of us who oppose the restoration of capital punishment, in spite of public opinion, are somehow violating the spirit of democracy. Apart from the obvious hypocrisy of this charge, given the fact that the same people from the PCs who spoke today would not change their minds about PetroCan if the whole world was for it, there is the irony of hearing these arguments from members of a party who would like to be

thought of, and who parade themselves, as defenders of parliamentary democracy, the kind of democracy in which the representatives of the people are elected to use their best judgment and to be answerable for that at the next election, which I am quite prepared to do. I have answered twice already. As Edmund Burke, that great Conservative thinker, said so clearly, MPs owe their constituents many things, but their good judgment and their conscience are their own, and so it should be.

The so-called defenders of parliamentary democracy are arguing for the politics of the public opinion polls and for referendums, which incidentally they oppose when it comes to constitutional matters. I am prepared to discuss with my constituents those areas where I am at variance with the majority of opinion, and, indeed, I do because I respect their views, and I have found that they also respect my views even when they disagree. If the politics of the Conservative spokesmen today prevailed and if they were to have their way, we might just as well pack up the House of Commons and instal a computer which would assess public opinion at any given time and make decisions accordingly. Of course, in many respects, this is what the Liberal party is already doing to destroy democracy. In this we now seem to have once again Conservative agreement.

I have little more to say except to apologize to the remnant, the minority within the Progressive Conservative party which does oppose capital punishment. I extend to those members my sympathy this evening for the embarrassment which many of their colleagues must have caused them up to this point in time. Thank you.

Mr. Howard Crosby (Halifax West): Mr. Speaker, let me begin my remarks by referring to the specifics of the motion which I can summarize very briefly in this way. What we are asking the House to approve is a reference of the subject of capital punishment to a committee of this House, nothing more than that. As the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark) explained when he addressed this House, this is an exercise in parliamentary democracy. But it has become much more than that. It has become an exercise in democracy because, while we in Parliament ought to have the opportunity and chance to express our views on this subject, the people of Canada ought to have their opportunity to express their views on this subject, and they ought to be able to do that before a parliamentary committee so their views can be recorded and recognized by this House of Commons and by this Parliament of Canada. We should not sweep the matter under the table and let it go on the vote that took place years ago. This is 1981 and we have to face the problems of 1981. We cannot hide behind something that was done four or five years ago.

● (2050)

I am ashamed, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) is ashamed, because I would have thought the point made in this debate would be: I might not agree with what you have to say, but I will fight for