

opinion to be in a certain direction, it is not necessarily incumbent upon a member of Parliament to pursue that direction. Decisions must be based on reason and evidence. If a community is small enough, then all may participate in a discussion of an issue. When the community is too large, and now we are talking about Canada, it is the role of the elected representative of the people who elected him to engage in that discussion based on reason and evidence. That is what representative democracy is about. My constituents know my stand on this issue; and I, for one, am quite prepared to defend my position before my constituents and to take the consequences of whatever decision they make when the next election comes.

A third type of moral argument contends that capital punishment is a deterrent to murder. People use the word "deterrence" in two senses.

**An hon. Member:** Look at the statistics.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** The hon. member says to look at the statistics. I would commend him to his own advice.

We speak of general deterrence; that is, to execute a person will prevent other people in society from committing murder. Second, we talk of specific deterrence; that is, executing the murderer will prevent him from committing further murders. That is patently obvious. There is no doubt of the specific deterrence aspect. Once dead, a person cannot commit another murder. However, the line of reasoning for specific deterrence is that a murderer, having once murdered, will murder again. The evidence does not show this. Murderers are the most unlikely group of offenders to repeat their crimes. The general deterrence argument is a much more difficult one; its validity depends in large part on the results of statistical analysis.

If it is not clear that capital punishment is a deterrent, and if it cannot be argued on moral grounds, using moral reasoning, that the killing of a human being can be justified, how do we reach the conclusion that capital punishment is permissible? It is a brutal act of killing. It is wrong to kill, wrong to take a human life, whether it is taken by the individual or by the state. Execution does not erase the crime of murder. It does not bring back the one who has been murdered. It simply repeats it. I do not see how states are exempted from that clear statement which declares the sanctity of human life.

Killing is certainly abhorrent at all times; but when the state sets out to deliberately destroy a human life, perhaps that is one of the most heinous acts of all. When the state indulges in murder, the result is the weakening of the moral fabric of the society, for by such a cruel and vengeful act, the state contributes to the brutalization of society as a whole. If the state demands that its citizens act with moderation and tolerance, it would seem to me that the state cannot sanction the deliberate destruction of life. The state must set the clear example of respect for human life through the tolerant and patient advocacy of law which looks to other more effective means of protecting society and discouraging crime.

### *Capital Punishment*

**An hon. Member:** What about the 450 extra murders each year?

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** The hon. member opposite asks, "What about the 450 murders each year?"

**An hon. Member:** Extra murders.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** I do not know what is meant by extra murders. I did not know that any murder was ever an extra one.

**An hon. Member:** It is extra compared with 50.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** The fact is that if 450 people committed murders in Canada in any given year, even when we had capital punishment there were never more than five or six who were executed in any given year. What happened to the other 444 or 445?

● (2010)

Where is the justice in such a system which applies severe punishment with such caprice? How are we going to solve the problem by having the state commit an additional 450 killings? If the state demands that its citizens act with moderation and tolerance, it must exercise some self-control and it must avoid the destruction of life. It is my belief that we are only justified in taking another life when it is the last resort in self-defence, personal self-defence, or national self-defence, as in wartime. To my mind it is very clear that capital punishment is not the last resort in self-defence. Each time the state executes a person, it admits failure, a failure of its family system, a failure of its education system, a failure of its social and economic programs, a failure of its moral and religious institutions, and above all, a failure to cope humanely and optimistically with anti-social behaviour. An execution is an act of despair toward the value of the human person.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a word or two to the discussion of the means of execution. There has been much debate over the years as to the "cleanest" and "quickest", most humane method for the state to employ in killing a condemned person. It would appear that as in all things there is a margin for error in the conduct of executions. *Time* magazine has written:

Even the cleanest execution, and an appalling number are not, is so revolting to see that witnesses commonly vomit and faint. Electrocution is relatively swift, though the victim's flesh sometimes burns while his eyes strain out their sockets. With cyanide and the rope, it sometimes takes five minutes for the dying man to fall totally unconscious, and usually fifteen minutes before he is pronounced dead.

Many people seek to avoid the terrible reality of an execution by concentrating on the supposed swiftness or painlessness of the process. I am very much afraid that the history of executions in Canada, as in all other countries, is filled with grisly tales of botched hangings which have led to decapitation, double hangings and a ghastly host of other suffering inflicted upon the condemned. One should not try to gloss over this fundamental reality, no matter how distasteful it is. I too