

Capital Punishment

given a great deal of consideration to how I shall vote on this particular issue, and I must say it is far more difficult for me this time to decide how to vote than it was last time when this matter came up for a vote in the House. At that time I was convinced, after reviewing all the evidence, that the main justification for capital punishment, namely, that it was an effective deterrent, simply did not exist and I therefore voted for complete abolition and then for the partial abolition bill which followed. That bill provided for a five-year trial, both to find out whether or not capital punishment was a deterrent and, secondly, to give the public of Canada some idea how the new system would work or whether in fact it would work at all.

It strikes me that, taking into consideration the way that the public of Canada feels about this issue, the trial period has failed in that it has not convinced either the public of Canada or Canadian police forces that doing away with capital punishment was a good idea.

Mr. Broadbent: What about the documentary evidence?

Mr. Reid: I want to deal with the question of evidence; the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) has correctly raised that point. In reviewing all the evidence that has been put before us by the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) in terms of documents, in terms of the amount of material put before us by interested citizens and the evidence that members on all sides of the House have used, I think it is fair to say that that which supports the abolition of capital punishment is far more scientific, lucid and reasonable than that evidence which those who are retentionists have placed before the House to convince the House of their arguments.

I do not think that anyone who impartially reads this debate in the House of Commons, or the evidence that we have, can doubt that statement for a moment. Basically, the arguments used by retentionists are emotional. They are valid in terms of the way in which the Canadian public feels about this subject. I think those of us in this House who prefer the position of the abolitionists must be very careful in taking a position on this question, simply because of the way in which the public, which we represent, feels about it.

As I said before, the five-year period has failed to convince the Canadian public that we can have abolition and public safety at the same time. There are a number of reasons, serious reasons, reasons that deserve our attention, for that position. First of all, I think it is fair to say that there has been a growth of violence in our society, not just in British Columbia, Quebec or Ontario but in all of Canada.

This is not a purely Canadian phenomenon: it is equally a phenomenon in the United States, in the United Kingdom, in the European countries and in the underdeveloped world. It is not unique to us. If the figures mean anything at all, they seem to indicate that the growth of violence in Canada on a per capita basis is substantially less than it is in most other countries. On this point alone it seems to me that no one can blame the fact that we do not have capital punishment in this country at the present time for the growth of violence. Nevertheless, the important factor is not so much what the situation is but, rather, what those people who have sent us here believe, and it is

in this kind of atmosphere that we must make our decision.

In addition, there has been a growth in what is called permissiveness which has been tied to the growth of violence in our society. There has been tremendous experimentation with a variety of drugs in our society, particularly with alcohol which has shown the largest increase in consumption of any drug even though some others have received most of the publicity.

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There has been a decline in the power of legally constituted authority; people no longer accept authority blindly—parental authority, judicial authority, school authority, any kind of authority you wish to mention. That authority no longer has the high status it had. That breakdown of authority, coupled with permissiveness, drugs and an increase in violence preys very heavily on the emotions of Canadian people.

I think we are dealing with a gap between those who have studied the matter and the way in which an ordinary Canadian citizen perceives how the abolition of capital punishment will affect him. The ordinary Canadian citizen seems to believe that the prison system has collapsed, that there is no punishment adequate for the crimes that are committed, and that in particular when dealing with capital murder there is no guarantee that people who are legitimately convicted will suffer punishment for the heinous acts in which they have indulged.

I think it fair to say that the Canadian prison system has not been given much attention by governments. It has been allowed to wither on the vine. Governments have taken the attitude that this is part of the shadowy side of Canadian society. Society has put people away and has not cared about their rehabilitation or what happens to them when they are in these institutions. Consequently, our institutions of penal reform have become, not places of punishment and rehabilitation but, rather, graduate schools in the development of advanced criminals. I think that factor, coupled with the abject failure of the parole board over the last five years, has given the Canadian people a tremendous sense of uncertainty about the efficiency of our penal system.

I believe this is at the root of the brief which the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs has filed with all members of the House of Commons. They do their work in catching criminals, and once their work is done the courts sentence; but the penal system does not work and people are getting off with ridiculously light sentences and there is often no concept of punishment, let alone attempt at rehabilitation.

I believe the previous government from 1968 to 1972 made significant strides in the parole system, but these were not coupled with a proper system of penal reform which I believe we must have before we can develop an effective parole system. It seems to me that what is on trial here is not the question of capital punishment but, rather, the whole concept of the role of law, punishment and rehabilitation in a system of the just society. It strikes me that we have failed to reform the penal system to make it effective. The Canadian people are looking for some sense of security, so that people who have been