

Capital Punishment

Maybe some day our justice system for murderers will mean incarceration for life, maybe our prisons will become escape-proof, maybe medical science will be able to guarantee rehabilitation of the hardened killer. Then, and only then, will I probably become an abolitionist. Until then I will think of the innocent victims; I will think of those young girls brutally raped and murdered. Until then, I think the punishment should fit the crime.

For those and other reasons, Madam Speaker, I intend to vote for the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Grondin (Saint-Maurice): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity today to take part in this very important debate.

To me, it is a debate that will have far-reaching consequences, and I think the Canadian people have a right to expect the same attitude of all Members of this House.

I hope that each and everyone of us is conscious of the major impact the outcome of this debate will have on our country's judicial system.

There is no room for uncertainty in this debate. We must decide whether the State shall or shall not end the lives of those who are convicted of murdering an individual. This is not just another measure that can be reversed even after our decision has been made. Once that decision has been made by us all, and once judges and juries decide in favour of an execution sentence, and when finally, the murderers are executed, the decision is final and irreversible.

Today, a tremendous responsibility is put on our shoulders. This is more than just another legislative measure. It challenges the whole philosophy of our judiciary system. It is also a study of the moral values that we, as parliamentarians, should convey to all Canadians and especially to Canadian youth.

In Canada, capital punishment has been the subject of more or less heated debate for the past seventy years. And I imagine the question will be reviewed regularly in this House for many more years, whatever the outcome of the present debate may be.

This realization, however, should not minimize the importance we should give today to this issue. We are a society in constant evolution. Step by step, most of the time forward but sometimes also backward, we are constantly moving towards higher ideals. Our decision concerning capital punishment is part of this slow process. This time, are we going to take a step forward towards a legal system stamped with justice and concerned as much about respecting the right to live as protecting individuals? A legal system which through research and new experiences will compensate for the flaws which exist in the current system?

That is what I hope for very strongly and from the bottom of my heart, Madam Speaker.

I, for one, am far from having lost all hope of finding a human, yet practical, solution to this vital problem. For this reason, I will vote against reinstating capital punishment.

Our society is quite justified in wondering about the causes and effects of crime, as well as the ways to remedy them. It has every reason to consider that 630 murders a year warrant the improvement of prevention, protection, and compensation measures.

But for anyone to brandish capital punishment as the sole remedy to all our ills is immoral, useless and demagogic. On the moral level, it is not less justifiable for the state to take life than it is for individual citizens. To give the state the mandate to take away life is the same thing as killing somebody for personal vengeance. Some people have a tendency to forget this and find comfortable solace in the thought that a legislation exists to that effect.

Let us make no mistake about it—capital punishment is legal murder, nothing less!

Whatever the terms used by speakers to socially justify capital punishment, the outcome is the same. They are after the blood of those who killed.

It is not surprising then that more and more Canadians are wondering if capital punishment is indeed a solution or rather a pretence to turn attention away from the inefficiency of the correctional system in rehabilitating violent inmates.

I would be curious to know how far supporters of reinstating capital punishment would go to defend their choice.

Will you be a volunteer to serve as hangman? To introduce the poison syringe into a vein? To turn on the power to the neuron burning electric chair?

Before taking a position, this is what we should be ready to ask ourselves.

In another line of thought, we cannot accept that Canadian society meet violence with violence. The State should set an example by recognizing the sanctity of human life in all cases. Meeting violence with violence is only legitimizing the latter.

Capital punishment is still viewed by some as an effective deterrent to prevent crime and maintain law and order.

But the experience in western countries shows the best bulwark against violence is social and economic progress and the development of human rights.

As far as capital punishment is concerned, it only adds to individual violence another kind of violence—state violence.

We all feel a sense of horror and repulsion about the taking of human life. Some foul crimes are particularly more repugnant to us. That is why we want justice to be done and the authors of such crimes to be punished.

However, we must not forget that one of the main objectives of justice is to rehabilitate rather than eliminate a person. The