

Capital Punishment

I have been particularly impressed in the community in which I live with the work which has been done largely by the leadership of the Mennonite community on victim-offender reconciliation and the question of beginning to build across communities an understanding of what is the societal part in anti-social behaviour and what is the appropriate and necessary restraint, the necessary prevention required.

In my comments I had thought that such a question might arise. I suggested that since each case would need to be looked at on its own merits that we might well want to begin to move to having people from parole boards, the judiciary, the Departments of Justice as well as communities and others represented so that when these decisions are made, they are not sudden and offensive to those who have been victims of crime, but rather some sense of participation in the decisions will have been experienced.

● (2120)

Mr. Kindy: Mr. Speaker, I was astounded to hear the Hon. Member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean) say that he was pro-life. It is nice to be pro-life. I looked up *Hansard* for June 2, the day we voted on the motion of the Hon. Member for Grey—Simcoe (Mr. Mitges) which read as follows:

Everyone including a human foetus or unborn being has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

Looking further to the record of the vote, I note that the Hon. Member for Waterloo voted against that motion. I find it astounding, not to use a stronger word, that he would say that he is pro-life.

I believe that whether one is unborn or is living, one has the right to life. As it was so well stated, this is in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice. I believe an unborn child has the right to life. However, as I said earlier this evening, the state has the right too to protect its citizens against forces outside the country during war, and that is why we have the Armed Forces, and forces inside the country, and that is why the police carry guns. If someone murders someone else in a way that is detrimental to the interests of the entire community, the state has the right to take that person's life.

My question is simple. How can the Hon. Member explain that he says he is pro-life but voted against the motion of the Hon. Member for Grey—Simcoe?

Mr. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I understood that the motion this evening was on capital punishment. I have been seeking to address that and I will be quite happy on another occasion to address that other matter with the Hon. Member.

Mr. Foster: Mr. Speaker, I was impressed with the speech made by the Hon. Member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean) and I would like to commend him for it. I think he made the argument very well that capital punishment is not really a deterrent to murder. We need only look at the statistics down through the years and certainly those since 1976 to realize that

in that 10-year period, the removal of capital punishment did nothing to increase the number of murders in Canada and that in fact they have dropped quite dramatically. When one looks around the world, one sees that there are more homicides in the City of Detroit, for instance, than there are in the entire country of Canada.

Likewise, another point that it is important to make is that people who are convicted and hanged if capital punishment is utilized are always the poor, the weak and the minorities. Clearly on death row in a State of the United States which has capital punishment, it tends to be the poor, the weak, minorities, blacks and members of other groups. Rich men seldom if ever are convicted of murder.

I believe the most important point the Hon. Member made was that there is tremendous concern in Canada over public safety and this point was made very forcefully to me by the police association in my riding. It was pointed out that we need a reform and improvement in the parole system, the sentencing system, crisis intervention centres and family assault centres because the prevention of murder and violence is more important. Unless we address that, I do not think that this debate can really accomplish very much. I certainly hope the Government will look into those aspects of public safety because that is what we are trying to achieve.

We may disagree about whether or not capital punishment is a useful mechanism for achieving that goal, but I do not think anyone disagrees that improving the sentencing, plea bargaining and parole systems and our systems for assisting young people with drug and alcohol problems and families suffering from violence is very important in preventing violent acts such as murder.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I suppose that that was just a comment. Questions and comments are now terminated. Debate.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, the issue of capital punishment is a subject on which I have done a great deal of soul-searching. I do not support capital punishment and I vigorously oppose this resolution. I intend to vote against capital punishment.

The issue is an important one to all of us. It is not important simply because Canadians say it is important but because it deals with the sanctity of human life. I am opposed to capital punishment out of moral conviction and out of a deep reverence for human life. In my view, human life is sacred. It is my belief that no person other than the Creator should determine the life of an individual.

Second, I am not in agreement with those who say that the reintroduction of the death penalty for selected Canadian citizens would give additional safety to police officers, prison officials or private citizens. It is simply not a fact that the death penalty acts as a deterrent. When the death penalty was abolished in Canada, the murder rate actually declined. The