

Capital Punishment

violence to violence without really dealing with the source of the problem. Crime is a social problem and we have to go to the heart of it, rather than choose a superficial solution that does not solve anything.

Mr. Speaker, we do not have the right to decide arbitrarily on the fate of our brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren. Our society has always attached much value to and shown a great respect for life and it must eradicate the causes or factors of crime. It must also, for humanitarian reasons, try to improve the correctional system so that the sentence imposed to criminals contributes to their rehabilitation and their social integration.

For all these reasons, and others I did not have time to develop, I will vote against restoration of capital punishment in Canada.

The reinstatement of capital punishment in Canada not only could make us lose any credibility in the area of rights and freedoms, but it could also be a signal for reinstating capital punishment in other countries. How could Canada in the future boast of defending rights and freedoms in international organizations, and more specifically the United Nations Human Rights Commission, if we gave such a clear indication that we do not honour our commitments and signature. Our credibility could easily be questioned.

Can we as a society take such a responsibility? I will conclude, Mr. Speaker, by stating that, personally, if the death penalty were to be reinstated in Canada, I would find unacceptable such a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which prohibits any cruel and unusual treatment and punishment. Reverting to the ultimate sentence would negate what we have supposedly become, a more civilized, vanguard nation, a land of freedom, a model around the world.

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Member for Louis-Hébert (Mrs. Duplessis) for her most eloquent, passionate and moral speech which reflects the opinion of a great many Canadian men and women. I would like to ask her how the feelings of Quebec men and women may differ from those of their fellow Canadians, and since most Quebecers continue to maintain contacts with the Catholic Church, what are the views expressed in that province by Catholic bishops and priests and what influence they can have, if any, on this debate. Does she believe, as I do, that here, in the Parliament of Canada, it is our duty to listen to the advice of religious men and women, the pastors of the various Churches, the philosophers and all those who are concerned with moral issues? I fully appreciate the moral position she has just expressed. I share it myself. However, perhaps in order to help some of our colleagues here in the House, I would like to know whether she believes that in a Canadian society which adheres to Judeo-Christian values, even though it increasingly includes the teachings of the other major religions in the world as it becomes more multicultural, we, in Parliament, should listen to the advice of our religious leaders and what advice is being given by Catholic priests in Quebec on this issue.

Mrs. Duplessis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend opposite for having appreciated the speech I made during the present debate. I shall be pleased to answer his question.

To begin with, I should like to say to my hon. friend that the views of Quebecers on capital punishment are no other than those of other Canadians. If he has carefully considered opinion polls published for some time in various newspapers, he has probably noticed that Quebecers were exactly of the same opinion as Canadians throughout the country. However I am glad to note a difference among Members of Parliament from Quebec. Most of them are against the reinstatement of capital punishment. They have publicly said so.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Duplessis: It is true that the Council of Churches, our clergy and parish priests have told us that if we are really practising Christians and believers, we have to be against capital punishment. However, before such statements were made, I had already taken my decision. It only confirmed what I believed in that respect.

Morally speaking, there is something that we should not forget and that is also valid for our colleagues and other individuals throughout the country as well as all other religious denominations in Canada. The reinstatement of capital punishment means that one does not believe in the rehabilitation of the human being who could come to regret his wrongdoings, try to grow better and finally serve the Canadian people. It amounts to losing faith in mankind.

Personally, I do not think that a human being can become rotten. A rotten apple cannot improve. It will only get worse and become uneatable. However, the human being is different. When a human being receives good advice, is being taken good care of and loved, feels it has his or her rightful place in life, there is always a hope that he or she will turn over a new leaf and become better.

So I brought here a small clipping where various solutions are indicated by the Council of Churches. There is also something I would like to bring to your attention, and if I am not mistaken, this morning, during the debate, I think your leader referred to this about the Council of Churches, when he asked how many people know that more than a third of all murders are committed within the family, in the home, after some quarrel? This applies to the majority of crimes in Canada.

This means that there may be something wrong in society. I referred to that earlier. We know that misery and poverty can lead to crime. We are told that maybe we should look more closely at that, this is where we should be providing support. As Members of Parliament we should work twice, a hundred times as hard at improving well-being in society, whether helping children or looking for better regional distribution across Canada. Members from every part of the country and every Party in this House will have to learn how to live with a decision we have taken in order to help and raise the standard