

still find reasonable would be to give more to senior citizens whose only income is the old age security pension and to give less or even nothing at all to those pensioners who have the good fortune of benefitting from the generosity of our system.

● (2210)

I still regret the demagogic comments of certain apologists of the universality principle who put a check on this will for greater social justice, and I find this a good opportunity to express my views even more forcefully.

Mr. Speaker, when I hear, as we often do from our media, about youths who, in a moment of despair, have killed convenience store owners or a pedestrian for a measly \$100 and even less sometimes, my feeling of helplessness does not lead me to promote a return of the death penalty, but to try and find how I could promote a better distribution of our wealth to avoid such situations. Indeed, I firmly believe that no criminal is born bad. Evil, cruelty, immorality and a tendency to crime are probably weaknesses which exist in human nature, but they develop when the social environment promotes such weaknesses more pressingly than the more humane and positive feelings which must be present in all the right-thinking people that we are to speak about the right to life and death of these criminals who deserve our consideration and attention, whatever we might blame them for. None of us here can lay claim to perfection and set himself as absolute judge to decide whether they will live or die, although it may appear legitimate, because supported by the majority, that the state should impose such a penalty for the most odious crimes.

There is no doubt that this very legitimacy would result from a survey which would ask the following question: "Would you be in favour of Parliament adopting legislation to improve the lot of the disadvantaged?" by directing this question to the same people who were asked: "Do you agree that capital punishment should be reinstated?"

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I should like to emphasize that a great many citizens who are in favour of reinstating capital punishment base their choice on the notion that it would be less expensive for the state to execute murderers than to pension them for life.

Well, I have been particularly impressed by the fact that economic analysts have shown that this popular belief is unfounded, to a large extent.

First of all, only a very small proportion of prisoners would be sentenced to death and executed. Then, what is generally meant by the expression "annual cost" of keeping a prisoner is obtained by dividing the total cost to the Canadian Penitentiary Service by the number of prisoners. Then we realize immediately that removing a few of them each year would have no more practical impact on this cost than on the total cost to the penitentiary services.

Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. Everything seems to indicate that a prospect of a death sentence would make

procedures longer and more complex. The appeals, the pleas for clemency, and the execution process would prove still more expensive for the Canadian judiciary system.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that Canadians who are watching this debate will realize that reinstating capital punishment would not result in a significant reduction of the financial burden to society.

[English]

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make submissions with regard to this very important issue facing the House of Commons and Canadians. Unfortunately, a great number of my colleagues will not have the opportunity to express their points of view here in the House. That is because the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mulroney) decided to invoke closure this morning, notwithstanding the fact that he promised, the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) promised and other high-ranking officials in the Conservative Party promised that we would have a full and open debate on the subject.

● (2220)

We have no alternative but to vote on this motion tonight. I consider it unacceptable, given the serious nature of the issue before us, that the Government should invoke closure, thereby denying a great number of individuals an opportunity to express their points of view.

In less than three hours, the House of Commons, consisting of 279 Members at this time, will be called upon to decide whether or not capital punishment should be reinstated, whether or not the Criminal Code of Canada should be amended to provide that the death penalty be reinstated. There is no question that the vote will be a close one. It will be the closest vote there has been in the three years of this particular Parliament and it will likely be the closest vote there has been in the last number of years.

The burden of proving to the House that capital punishment should be reinstated rests on those who are in favour of reinstating capital punishment. In my submission, the advocates of capital punishment have not discharged that burden. They have not convinced Members of the House to support capital punishment. They have not provided the necessary evidence to convince Members that capital punishment is in fact a deterrent. Is it any wonder that a number of those who previously supported capital punishment no longer support it today? They have been convinced that capital punishment is not the answer.

Those who have changed their views, those who previously supported capital punishment but who will in less than three hours vote against it, ought to be commended for the position they have taken. In effect, it has been a tough decision for them. It has been somewhat tougher than it has been for those of us who have always opposed capital punishment. We as Members of Parliament should congratulate those Hon. Members for their wise judgment on this particular issue.