

Capital Punishment

It is all well and good to quote statistics that show capital punishment is not a deterrent, but what do you say to the wife and children of a husband who was shot down, murdered in cold blood with malice aforethought by a killer who was trying to procure ill-gotten gains of whatever description? I do not wish to cast slurs on those who firmly believe in abolition, but in fairness they should not pepper their arguments with innuendoes that the retentionists are less humane than they.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Parent: Which is more humane, to put a man to death or have him spend 25 hopeless years locked away in prison? What would he do when he was released? Toffler, in "Future Shock", stated that in 1900 we had a new generation every 20 years. By 1945 we had a new generation every 15 years. During the sixties we had a new and different generation every 12 years. Now, in 1975, we have virtually a new generation every ten years. If this trend continues and if a man or woman were sentenced in 1975 to 25 years in prison, by the year 2000 three generations or three generate changes of mores, customs or attitudes will have taken place. That person would be like a Rip Van Winkle thrust into a space age. When he returned to society how could he possibly be prepared to cope with all the problems with which he would be faced?

Prior to the 1974 election I had not made up my mind whether I was a retentionist or an abolitionist. During the campaign I was asked many times about my position on this particular issue. At that time I promised I would speak with my constituents and conduct a survey on how they felt about this issue. I did take the survey; I sent out 40,000 questionnaires. Virtually every adult in my constituency had an opportunity to let me know how they felt. Of the 40,000, only 2,755 responded. The response was overwhelmingly in favour of retention of capital punishment.

I asked these straightforward questions of my constituents: first, "Do you favour the abolition of the death penalty?" Twenty per cent replied "Yes" and 80 per cent said "No". Second, "Do you favour the retention of the death penalty for convicted murderers?" Eighty-one per cent said "Yes" and 19 per cent said "No". Third, "The present law calls for the death penalty only in the case of convicted killers of policemen and prison guards. Do you agree with this?" Sixteen per cent said "Yes" and 84 per cent said "No". Fourth, "Do you favour life imprisonment—that is, the remainder of the offender's days as a punishment, instead of the death penalty?" Twenty per cent said "Yes" and 80 per cent said "No". The fifth question was, "Are you in favour of the death penalty for all criminals who have been convicted of murder and other crimes which are now subject to the death sentence?" Eighty-two per cent responded "Yes" and 18 per cent said "No."

● (1620)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to be sure that the people of St. Catharines truly gave me a correct picture of their feelings on capital punishment, not only for the killing of policemen and prison guards, so I asked the sixth question in this way, "Are you in favour of the death sentence only for criminals who kill police and prison guards?" Only 8 per cent responded "Yes", while 92 per cent responded

"No." So you can see, Mr. Speaker, that the results were virtually overwhelming. Some people have suggested that perhaps we should not make decisions on the basis of surveys. I agree that perhaps decisions should not be made on the basis of surveys. I agree that perhaps decisions should not be made on the basis of surveys alone; but when we go to the people and ask their opinion, we should be receptive to their advice.

Some years ago, when in university studying apologetics, we were discussing wrongdoing and what constituted wrongdoing. There are three ingredients that go into it. The first is that a person must know that what he is doing is wrong; there must be knowledge. The second is that you must want to do it; therefore, there is a decision, a will. Thirdly, you must do whatever the action is; it must be done. For my purposes here I have defined what is a murderer. First of all, I believe he must know what he is doing. He must be sane. He must have all his faculties. He must be able to exercise knowledge. Second, he must plan the crime very carefully. Therefore, the crime would be premeditated murder. Third, he must want to do it. He therefore makes a conscious decision to go ahead. Fourth, he carries out this action. So for me, at least, the definition is quite clear, and with this definition in mind I have gone on to make a decision for myself and for the people I represent.

It has been said that if every person convicted of capital crime were killed, there would be two killings instead of one. That is a very simple deduction but it is not entirely accurate, for by no means is every convicted murderer executed. There has been no execution in Canada since 1962, which reveals that even if returned, capital punishment would be imposed only in the case of a notably small percentage of murderers. I am aware that since 1968 virtually all the men condemned to hand have received a recommendation of mercy or leniency from the jury; only one has not received a recommendation of mercy.

To those who say that the state has no more right to take a God-given life than an individual, the cart is put before the horse. By using capital punishment, the state employs the only effective deterrent so far as the vast majority of persons is concerned. Because of the severity of the punishment, the potential murderer will do more thinking, I suggest, before perpetrating a premeditated murder. The all-important threat of adequate retribution for so horrendous a crime is there, though society will probably not carry out an execution except in the more deserving cases and where hardened criminals are involved.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the murder comes first, the death penalty comes second. In order greatly to reduce the incidence of one person slaying another, and in the overall, I believe that fewer persons would lose their lives. Further, Mr. Speaker, I believe society does have the right to take life. We sanction war under extreme circumstances and send the flower of our youth into battle to kill so we can protect those principles by which we live. Our abortion laws as presently constituted permit the taking of the life of a child where the life of the mother is in danger. Murder is a great deal more dehumanizing and is made extremely more so by those who, by their permissiveness and laxity in dealing with convicted murderers, place such a totally incomprehensibly low value on human life.