

### *Capital Punishment*

argument of Quebec's Association professionnelle des criminologues, and I quote word for word: "Death penalty proponents maintain that it has a deterrent effect, but the facts do not substantiate this statement. Five factors really contribute to effective deterrence: punishment severity, certainty, publicity, swiftness and frequency. Facts demonstrate that only the first criterion—"meaning the severity of the punishment—"relates to the death penalty. The certainty of capital punishment is more than dubious. Execution is carried out behind closed doors. It takes a very long time before it is applied—" I will get back to that—and it is ever less frequent. Therefore capital punishment has no deterrent effect."

I agree, Mr. Speaker. Capital punishment has no deterrent effect. For some people the death penalty is a case of conscience. Personally, for moral reasons and after lengthy reflection, it was in my soul and conscience that I arrived at a judgment. I have a sacred respect for every form of life and, for moral reasons, for personal moral reasons, I cannot condone the act of killing either by the state or by individuals. Of course there are circumstantial exceptions: legitimate defence by the state in case of war, or individual self-defence, the only two exceptions I can see which might warrant killing.

Given these premises, my judgment does not rest only on a moral question but also on a number of rational arguments. For one thing, there is the basic philosophy underlying this debate. Since time immemorial humankind has been seeking to achieve what we call civilization. As it happens, one of the characteristic features of progress made by our societies in their evolution is the progressive repudiation of violence. I remember the debate when the Hon. Gérard Pelletier said, and I quote: "For ever indeed the road to civilization has been charted by the gradual refusal to kill one's fellow human being."

Mr. Speaker, history tells us that from the primitive society—where the old and the sick were killed, where the master had the right of life or death over his slave—to the most enlightened societies, there has been ever diminishing recourse to execution. For example, only 150 years ago people in England were still hanged for such minor infractions as shoplifting, a punishment which nobody would accept these days. This movement towards the abolition of capital punishment in contemporary societies is historic and unavoidable. This is why I sincerely deplore that a country as civilized as ours should revive this debate on an issue which, I suggest, was put to rest in 1976.

• (1220)

I understand the reasons and concerns that may have led some people to urge the Prime Minister to do such a thing. There is widespread coverage of murders taking place in Canada in the media, both in the newspapers and on television, so that people are aware of such atrocities. However, violence has now become commonplace on T.V. In fact, a child can see more violent crimes including murders, slayings and others by just watching television for a few days than someone else will

ever see in a whole lifetime. I tried 10 or 12 years ago to table in the House a bill that would have helped parents choose the type of programs that their children could watch by warning them when programs might have a harmful mental impact on children. However, that bill was not passed because, they said, it meant moral direction, and they did not want that. Yet, Mr. Speaker, I believe that enlightened parents should control those programs which display violence and sometimes feature a society in which mutual relationships are positively atrocious. Children watch those programs and no one is concerned. I believe it is a very sad situation.

As they watch that display of violence, people get increasingly concerned and tend to conclude that the crime rate is also on the rise. Indeed, it was shown in a 1982 Gallup poll that those television programs largely accounted for the fact that the people overestimate the phenomenon of violence by a wide margin. According to that poll, 75 percent of the people interviewed believed that more than 50 percent of criminal actions involve violence, whereas the real percentage is only 8 percent. Moreover, two people out of three in Canada believe that the number of murders has increased since 1976, whereas it has in fact remained relatively stable.

People are also very misinformed on the circumstances of murders, in spite of vociferous media coverage. For instance, very few people know that three out of four people who are murdered get killed by someone they know: a relative, a neighbour, a friend. We should have told people the real facts instead of stirring up passions that had cooled down since 1976. For instance, according to the official legal statistics of Statistics Canada, in 1976, the number of manslaughters had gone down by 20 percent, from 704 in 1985 to 561 in 1986. Since 1986, when capital punishment was abolished, the number of manslaughters has remained fairly constant, at around 650 per year. I grant that it is a lot and it is too much. That is why our prison system will have to be changed. Our parole system will have to be much more stringent and controlled. I wish to insist, Mr. Speaker, that those are 650 murders are too many. I do not think the restoration of capital punishment has any influence over those figures. The argument of capital punishment as a deterrent against crime which I heard earlier is difficult to defend logically, if one looks at statistics and reflects upon the various kinds of murders.

Mr. Speaker, on the statistics side, between 1962 and 1976, at a time the death penalty existed, we saw the number of murders increase constantly, from 265 in 1962 to 701 in 1975. The death penalty was abolished in 1976. Since then, the number of homicides declined from 701 in 1975, the year before abolition, to 561 in 1986, and as I said earlier, it is holding at a more or less constant level. Were capital punishment the deterrent it is said to be, we should have witnessed the opposite trend, that is to say that since murderers could be executed for their crimes before 1976 and if the deterrent effect worked, then the number of crimes should have increased or at least remained constant. That has not been the