

LaRouche: 'Why I demand an end to the death penalty in the United States'

This statement was released by independent presidential candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. on Sept. 1. LaRouche is a political prisoner at the federal Rochester Medical Facility in Rochester, Minnesota.

It should be well known by now, that I have strongly denounced the use of the death penalty in the state and federal law of the United States, and that I have expressed my horror and opposition in respect to specific executions, especially in the states of Virginia and Arkansas, and have denounced these practices as a form of barbarism from which all civilized nations, except the United States, are retreating.

I give you the grounds and sets of facts as to why the death penalty should be opposed, and then add a comment on the significance of the resurgence of assembly-line executions in prisons, especially of minorities, today.

The first general ground, is that if we could assume that justice were efficient in the United States—as it is not today—why, under even those ideal conditions, we must oppose the death penalty. First, simply: Every human being is in the living image of God, by virtue of that divine spark of reason which sets man apart from and above all lower forms of life. When we execute a person, no matter how hideous the crime they may have committed (if they indeed did commit it), we are forgoing the possibility of the redemption of that soul. And we must never deny, in a Christian civilization in particular, the possibility of redemption.

Secondly, also in the ideal situation: When a society takes a person who is helpless and at their disposal, a helpless captive, and murders that person, even under due process of law, that society brutalizes itself as a whole, and brutalizes those persons and agencies which we require to execute that form of so-called punishment. Some of us can think back to the case of Chief Justice Warren Burger, who resigned from his position in the Supreme Court under the pressure of his mounting, visible horror against the parade of death penalty cases which came across his desk following the 1976 resurrection of the death penalty.

Now, to the other grounds. We do not have, by any means, an ideal system of justice. We have in the United States, presently reported, about 2,500 persons, largely from minority groups, who are sitting on death row, now waiting for assembly-line butchering. And all the methods of which I've heard for execution, whether gas chamber (that's the

Nazi method), lethal injection (which is a liquid version of the Nazi method practiced in Arkansas), or the brutish use of the electric chair in Virginia: All of these are torture. This is death by torture, of the same type done by the Nazis in gas chambers, to which postwar objections were registered.

Of the 2,500 on the assembly line for mass executions, lawyers who are expert in this area assure me that at least 10% are unquestionably innocent, and that probably double that number have clear, colorable claims to innocence. That's about 500 people, of this 2,500, who are innocent.

There is no rule of law

Now, let's look further. Let's look at the system of justice itself.

We have no law in the United States today. We have prosecutors, federal and state, who in many cases *routinely suppress evidence* which would tend to show, or would show conclusively, the innocence of the accused in capital and other criminal cases. We have the upholding of these frauds upon the court by appellate courts. We have a Supreme Court which is headed by a man, Chief Justice Rehnquist, who is avowedly an admirer of the Confederate Constitution, the constitution of slavery and treason; an admirer of the Justice Taney who was the author of the hideous *Dred Scott* decision; a man who is flanked by a clever fellow, Scalia, who is cleverer than the dumb Rehnquist, and who works to the same effect.

In the rest of the court, we have a few justices who are generally concerned about the overturning of all respect for law in the United States, and we have other justices, who, unlike Rehnquist and Scalia, have shown some concern at the fact, that the horrible things the Supreme Court and the federal courts are doing, may bring international and national discredit upon the institution of the federal courts themselves; where the population will come to hold the courts themselves in contempt as lawless bodies, which they have tended to become under the leadership of Rehnquist, particularly, over the past seven to eight years.

Oh, there are still a few justices there who are honest; there are still a few people in the courts at all levels who care about law; there are still a few prosecutors who are honest—but most of them *aren't*. Not any more. There is no longer any respect for law as we think of the majesty of law, in the system. There's no assurance of justice anywhere.

We cannot therefore believe, given the practices of prosecutors and courts, that there is good faith in the justice system. We cannot believe that any person reported to us as found guilty of a crime, actually perpetrated that crime.

Granted, we may know that probably most of the people who are convicted on criminal charges, such as drugs and so forth, are guilty—most; but an increasing number, perhaps, are not; at least, in an increasing number of cases, because of the nature of plea-bargaining and so forth today, there are miscarriages of justice. And that's rising.

Now, let's turn to another aspect of this thing not directly bearing on the death penalty, but bearing on the situation of law in general.

We have, in the United States today, about 500 persons out of every 100,000 of the population, in prison. This is the highest rate of incarceration of any civilized nation, double or more than double the rate for most civilized nations today. We also know, from experience as well as statistics, that the number of arrests far exceeds the number of crimes committed against people. And we're talking mostly about street crimes—burglary, muggings, and so forth. So, we would have to say, that the American people have become, perhaps, by these statistics, the most criminal people on the face of the planet, with the highest incidence of criminality among people of any nation on this planet today, or any civilized nation. We're also the worst police state in the world today, by these statistics. Both. The most criminal and the most police state—the most lawless in every respect. The most lawless in the streets, the most lawless in government. And perhaps obviously, the increase of penalties, the increase of the death penalty, has done nothing to reverse this, but has rather only worsened it, by brutalizing society more and more.

Under these conditions of police-state rule and spreading criminality, to continue to enforce the death penalty, will do nothing but brutalize us still further and will help pave the way toward the kind of fascist dictatorship which accords with the kinds of austerity programs coming generally out of the Congress, where they talk about cutting wages, cutting entitlements; and the kind of fascist austerity—Mussolini-style—proposed by such influential people as the famous Felix Rohatyn of Lazard Frères, the man who built Big MAC in New York, for those of you who remember that.

We must cry, 'Halt!'

We're headed into dangerous times, in which the weakest and the poorest will be the most victimized. We must cry, "Halt!"

Now, as to the prisons themselves. I've seen the prisons, and I know what's in some of them. I've only seen one prison plus a few jails from the inside, but what I see, in probably the best institution in the federal system, shows me the nature of the problems. Yes, most of the people here are guilty. Not because I've seen their paperwork, entirely—I've seen a lot

of it. But because I know them. A certain number are victims of miscarriage of justice, either by excesses in their sentencing or because they probably are innocent or have strong, colorable claims to innocence. Of that there's no doubt. And there are a few cases which, I'm sure, are outright frame-ups. They were innocent, and the prosecution knew they were innocent; the courts probably knew they were innocent, but they jailed them anyway.

But the other thing that I see, is that there is no program of rehabilitation of people sent to these prisons. Worse, I don't think the people in charge of these places, have any idea what rehabilitation would be if they were instructed and empowered to conduct it.

If we put people in prison, and put them in for a finite period of time—5 years, 10 years, so forth—we presume that unless we execute them, we're going to return them to the streets. And *what* are we going to return to the streets? We're going to return people who are more bitter, more hopeless, more desperate, than they were when they entered prison in the first place. Because there is nothing, nothing, in my sight, in prison, for the average inmate who *might be* reconstructible, who might be rehabilitable, there's nothing offered to inspire him or her to become a better person, or to acquire any of those assets of personal development, by which he or she might be better enabled to live a useful life once released from prison.

In short, I think we ought to show mercy and a concern for justice, which is lacking generally in the political domain today. And, without denying that a crime is a crime and a criminal is a criminal, we ought to look at the contributing factors which make the United States the most criminal of civilized nations today, and the worst police state, and the nation least sensitive, on my observation, to the need to repair damage, to heal the sick, to rehabilitate the person who is saveable.

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