

*Capital Punishment*

convinced that this would be a quick and hasty answer, resulting from an excessive self-defence reflex, which following discussion, could be restored to more reasonable terms. I am convinced that by meeting personally with these respondents, I could easily bring them to the positive sentiments expressed by the editor, the jurist and the theologian I quoted a while ago. In short, we should not fall into the trap of sentimentality which could distract us from the real issue, the root of crime. By approving retribution, our conscience is clear but no more. As legislators, our sense of responsibilities should carry us further.

Mr. Speaker, I always been unable to believe that capital punishment sets an example for potential criminals. As a result of what historians have told us about the death penalty as retribution and what we have seen in historic films and documents—if we go back to earlier times, we realize that there is some logic in that argument. The death penalties were publicly carried out and that was an important aspect of the example to discourage eventual criminals. However, with the development of our civilization, those public scenes of torture were disapproved and progressively, retribution by the state for even the most contemptible crimes was questioned. The executions are now carried out more secretly and less brutally. I think that this refinement was developed to make the execution easier, the previous torture being replaced by the painless execution and to observe a greater discretion, the public place being replaced by an isolated corner of the prison in the presence of a few official witnesses because the executioners were not very proud of themselves. And surely the abolitionists are not so proud either since to my knowledge those who are demanding the reinstatement of the death penalty do not complain about the effectiveness of the procedure nor about the discretion of the execution. Tell me where is the exemplarity?

Mr. Speaker, greater experts than myself on the matter have tried to prove that that penalty does not act as a deterrent, and they have succeeded in proving it since capital punishment was abolished in Canada. Others had referred to the irremediable guilt feeling owing to the concern about a possible miscarriage of justice. I agree this last argument has its merits. Novels, political writings and films have made heroes of criminals executed after being convicted of crimes for which the death penalty was given at the time, while afterwards, people started having second thoughts. I am convinced that the quality of our judiciary system, based on the presumption of innocence, has reduced this risk considerably. However, these are reasonable and genuine arguments we cannot ignore.

Mr. Speaker, I am one of those who believe that the death penalty does not protect the public against potential criminals. We have all, from time to time, read reports in the media on series of murders of policemen on duty and more recently, of convenience store owners. Executing these murderers would do nothing to protect policemen or store owners. Actually, people who rob convenience stores without killing, people who commit their crimes without killing policemen are still around and are

a potential danger when we are talking about violent acts. An armed thief who commits his crime without killing a policeman or a convenience store owner is not any less dangerous than the thief who used his deadly weapon when he was caught in the act. One will be sent to jail and the other will be sentenced to be hanged. And what kind of additional protection does hanging the second criminal afford society? I don't believe in this argument, because, as I said before, the death penalty would only have a deterrent effect on someone who would be afraid to commit the crime leading to the murder. The other guy, who is involved in a crime where he will be able to escape or who is a professional criminal, is usually afraid of nothing, even if his life depends on it, whether it means being shot down by a policeman exercising his responsibility as the protector of the public or by an executioner with a legitimate mandate to do so. It doesn't make much difference to him.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to my very real concern which is how we ought to punish acts of murder. How do we deal with this evil at the source? My answer to that is by seeking a better distribution of wealth in our country and the gradual building of a juster society. I became involved in active politics, inspired by a great Canadian who is committed to these goals, our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). Since my election, I have done my best to meet these objectives, first, by being receptive to the grievances of my fellow citizens and by looking for the maximum of benefits within Government programs to meet their expectations, second, by working at developing new programs to meet this objective, and third, by supporting the major legislative proposals of our Government which I believe can contribute to this end, such as the tax reform proposal announced by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), to name but one.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore express the wish that my colleagues who advocate reinstatement of the death penalty will reflect on this more constructive approach, which they would surely be able to convince their fellow citizens to support, by taking the time necessary to reflect and argue on such a crucial issue instead of giving in to the temptation of first impression arguments steeped in feelings of revenge and especially helplessness. Indeed, I have to say that I find the attitude of the advocates of the death penalty fatalistic and steeped in a feeling of helplessness at endowing our country with more equitable social programs, and in this regard, our colleagues opposite should perhaps reflect on our expressed intention to bring about a better distribution of our social programs by giving less to the better-off and more to the poor at the risk of making certain exceptions to the universality principle.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when I read in the newspapers that two senior citizens, who have lived together for 40, 50 or 60 years and who have raised eight or ten children can feel so much hate for each other that it leads to the death of one of them, my feeling of helplessness does not make me want to punish these acts of violence by a return of the death penalty, but look for means to improve the standard of living and well-being of these victims of poverty. One of the solutions which I