

Capital Punishment

this is a human failing that we must overcome when we are talking about the criminal justice system, because if we were to allow vengeance to creep in and form the basis of our criminal justice system then we would in effect be saying that our criminal justice system is the law of the jungle. Would the Hon. Member not agree?

Mr. St. Germain: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out earlier, I do not see this as being a form of revenge. Obviously the Hon. Member does, and that is the basic difference. This is why it is a question of the conscience, perception and perspective of each individual. It has never been proven that capital punishment is not a deterrent, as marginal and questionable as this particular area really is.

The Hon. Member asked what advanced nations have capital punishment. The answer is the United States of America, Ireland and Belgium, to name just a few.

There are those of us who believe that the protection of society is not a question of revenge or vengeance, but is merely a question of the ultimate crime being controlled. When I was a member of a law-enforcement agency, I recall an individual who had killed a child and was incarcerated. Through the system of parole he was released, according to the laws of the land. He was not on the street three months before he had killed again. I am not saying that in this particular case capital punishment would have been the penalty in the first instance, but had it existed it certainly would have been a deterrent to the second murder.

I do not want to base this entire debate on a question of revenge. It is a question of the protection of society and we have an obligation as legislators and leaders of the country to come forward with the protection that is needed today and in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): Mr. Speaker, I should like to take part in such an important debate, so important in fact that after my election the first question put to me by a news reporter when I first arrived in Ottawa was whether I was for or against capital punishment. Canadians are following this debate with interest because it is very important, yet at the same time sad for me because nearly 15 years after the death penalty was abolished in Canada the Canadian Parliament reopens the debate with a motion aimed at restoring capital punishment.

During that time mankind was able to send men to the moon and in orbit in space. As Canadians we are very proud of the Canadarm sent to the moon to repair satellites. Our scientific achievements are well known, but after 15 years, since yesterday, publicly in this House, by debating the restoration of capital punishment we admit we have failed and that as citizens we have been unable to find solutions to provide better protection for our society and prevent certain kinds of murder from happening again.

Any way you look at them, Mr. Speaker, statistics show that the number of murders did not increase since the death penalty was abolished in Canada. In countries where capital punishment is still on the statute books statistics reveal that the number of murders did not decline either. So, Mr. Speaker, what is the point of restoring capital punishment in Canada?

We have a serious problem, a problem of society. How to protect society? How can we make sure that certain criminal acts will not be repeated? How can we make sure that the life of every human being on earth will be protected? That is the real issue of the debate. Those are the answers which we as parliamentarians must find and give people. But what are we up to? We want to restore the death penalty. And when I say it is sad, Mr. Speaker, it is because by so doing we admit we have failed in our duty, that we are unable to move forward, to better our society.

• (1530)

[*English*]

Killing those who have killed in order to prove that killing is wrong in today's modern society is absurd. As a parliamentarian I do not believe the state should have the power to kill someone. If killing is wrong, why should the state have the right to kill? That is what we are debating here today. People often argue that if the death penalty is reinstated that will dissuade people from committing murder. On statistical grounds alone that argument does not stand up. Most of the time even if murderers knew they would die they would still kill because they are not normal human beings. They are sick. That is what we should be addressing: how can we solve the problem, how can we cure those who need help instead of killing them?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, assuming that some day on our planet earth—there are even some scientists who are foreseeing this in the more or less distant future—there are more human beings than the planet can support, what will happen? Would the authorities decide to kill a lot of people to ease the problem? Or would they look at the problem as a whole to try and find a balance and save all human lives? That is the question, Mr. Speaker. Personally, I feel that by reinstating capital punishment in Canada after 15 years, we show that we are unable to find solutions in our modern society, to develop effective preventive mechanisms to reduce crime and to protect our society against unbalanced human beings.

Mr. Speaker, those who are in favour of reinstating capital punishment will certainly say that three out of every four Canadians agree with them. In my opinion and on the basis of the great many thorough discussions I have had with my Saint-Léonard—Anjou constituents, these polls mean that people want better protection. It is our penal code that should be revised.

Of course, we have penitentiaries. But are they part of the solution? In penitentiaries, we take criminals and lock them up