

Capital Punishment

convinced that even more Canadians would have reconsidered their position on the death penalty had we proceeded in a more thorough manner, delaying further debate on the question until the fall.

In reviewing all of the information that I know we have all received on this issue, I have found that some of the most moving testimony has come from the mothers of children who have been murdered. These women have written to us, attesting to their realization that the death penalty will not bring back their children. They appeal to Members of Parliament to vote against the reinstatement of the death penalty. They do not believe in a society that supports killing, in any form.

Many of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party have presented facts as to why we unanimously oppose a return to the death penalty. The Coalition Against the Return of the Death Penalty has done a great service to our country in that it has provided documented evidence to show that we should not kill people to show that killing people is wrong.

I want to tell my own constituents this evening, and anyone else who will listen, why I personally feel so deeply in respect of this question. Coming from British Columbia, I know how very upset the people of British Columbia were following the Olson killings. In our anger and fear, we wanted retribution, and even revenge. I must confess, I felt this way myself.

But the facts show that killing a murderer will not prevent further brutal crimes from occurring. We need other measures to prevent violence and killings. As well, we need to protect the public through more effective policing and sentencing. In addition to assisting the victims of crime, society needs to take steps to rehabilitate criminals, where possible.

I am against the death penalty because I am morally against killing in any form. I agree with all three party Leaders, all of whom have said that, as a civilized nation, we must not give the power to the state to kill. The reinstatement of the death penalty could lead to the execution of an innocent person. We are all aware of Donald Marshall, who spent some 11 years in prison before being proven innocent.

We have heard many religious arguments as to why capital punishment is wrong; why it runs contrary to all Christian values. We have ample evidence that capital punishment is not a deterrent. In fact, the murder rate in U.S. states which have capital punishment has gone up, whereas it has gone down in those which do not have the death penalty.

Some people are so angered and frustrated and fearful when someone is murdered that they seek vengeance. That is understandable. But the state itself, in a civilized society, cannot practise vengeance. Violence begets violence. As Gandhi said: "The trouble with an eye for an eye is that it leaves the whole world blind." As a social worker, I know very well that sociopathic personalities can rarely be rehabilitated; but it is wrong to deny the possibility of rehabilitation to all.

History shows that where the death penalty is in place, it is the poor and members of racial minorities who are hanged or electrocuted. Rich murderers can afford the best defence, while penniless persons are condemned to death row. It is also a fact that there are fewer convictions against murderers where the death penalty exists. In that circumstance, the justice system operates differently.

Those who support the return of the death penalty want the state to have the most awesome power of all, the power to take a human life. New Democrats do not believe that the state should have this kind of power over its citizens. The death penalty has no place in a civilized democracy. With the exception of most states in the United States, western democracies have rejected the death penalty.

What kind of countries have the death penalty? Very centralized, top-heavy, undemocratic countries, often with brutal dictatorships. South Korea, South Africa, Chile, Guatemala, the Soviet bloc countries, those are the kinds of countries that have the death penalty. Those are the countries where there is legalized cold-blooded murder conducted by the state. Is that what we want in Canada?

During the course of this important debate, we have heard many compelling arguments about how inhuman and brutal the death penalty is. Disturbing accounts of past executions have been read into the record. These are accounts from our past.

I invite Hon. Members, and anyone who may be listening, to read *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel by Margaret Atwood. I wish I had time to quote from it this evening. In that book, Margaret Atwood describes, in very dramatic terms, what can happen in the future when a state adopts a policy of "salvaging", pursuant to which people are forced to witness public executions.

Not long ago, I heard a Member of this Parliament express the opinion that women who have abortions should face the death penalty. When I heard that, I was left to wonder what we might have in store for us if we should reinstate capital punishment in Canada! The death penalty does not stop murders. Based on the U.S. experience, it appears that the death penalty does not even decrease the number of murders. There are, however, other steps that we can take which will decrease the number of killings.

Let me relate to you an example from my own riding of Vancouver East. For years the people of Vancouver East have been crying out for measures that will lead to a decrease in the number of murders in downtown Vancouver, murders in which the weapon is usually a knife. We have asked for the banning of knives in public places.

Over the years, many constituents have been murder victims at the hands of someone carrying a knife. Thus far this year, six out of twelve murders in Vancouver have involved knives, and a similar trend is reported in other cities across the country. These murders take place during moments of passion.