

*Capital Punishment*

This matter was raised seriously with me when I was seeking the candidacy for my Party in Nepean—Carleton. There were candidates who presented themselves for nomination who supported capital punishment. Members of my Party decided on balance on a candidate who had other views, all the while knowing where I stood on the issue.

At every turn during the 1984 election campaign, at every all candidates' meeting and at hundreds and hundreds of doors at which I presented myself, I was asked where I stand on capital punishment. With all the truthfulness I could muster, I shared the fact that I was not a supporter of capital punishment.

I want to share with you as well, Madam Speaker, the fact that my community is no different from any other community. From the enormous amount of correspondence, telephone calls and times it has been raised in town hall meetings, I suspect that the feelings of the residents of Nepean—Carleton are no different on balance than the feelings of those from other places in Canada.

Superimposed upon that, of course, is the fact that my community has lost one police officer in the last five years and saw two others seriously wounded in the line of duty. That of course tends to deepen and, I think, magnify the concern over capital punishment.

I need to share with my colleagues the fact that I have probably spent more time researching this issue, the aspects of deterrence and vengeance, than I have on any other issue since I became a parliamentarian. When I talk to people who are either supportive of capital punishment or opposed to it, I find that the roots of their feelings run deep, that there are philosophical differences that are complex and sometimes contradictory and at other times difficult to understand. However, regardless of which side of the argument they are on, when I talk to people, I find that they have common concerns. They are deeply concerned about violence in our community. They are deeply concerned about the judicial system. They are deeply concerned about the parole system. They are deeply concerned about a tax on police officers.

So we all agree, I believe, on the cause. What we disagree on is the solution.

Looking across Canada to see who commits murders or homicides, we find that 40 per cent of all murders occur within family units and with people being intimately known to one another. Between 70 per cent and 80 per cent of all homicides are committed by people who are acquainted with their victims. These acts of violence are sometimes acts of persons who are emotionally disturbed. Sometimes they occur during an emotional outbreak, a family quarrel of one sort or another. Sometimes they are carefully planned by professional criminals who probably have no fear of getting caught. Other times they may be an act of panic during another crime.

● (1710)

If you look at them carefully you will see that many of them relate to people who grew up in situations of poverty. They involve young people who are among the disadvantaged in our communities, the underprivileged. Some of them may relate to alcoholism and drug abuse. However, none are happy situations.

I would like to share with you something which happened when I was a young person growing up in Nova Scotia. Through the press I followed the case history of a murder which occurred in a small community there. A person was ultimately charged with the crime and the trial was reported in great detail in the local press. Every person in that community seemed to become a member of the jury. In that public jury there was no unanimous conclusion. One could walk the streets of small towns in that vicinity or go into any dance hall or beer parlour and find divided opinions. Yet, the jury of the day convicted that person.

I recall the appeals that were launched. I recall the plea for leniency that went out. I recall the community waiting for a message from the Prime Minister of the day that the sentence be commuted. That message never came. There was no joy in the community, there were only sobs.

I have spent a considerable amount of time talking to as many cabinet Ministers as possible who were involved in the last public hangings in Canada, those being two in 1962. Of course, I was unable to speak with all the cabinet Ministers who were involved in the process. However, I asked those to whom I was able to speak what kind of discussions went on within the cabinet chamber. I asked what kind of dialogue went on among the Ministers and the Prime Minister. Colleagues, my feeling is that that situation left a mark on the conscience of every one of those persons with whom I chatted. Every one of them recalled those moments in 1962 with a great deal of clarity and a great deal of concern.

As a result of those discussions I have reached the conclusion that I do not want my Prime Minister ever to be put in such a position. I do not want my colleagues in the Cabinet ever to be put in such a position. I do not want future Prime Ministers or future cabinet Ministers to be put in such a position either, a position in which they must decide between life and death, between right and wrong. I do not want to be part of a Parliament which endorses the restoration of capital punishment.

We are really talking about something far deeper than capital punishment. We are talking about the kind of society we want to have in Canada, the kind of environment we want our young people to grow up in and our grandchildren to be part of. Do we want a violent society? Do we want to reward and counteract violence with more violence? I do not want to build that kind of Canada and I do not want to be part of a Parliament which does that. I do not want Canada to be associated with countries such as Iran, South Africa, Saudi Arabia or the U.S.S.R., and I could list many others. I want to