

How can one in conscience say "Save the murderer but risk another innocent life"? I will vote for the return of the death penalty because I believe life is important and that, until we manage, as we all wish, to change society and human nature, there is a need for punishment that fits the crime.

Whatever the outcome of the vote tonight, we will all accept the decision of this House. That is what democracy is all about. But let there be no wringing of the hands on the one hand nor shaking of hands on the other. Each of us owes it to our society to find a better way to protect the life of the innocent than we have today.

**Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East):** Mr. Speaker, I think it is fairly obvious for those people who are in the gallery tonight that most Members already have their minds made up on this issue and, in fact, those who are putting their positions for or against in many cases are putting their position for the record. It is for that reason that I would like to spend a few moments on the process, the process in particular, because we have heard the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) state in this House only a few short days ago that to him the whole notion of capital punishment was "morally repugnant."

● (2340)

One would think that the notion of moral repugnance would reflect the position of the Government and how it would have treated the debate from start to finish. Yet we are aware that the same Government that claims that capital punishment is morally repugnant has in fact put a muzzle on Members of Parliament from all sides of the House who would like to speak their piece on this issue. In fact, we are faced with a closure motion which means that on my side of the House, to date only 22 Members have had an opportunity to speak. That is a little over 50 per cent of them.

I see in the Chamber here tonight the Hon. Member for York West (Mr. Marchi), for example. Has he had a chance to speak on this most important issue? No, he has not because the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) have chosen to invoke closure on an issue which they claim is morally repugnant to them. If that is so, why closure? Why the muzzle? Why the decision to curtail debate in this most insidious way? It is a guillotine motion and it is appropriate under the circumstances.

I think we must examine the process. Let us look at what we are being asked to vote on tonight. It is not simply the question of the principle of capital punishment but if this motion passes, we in the House of Commons will set up a parliamentary committee that will travel from one end of the country to the other to examine whether people should die by poison, by arsenic, by hanging or by the electric chair. The committee will determine which particular ghoulish and garish form of capital punishment is the most appropriate. If the Government and the Prime Minister were truly serious about involving Parliamentarians in this debate in an effective and complete way, they would have supported the motion which would have

permitted this resolution dealing with whether or not we support the principle of capital punishment to be debated across the country.

If this motion passes tonight, we will see the ridiculous spectacle of a travelling parliamentary committee going from St. John's, Newfoundland, to British Columbia asking the people not whether or not we should invoke capital punishment but how it can be carried out. When we moved an amendment which would have permitted Canadians to have input on the question of to kill or not to kill, it was defeated by an overwhelming majority of government Members, including those who say that they are abolitionists.

We must examine the hypocrisy of the process. I for one during the last federal election knocked on doors throughout my riding and was constantly confronted with this statement: "The Conservatives will bring back the noose so I'm going to support the Conservatives". On the government side of the House, the Prime Minister has said that he personally abhors capital punishment and finds it morally repugnant. Yet he has set in motion all the wheels that will permit the return of capital punishment.

If the Government truly finds that capital punishment is morally repugnant, why has it set it up as number one on the agenda? Why has it determined that of all the problems confronting the country, the problem that deserves our attention in the House and as part of a travelling committee is the question of capital punishment? Is that moral leadership? Is that the kind of leadership we can expect from someone who made a wonderful speech last week but when it came time to show leadership and to allow Canadians themselves to have input into whether or not we should have capital punishment, he snuffed debate. He snuffed it by closure and he snuffed it by way of a resolution which asks Parliamentarians not to ask the people about the principle of capital punishment but to ask the people whether we should kill by way of poison, of the noose or of the electric chair.

So I think the process has been a sham and a farce. The senior leadership of the Government has stated that they are abolitionists, they are opposed to capital punishment. Yet at every opportunity, they brought forward instruments which aid and abet the cause of the return to the noose.

I say shame on the Prime Minister who had a chance to show moral leadership. He had a chance during the last federal election to tell the people of Canada that he does not support capital punishment and he will not assist in any way the return of capital punishment as long as he is the Prime Minister and leader of the country. That is the challenge he faced, but instead he attempted to go before the people during the election campaign and say that he will bring in a free vote and will reopen debate. He turned his back on the kind of moral leadership he should have shown. Instead, he reopened the debate which we felt had been closed many years ago.

**Mr. Clark (Yellowhead):** Because he believes in Parliament.