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Title **Let's Move Beyond Revenge**

Revenge is a primitive desire, yet society seems continually willing to embrace it. To start with the extreme, there are currently 16 executions planned in the USA in 2015. From a purely utilitarian perspective, this is illogical. Countless studies have refuted claims that the death penalty has any deterrent effect on violent crime. One of the most frequent responses from death penalty advocates is that tax dollars should not be used to house those who will never be capable of re-entering the community. Behind this logic is a fallacy that is as disruptive as it is misleading, and must be brought to the forefront of the debate. Capital punishment, at least in societies which embrace the rule of law, is far more costly than life imprisonment. A report by the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice recently concluded that the annual cost of a system which imposes a maximum sentence of life imprisonment would cost \$11.5 million annually, compared to the current \$137 million. The difference is largely found in the legal costs. If the death penalty is more expensive and fails to act as a deterrent, it appears the only added value is revenge.

Canadians seem to sidestep the debate entirely; there hasn't been an execution in Canada since 1962. This doesn't mean we aren't still gripped by our desire for revenge. There have been some calls to reintroduce the death penalty, but they have failed to gain popular support. Lately, we've been getting our dose of revenge through 'tough on crime' initiatives. Mandatory minimums, increases in the use of life without parole sentences, lengthier sentences for non-violent drug related crimes. It's nothing new to western democratic societies. Reagan famously implemented a draconian criminal justice system in the 1980's. What is worrying is the extent to which this philosophy is seeping into public and parliamentary discourse. Just like capital punishment, studies have shown that 'tough on crime' measures simply do not work. When even Texan conservatives oppose your plans, it may be time to rethink things. Not only does it not deter most crime, but it causes prison populations to swell, and steals the liberty of thousands.

Why is it that Canadians are opposed to capital punishment, yet seem increasingly willing to 'lock em up and throw away the key?' Is it because of fear? There is no dispute that draconian measures are often implemented following national tragedies. Counter-terrorism measures proposed following the rise of Islamic State

are one example. I believe that the issue has more to do with relativity. It is far easier to live with a wrongful conviction if it can still be rectified. Punishing child molesters, murderers and rapists appears much more humane if were not physically harming the convict. Make no mistake, this article is not an excuse for the wicked. Punishment no doubt has its place in society, and many individuals will never be capable of living peacefully in a modern society. Yet the vast majority of criminals are capable of rehabilitation, and one day will be released.

When confronted with the atrocities committed by some criminals, it's often easy to demand lengthy sentences. We're outraged when we hear of a sentence that seems unduly lenient. Nobody wants to see a murderer playing with his iPod in a hammock. What we forget, is that 25 years is a very long time. 25 years ago the Berlin wall had only recently fallen, we were still years away from the internet. Now imagine a criminal being released after all that time. He may not be your neighbour, but you will see him in town, maybe at the park or your favorite pub. Criminal reform aside, he has an uphill battle to adapt to a society that has changed drastically. The question is, who do you want that person to be? A hardened criminal unable to cope with their new environment? Or a reformed individual who has benefited from rehabilitation while they were serving their time.

We need to have a national discussion about how we treat criminals. Not just about the length of our sentences, but also how we approach the issue of criminal punishment. Do we simply want to punish? Or do we want to deal with the issues that caused the individual to offend in the first place? Can we move beyond revenge?

Let's make criminal justice reform a key issue in the upcoming elections. It's time to start the discussion.



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