

*Capital Punishment*

who share that view, that they are mistaken, and that Canadians who support that opinion are mistaken as well, because people who have been convicted of a serious crime punishable by a 25-year jail sentence consider that they are more severely punished when, pursuant to the new legislation, they are kept in jail and deprived of their freedom during 25 years for first degree murder or 15 years for second degree murder.

● (1740)

Mr. Speaker, that is another way of saying that in a debate such as this one, we must try to forget for a moment the nature and circumstances of the crime which has been committed, and think instead about the kind of society in which we want to live.

A criminal is accused of taking someone's life. An individual is thrown in jail because he has committed the most despicable crime, taking the life of a fellow human being. I think it is sometimes difficult to react any other way when confronted with repugnant and totally meaningless crimes. The first impulse of the ordinary man is understandable. He says that the criminal no longer has any right to his freedom or even his life. But should the legislator be influenced and seek vengeance? Should the legislator take a decision when he is emotionally stressed? I do not think so, Mr. Speaker. I think that as spokesmen for all Canadians, our role is to enlighten them and provide them with every means to enable them to make a fair and honest judgment.

Mr. Speaker, when speaking of fair and honest decisions, I think that my colleagues will agree that statistics are undoubtedly a useful tool to make decisions. Polls are the usual procedure to gauge public opinion, but when a decision must be made, we should not make it exclusively to comply with people's wishes. Statistics clearly indicate that since 1956, when the death penalty was abolished, the number of crimes or murders has decreased. But there is a distinction to be made: the number of violent crimes has not diminished. Violence has increased, but the number of murders has fallen. I think that this shows that statistics can be used by both sides on the issue of capital punishment. I suggest that on the whole, the statistics to which I referred tend to support my views, although I do not pretend to be an authority giving confirmed opinion. I am only speaking according to my conscience, since my colleague referred to it a while ago. We all have our conscience. We try to abide by own conscience as legislators when we must choose a direction which offers true protection and security to Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, as far as public opinion polls are concerned, we realize that some countries have abolished the death penalty. Those countries often have a lower crime rate than before.

On the other hand, there are nations which have both the death penalty and a very high crime rate. Certain countries have chosen to abolish the death penalty for some reason or other, but in this country, in my opinion, we made that

decision for a very important reason, and we did so in a non-partisan move.

Moreover, I remember the very eloquent comments of the Right Honourable the then Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), when he stated: "I have realized that the death penalty is no deterrent for the peculiar type of persons that murderers are". He also added the following: "Our duty is to establish whether the threat of capital punishment would deter those who might be likely to take a human life, that is to commit murder". I have seen no strong evidence that the threat of that penalty could be a deterrent, and I agree with the views put forward by the then Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) had also stated, and I quote: "I do not believe there are arguments either of reason or of a moral nature in support of capital punishment". He also stated: "The Solicitor General has stressed like others that the information at our disposal is not conclusive to say the least".

Those are statements made by dedicated politicians, by men with just as good and sound a conscience as any citizen who would advocate capital punishment, and those men of experience and distinction did support at that time the very close vote to abolish capital punishment.

Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental reason why I cannot, as a member of Parliament and as a citizen, support capital punishment. It is not the kind of criminal acts, frequently of a sordid nature, that have been committed and that call for a penalty. It is, in my view, the injustice involved in reinstating capital punishment. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, and in view of your vast knowledge I know you are aware of them, but I take the liberty of reminding you of the facts. To what class of citizens do criminals belong? Most of them come from the ranks of the have-nots, the poor, the unemployed, and those on welfare. They are the ones that are mostly involved in criminal acts that go as far as murder. Why should our society lay on people who are already underprivileged, why should it lay on them the burden of an error that often is not the fault of those who committed it but that of the society in which they live?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin):** Order, please!

● (1750)

**THE ROYAL ASSENT**

[Translation]

A message was delivered by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Deputy to the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the Chamber of the honourable the Senate.