

### *Capital Punishment*

How could I pass a law which would state that a judge must make a decision on life or death? I cannot morally do that. I do not know why I should then pass that decision on to a judge or a jury.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, is it fair to expect, if capital punishment is returned, to have a medical doctor stand and verify that somebody has been hung by the neck until dead and then pronounce that person dead? Should we expect a medical doctor to do that whether the method of execution is by hanging, electric chair or lethal injection? Is it fair to force the people in the medical community to go through that type of uncivilized act? It is not fair. I would not do it. How can I pass a law saying that we expect doctors to do it?

Is it fair to expect a minister of the cloth, a reverend or a priest, or what have you, to be there when someone is executed and to give them their last rites, to be with them and try to comfort them? That is not fair.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, is it morally right to leave someone who is condemned on death row year after year after year while the appeals go on and on, while the date of execution is pushed back and back? Do Members of the House really believe in that kind of torture? I ask them if they believe in that type of torture for someone who is condemned?

I also ask if Members of the House really believe that it is fair to the family of the condemned woman or man, to see their brother, sister, father, mother, cousin or loved one on death row waiting week after week and month after month and year after year while appeals are being exhausted and retried and exhausted once again?

Finally, I ask whether any Member of this House of Commons would volunteer to be the hangman? Someone has to pull the trigger, someone has to push the button. I suggest that there is no one in the House of Commons who would do that.

**Mr. Gagnon:** Yes, there is, right here.

**Mr. Holtmann:** Yes, I would.

**Mr. Nystrom:** The Hon. Member for Calgary North (Mr. Gagnon) would do it, and so would the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake (Mr. Holtmann). They are exceptions. They would volunteer to be the hangman, to push the button.

**Mr. Gagnon:** We had a million people go serve in the war who do not want to fight against crime.

**Mr. Nystrom:** Almost no one in the House would do it. If we would not do it or they would not do it, how can they vote for a Bill that forces someone else to do it?

**Mr. Holtmann:** As long as you were standing there we would do it.

• (1210)

**Mr. Nystrom:** We have had hangmen in this country who have committed suicide because of the job they had to do. These are people who lived a life of sheer hell because of the job they had to do.

Mr. Speaker, if we would not do it ourselves, how can we pass a law that obligates another member of our society to be the executioner, to be the hangman?

We live in a civilized society. We have a great country. I believe we now have to reach for higher morals, for a higher standard in society. History will judge us on how we vote on this issue. Years down the road, when I am asked where I stood on this very historical debate, I will be able to say with pride that I stood on the side of decency, that I stood on the side of higher morals in our society, that I stood on the side of a democratic society, a just society; that I did not stand on the side of those who want to bring back the noose, taking us closer to the kind of society we see in the Soviet Union, or China, or Iraq, or Turkey, or Iran, or Chile, and other countries of South America, or South Africa. I do not believe in the kind of society that exists in those places. I believe that Canadian people reflecting on this issue will overwhelmingly come down on the side that capital punishment is morally wrong and dangerous for Canada as a country.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The House has heard the terms of Mr. Nystrom's amendment. The Chair finds the motion for amendment in order.

Questions or comments?

The Hon. Member for London East (Mr. Jepson), on debate.

**Mr. Jim Jepson (London East):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House today to speak on the issue of capital punishment, an issue on which there are deeply held convictions on both sides. It is wrong for those on either side of the issue to claim the high moral ground. Those on both sides of the question have deep convictions. It is wrong to impute that one side has the high moral ground and the other not.

In the debates that I have had with the former Solicitor General, the Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) and Mr. Edward Greenspan, it was generally agreed that the statistics will not conclusively prove either side of the issue.

I am in favour of capital punishment for first degree murder, or premeditated murder. I believe the courts must have the capital punishment option. The Government must make it clear that society will not tolerate the premeditated taking of a life. The clear message must be that the sanctity of life is foremost in our considerations.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we see a focus on the rights of the accused as an individual. But, what about the collective rights