

Capital Punishment

[*Translation*]

Mr. Carlo Rossi (Bourassa): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to the subject of reinstating the death penalty, in the firm conviction that my constituents will understand why their Member, who was known to favour capital punishment in the past, is no longer in favour of reinstating capital punishment today.

I do not want to judge anyone in this speech. I just want to explain my decision.

I respect those who do not share my views but I expect them to respect me as well.

I know from representations I have received that many people in my riding, and we have discussed the subject at length, share my opinion. I have received a great deal of correspondence, and the vast majority of the letters I receive are opposed to reinstating capital punishment.

Mr. Speaker, as in the House, a number of people in my riding are in favour of capital punishment. But today, and let me tell you I visit my riding regularly, and I talk a lot, and I must say that their reaction when I decided to change my stand was surprisingly favourable.

To some, a return to capital punishment is a matter of conscience. Personally, I weighed the moral implications and I made my decision after a great deal of reflection.

I have a deep respect for all forms of life, and morally and as a matter of personal conscience, I cannot approve of the act of killing, whether by the State or by individuals, except of course in extraordinary circumstances such as when defending one's country in time of war or when one is engaged in self-defence.

The consequences of this debate go far beyond the confines of our usual debates, Mr. Speaker. Our decision in this House will determine whether Canadian society has the right to end the life of a murderer or not. However, even if the person is a murderer, the fact remains that this person is above all a human being, and that is why I condemn, in no uncertain terms, the motion of closure tabled by the Conservatives to restrict the speaking time of Canada's elected representatives who want to speak to this vital issue, this matter of life and death.

Mr. Speaker, my police origins, as many Members will know, and of course my constituents who put their trust in me, put me in an environment that no one in the House, and I say no one, would have been proud to belong to.

In my 31 years as a detective lieutenant with the *Bureau des enquêtes criminelles*, Mr. Speaker, I was involved in cases of hostages taking, armed robbery, negotiation and gun fighting. In my line of work, cases of rape and murder were routine.

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These cases were routine for myself and my fellow police officers and detectives in Montreal whom I respect and to whom I send greetings. I am proud to say that, contrary to what a great many people may think, there is not a single police officer who enjoys catching or firing on a human being.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that none of the police officers in the Montreal urban community whom I know personally will shoot to kill. And when I hear someone say: Come on, Carlo, you were a police officer and against capital punishment. Let me tell you that in addition to being an elected Member of Parliament or former detective lieutenant Carlo Rossi, there are a great many police officers in Canada who are against capital punishment because a police officer is first and foremost a human being who respects life and who has taken an oath to protect it. His duty as a police officer is to protect life.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that I arrested several suspects. Most of them were sentenced. But the big question is: Did they all deserve capital punishment? Of course not. But some murderers certainly deserved life imprisonment. On the subject of life imprisonment, I want to return to these paroles which are granted much too early.

I am sure that if this committee which wants to travel from coast to coast to ask Canadians how murderers should be killed, either through an injection, hanging, the electrical chair or any other way the life of a man can be taken. Instead, it asked people: Do you feel that, beside taking a human life, there are other ways to remedy the situation? Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Parry Sound—Muskoka (Mr. Darling) clearly stated early in his speech that even if he is for capital punishment, there were 36 or 37 people who killed while they were on parole. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, my point is quite true.

Those guys should have done their time, instead of spending 15 years in a penitentiary, they should have stayed there for life as sentenced, and I am going to deal with parolees, Mr. Speaker, because I have some first hand experience . . . let me give you an idea of how it works, based on my own experience, in the case of inmates sentenced for other offences than murder to 10 or eight years in prison. After 3, 4 or 5 years, those people are out in the street again. However, what a lot of Canadians do not know is that when those guys are paroled they are told: If you are caught committing another crime, you will have to complete the balance of your 10 years and an additional term for your crime. I therefore leave you to imagine, Mr. Speaker, what the parolee is going to do: Needless to say, if he takes part in an armed robbery, he will be very careful not to be caught again and go back to jail to spend another 20 years.

I think it is one thing to tell Canadians throughout this great country: Yes, we are going to amend the Criminal Code, the parole system, we are going to have a reform of the Parole Board if you want. However, I think we should come clear on this and not mislead people, because when you visit constituencies, mine at least, you meet elderly people who know what it is all about and keep telling me: they are sentenced to jail, they get a five-year sentence, and after two years they are back in the street. So that is what we should be concerned about. This is where we should try to find solutions rather than killing human beings.