

*Capital Punishment*

**Ms. Copps:** The Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark) said it is because he believes in Parliament. Last week the Prime Minister said that capital punishment was morally repugnant to him. If he is the leader of this country, he should not facilitate in Parliament the return of capital punishment, something which he claims to find morally repugnant. It is inconsistent and hypocritical.

**Mr. Dick:** What is your opinion?

**Ms. Copps:** My opinion is the same one I stated when I was out on the hustings in 1984. I did not attempt to buy votes with some kind of a phoney claim about capital punishment. I went to the people of my riding and told them that if they believed that their Member of Parliament should go to Ottawa and support capital punishment, they should not vote for me because I will never support a motion which will lead to death and murder, whether it be by poison, by the electric chair or by the noose.

Back in 1984, I stated the way I felt. I invited the voters of my riding to look at all three candidates and to make their determination. If they wanted to send to Ottawa someone who would merely be a voting machine and would merely look at the opinion polls, see that 61 per cent of the people are in favour of the death penalty and ergo must support the death penalty, then I suggested that they send another representative to Ottawa. My responsibility as a Member of Parliament is to be in a position to examine all of the ramifications. Indeed, all of those ramifications involve the question of whether or not the death penalty is a deterrent.

Even those who support the death penalty have agreed that at best, the argument of deterrence is a specious one. In the United States, the very states that have embraced and indeed encouraged active use of the death penalty by way of the electric chair are the very states in which there is the highest murder rates. I look to Louisiana, Texas and Florida where there are murder rates of over 14 per cent.

One need only look at bumper stickers in Florida reading: "Only free men carry guns" to see the violent attitude which is enshrined in their commitment to capital punishment. That translates itself into the way they live their lives on a daily basis. I cannot believe for a moment that there are Members of Parliament who would want to adopt the kind of jungle justice which unfortunately has become all too rampant in certain states in the United States.

The other question we must examine is who dies in states where capital punishment is embraced. We need only look at Amnesty International's recent report to realize that in fact it is a horrifying lottery.

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If you happen to be black and have killed a white person, your chances of dying by the electric chair are so many times greater than if you happen to be white and have murdered a

black person. If colour is an issue, as was so aptly demonstrated by Amnesty International's examination of who died in the United States, how can we, in conscience, reintroduce in Canada a system which quite clearly discriminates, potentially on the basis of gender?

We know, for example, that women are responsible for 14 per cent of violent crimes. Yet, the number of women who have died by way of the electric chair in the United States is very small because traditionally society has not sent women to the electric chair. Do we want to reintroduce a system which would discriminate on the basis of race or gender?

The Member for Guelph (Mr. Winegard) dealt with the question of the possibility of error. There have been instances of people going to the electric chair by mistake. It has been wrongly decided to send people to the electric chair.

As our constituents listen to this debate here in the Chamber tonight or in their homes across the country, they must consider the fact that they are asking us to make a decision about pressing the button, about administering the deadly chemical or, potentially, putting the rope around someone's neck. I ask them in good conscience whether, if they were put in the position in which we are tonight of having to make that decision, they would be as eager to say yes as they are to respond to the public opinion polls.

I firmly believe that when Canadians have a chance to examine this issue and consider the experience of what has happened in states in the United States in which they have continued capital punishment as compared with the states in which they have abolished it, and to study the ramifications of a system of institutionalized murder, they will start drawing back and reconsidering their views on the death penalty.

That is why I am so disturbed that the Government has invoked closure on this very important issue. That is why I am so disturbed that the Government has not permitted a parliamentary committee to examine the principle. It has asked the committee not to examine the principle but merely to look at the methodology. I believe that as Canadians have a chance to examine these issues in greater detail they will join those on all sides of the House who feel that they cannot support the reinstatement of capital punishment in Canada.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I already had a few comments on the matter of the process and I am horrified the Government tonight decided to impose closure on such an important matter. I am also horrified the same Government will not let us travel across the country as a Parliamentary Committee to ask the people what they think of the principle of execution.

What they are asking us to do is simply vote on the principle tonight, and then travel from province to province examining whether we are to kill by hanging or electric chair. That is barbaric indeed, Mr. Speaker. Because I believe that when