

Capital Punishment

We cannot base our position on this and say: I am for or against the death penalty. Mr. Speaker, I feel that the message of the Holy Scriptures is this: You will follow the direction of your conscience and you yourself will decide. You can choose either position A or position B. It is up to you. My decision is clear and final. I am not going to let anybody kill on my behalf. I will not give the power of life or death to any administration or civil servants. I will not want to return to a situation where a juror, for fear of making a mistake, would strive to let someone who is guilty and deserve a severe punishment go free. We need to review our penal code. We must work in this direction, but not demand an eye for an eye as we used to. It is not an argument to say that the State should have the right of life or death over its citizens. The State does not give life. But it must see to it that life is protected.

Very often, Mr. Speaker, you will find that many of those who are in favour of reestablishing capital punishment are against abortion. I just cannot understand how they can be against abortion on the one hand and for capital punishment on the other. In both cases, a life is involved.

Of course, they could claim that an unborn child is not guilty of anything. The murderer, on the other hand, is a despicable person. But what made him the way he is, Mr. Speaker? At what age did the child become contemptible? Very young, Mr. Speaker, when he was in kindergarten. When a boy is rather unruly, the child of a divorced family in many cases who has been through a dozen of foster homes . . . I met a young man in my own municipality. He had lived, Mr. Speaker, in 14 foster homes in seven years.

How long did it take us to get used to our new life as members of Parliament? We are not very young any longer. Some children of 8, 10, 12, 15 years of age are asked to adjust themselves to many successive foster homes. That is the starting point. He is boisterous at school. The teacher says: "He is my scatterbrain pupil. Go in the corner. You cannot listen." He will grow up and reach high school. He is a scatterbrain. He cannot be good. He cannot go out with a nice girl. He is a good-for-nothing, so it out of the question. He loiters at the corner restaurant. He bums around. This is what he will do till the day where a judge will rap his gavel and tell him: "You are sentenced to two years in jail because you are a scatterbrain and a misfit." And then, we will try to cast him in our mould. Is our mould really used to try and help rehabilitate those young people? No.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that our mould is far from being perfect. Our rehabilitation system for criminals in Canada is far from being satisfactory, because insufficient funds are available. We should put into crime prevention as much money as we put into our jails and our police forces. This is what should be done, Mr. Speaker, and we should not return to the law of retaliation. It makes no sense.

I have read about horrible cases. Imagine! In 1803, a 13 year-old boy was hanged because he had stolen a cow. It is

terrible! We would say that no such thing could happen in 1987. Such were the times. We have progressed in Canada with the passage of time. In 1861, there was a riot in Montreal because two people were scheduled to be hanged that day and one of them had been amnestied the day before. There was a riot. They changed methods. They hanged them secretly thereafter. But that did not change the problem, it did not solve the situation. It did not improve the system in Canada. They did not really solve the real difficulty, which is prevention, the modernizing of our judicial systems in Canada.

How many times did I hear police officers tell me: We arrest an individual for drug trafficking, and before we have time to fill in all the forms he is already back on the street. We arrest a guy caught in the act for armed robbery. Two years later he is already out of prison. Is that normal, Mr. Speaker?

But at some point there will be an accident. There will be a murder. A human life will be spent. And I do not support legalizing murder in Canada. No, I am against crime. But crime must be prevented. That is the beginning, the starting point. When we see horrible films on T.V., how is it possible that young children four, five, six years old will not have a tendency to violence? If we try to fight violence with violence, Mr. Speaker, we will get nowhere. Because if the State becomes as violent as the worst murderers in society, I do not believe we will solve the problem. We will not be setting an example. The role of the State, the role of the Canadian Government is to set an example.

If capital punishment had been reinstated, Mr. Speaker, do you think I would have been able to vote for Bill C-28 presented by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn)? The main objective of that Bill was:

This Act would implement the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted by the United Nations on December 5, 1984 and signed by Canada on August 23, 1985.

How would it have been possible, Mr. Speaker, for Parliamentarians, Members of this House with 1/282 of the life and death power in this country, to vote for a Bill against torture, and cruel and inhuman treatment?

Mr. Speaker, if capital punishment is not a cruel and inhuman punishment, I wonder what it is. You can read what has been written on the subject, and I am glad that journalists have reported abundantly on the reality of death row. What about the fact that light stays on 23 hours a day, to prevent suicide. Justice must be served and the accused must be kept alive. That is justice for society.

• (1250)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member has one minute left, plus ten minutes for questions and comments when we resume debate after three o'clock.

It being 1 p.m., I do now leave the chair until 2 p.m.