

Capital Punishment

We have seen evidence time and time again that violent acts on television may provoke some violence of one kind or another. I remember when I was a young boy that a cousin of mine was always watching westerns on television. He saw how they kept hanging the bad man, and that in the next show the bad man came back. This little cousin of mine, who was about four-years old, went out to the barn, took his favourite cat and he hung the cat. This is the kind of message he was receiving from the television set.

I suggest that Canadians should be influenced by the fact that by executing people, we in turn may be provoking more violence and killings by sick and demented people.

My fourth question asks, are we going to get as many convictions for first-degree murder if we have capital punishment? Are juries going to convict people as readily of first-degree murder if we have capital punishment? I suggest that is highly unlikely. We will have more convictions for second-degree murder and murderers will be running around our streets a lot sooner if we have capital punishment rather than a 25 minimum first-degree sentence.

I refer again to studies which show that out of some 30 juries, at least 29 would have been affected by the fact that capital punishment was the law of this land. There are many Canadians in Canada who would never convict someone of first-degree murder if they knew that the conviction would result in someone being executed. As a result there would be more convictions for second-degree murders and murderers would be out on the street in a position to do more harm and violence to our society. I ask Members of Parliament to think a lot about that.

In my Province of Saskatchewan a couple of years ago Jo-Ann Wilson was murdered. We had the conviction of Colin Thatcher, a very prominent citizen of Saskatchewan. It was a very difficult case. The jury, if I remember correctly, took some five days to make a decision. I wonder whether Colin Thatcher would have been convicted of first-degree murder, which he was, if capital punishment was in force. I rather doubt it. The decision was difficult enough without the issue of capital punishment. With capital punishment, it would have been made a lot more difficult.

I believe if we had capital punishment, there would be millions of Canadians sitting on juries who would never knowingly send someone to the gallows and have blood on their conscience for the rest of their lives. That is an absolute fact. There are a lot of Canadians who would not convict someone if they knew that person had to face the executioner.

A Conservative friend of mine back here is laughing. I suggest it is no laughing matter. We are talking about something very serious.

My fifth question asks, can an innocent person be executed if we had capital punishment? I think the answer is very clearly yes. Again, the Conservative Member of Parliament from Ottawa West put some statistics on the record which proved that where they have capital punishment, over history,

many, many innocent people have been executed. I do not want this to happen in this country. I could not have that on my conscience. So I ask Members of Parliament to think very seriously about the possibility of an innocent person being executed.

Along that line, I would like to refer to a letter in the *Prairie Messenger*, which is a newspaper of the Roman Catholic Church in the Province of Saskatchewan. It was a letter written recently by Mr. Robert Eisler of Regina. I wish Members of Parliament who are leaning towards capital punishment would listen to Mr. Eisler's arguments. He says in part:

As long as we are human there is always the danger of putting an innocent person to death. So long as that possibility exists it completely destroys all arguments in favor of the death penalty.

How can I in all conscience vote for a return of the noose? In so doing, and should an innocent person be put to death, I would be compelled to spend the rest of my life with blood on my hands.

That is what Mr. Eisler wrote in the Catholic newspaper in Saskatchewan.

With the return of capital punishment, it is only a matter of time before an innocent person is put to death, and once someone is put to death there is no way of making amends or issuing apologies. Once that person is dead, that person is dead, and it is much too late. So I ask Members of Parliament to think very carefully about that issue before they rise in this House and ask that people be put to death in this country.

I refer to the Donald Marshall case recently in Nova Scotia. He was convicted of murder and after a number of years it was proven that Mr. Marshall was innocent. This was second-degree murder, but it is only a matter of time before someone is convicted of first-degree murder and put to death. As the Hon. Member for Ottawa West said, this has happened hundreds of times throughout history in countries and states which have capital punishment. Again I ask Members who want to vote for capital punishment, for hanging, to think twice before they do so.

My sixth question asks, if we bring back capital punishment, who is going to be executed? There was a study done of all the executions in Canada since we became a country back in 1867. It was found in this study that in the main it was the poor people who were executed; it was the disadvantaged who were executed; it was the native Indians who were executed in great numbers; it was the eastern Europeans, people of Ukrainian descent who, historically, were more likely to be executed than Anglo-Saxons. In the United States it is blacks who go to the gallows much more often than white Americans. That is so because they do not have the money to hire the best lawyers. They do not have the privileges that the wealthy have in our society.

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Once again I say to Hon. Members, if we bring back capital punishment we will be bringing in a law from which the rich will once again be protected to a greater degree than the poor,