

Capital Punishment

came about because we continued to push forward our frontiers in terms of understanding and knowledge. As a people, we have made considerable progress. We have taken considerable strides as a civilization. We are more compassionate, more understanding, and more humane. I believe that bringing back the death penalty would once again close the door on that road of progress.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): It would also be an indication that we have given up hope of finding a humane yet effective response to the ultimate crime.

It is for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I intend to vote against this motion. It is for these reasons that I intend to urge my colleagues from all quarters of the House to vote against the motion, to vote against the restoration of the death penalty. It is for these reasons that I commend to each and every one of us a thorough review of our conscience and of our dignity as elected representatives of a great people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis), on a point of order.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, in the light of the importance of this debate, and in the light of the custom and tradition of this House, I rise to seek the unanimous consent of the House to allow the Hon. Member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent) to speak for a period of time equal to that of the Right Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Turner); and, if necessary, that the hour of one o'clock not be seen by the Speaker, to enable his speech to be completed.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lewis).

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, as the House will be aware, we have been trying to work out arrangements for an orderly debate on this subject, arrangements which would ensure that everyone will be heard fully. We have considered this matter, and in the spirit of co-operation—which we hope will endure throughout this debate—we are prepared to give our consent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray).

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Official Opposition, we are happy to agree to the request of the House Leader of the New Democratic Party.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): It is so agreed.

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, there is not a subject matter more important for Members of Parliament to debate and deliberate upon than the one that is now

before us. As all members on both sides of this issue know, what is at stake here is whether this country will reintroduce into law the right of the state, calmly and deliberately, to take a human life.

It is the importance of this issue that leads me immediately to say to Members of all Parties that I intend to address my comments on this profoundly important matter, not to those who agree with me that capital punishment is wrong, but to those who are either undecided or, up to this moment, believe that it is appropriate for capital punishment to be reintroduced into our laws.

I have concerns about the origin of the resolution, the way it has been brought forward, and I have some concerns about the details of it. But I put those concerns aside to deal with the fundamental question that is at the root of the motion. As the right to experience life, Mr. Speaker, is the most basic of values, so too is the destruction of life, its denial to another, the most horrible of crimes. Whether that destruction is of a child or an elderly person, an invalid or an athlete, a scholar or a cab driver, a man or woman in the home, or whomever, whether that destruction is one of a random mass murder or an act that is premeditated and specific, the result, Mr. Speaker, is the same. The victim's life is snuffed out; it is finished, there is no more. The ultimate impingement on another human being has been carried out.

● (1230)

I am sure everyone in the House agrees that murder is horrible, that we must do all we can to prevent it, and that those who murder must in some sense be punished. However, these are not the central matters before us.

What is central is the obligation of those who want capital punishment to justify that course of action. What is central is their obligation, those who believe that killing our neighbour is morally wrong, to show that the same act of terminal violence when carried out by the state in the name of law is morally right.

Those who want us to approve of the motion, which in its essence, if established, would bring about the restoration of the death penalty, have the obligation to prove their case. If they want to take life, they must provide us with arguments which lead us to conclude that when sanctioned by the state the taking of a life is right.

[*Translation*]

People who are in favour of capital punishment have a moral duty to prove that killing by the State is justified and to argue their case. That is in fact the major moral concern of this debate, since a debate on the death penalty is about the right of the State to kill.

People who are in favour of capital punishment will have to provide moral arguments to justify the right of the State to kill a human being. In my opinion, killing is justifiable only in two situations. One is self-defence. If a man, woman or child is attacked by another person, he or she has a right to kill the