

Capital punishment can never restore the life lost; it can only degrade us as a nation. It is not a deterrent. Surely the comparative experience in the United States proves that. Surely the views of the former President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police should be considered. He said:

—it is futile to base an argument on reinstatement of capital punishment on the grounds of deterrence.

Surely that view should be listened to, as should the words of the Hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) who said:

Where you have a penalty it should be demonstrated to be a deterrent with respect to the activity for which it is a penalty.

Because I learned history in the United Kingdom, Madam Speaker, I think of the experience there. I think of how, back in the 17th and 18th centuries, a whole panoply, a gamut of crimes were punishable by the ultimate sentence, and how gradually penal reform reduced that number and how there was in fact a reduction in crime that went hand in hand with that reform.

We are no longer in the age of Dickens, when a person could be hanged for picking a pocket. And we know that even for that trivial crime, capital punishment was not a deterrent. We have more than one authority citing the fact of the widespread pick-pocketing that took place at public executions. That is an antithesis that the “pro” forces are incapable of resolving.

Far from reducing violent crime, the facts support the view that the death penalty is part of the cycle of violence and does not address the public’s need for protection.

Depending upon the base year and depending upon the use of statistics, it is very easily possible to show that murder in Canada has fallen since the death penalty was abolished.

The death penalty means that even the innocent can be executed. Miscarriages of justice have been documented in this society, in the United States, and in Great Britain. It has been reported that 343 persons have been wrongly convicted of capital offences in the past 200 years in the United States.

The death penalty is discriminatory. Those who die are, overwhelmingly, the poor, the illiterate, the uneducated, the native people, identifiable racial minorities.

The Assembly of First Nations has petitioned this Government, based on a study entitled “The Quality of Mercy”, to block the reinstatement of capital punishment on the ground that if it were reintroduced, it would again fall upon members of the groups which it represents.

As the late Supreme Court Justice of the United States, Justice William O. Douglas, noted: “One searches our chronicles in vain for the execution of any member of the affluent strata of society.”

May I call it two o’clock, Mr. Speaker.

S. O. 21

• (1400)

STATEMENTS PURSUANT TO S. O. 21

[English]

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

CLOSURE OF DEBATE

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, today is a day of infamy. The Tories have once again broken their promise, this time about a matter of life and death.

Today the Government has shocked and outraged Members of the House by invoking closure in the capital punishment debate. I believe that most Members of the House, regardless of party affiliation, shared the views of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) when he stated in the House on February 13, 1987:

The Government wishes to have a frank debate, a full debate, and a constructive debate.

Given this statement, it is indeed hard to understand why the Government is in such a hurry to curtail debate on this serious issue before all Members of the House have been able to voice their views.

I want to point out—and I hope the Speaker will take note as well—that this debate is different from all other debates. This is not a debate between Parties. It is a debate where each Member of Parliament has views to present, and the Speaker must consider that in this circumstance each of us has an equal right to be heard—

Mr. Speaker: I regret that the Hon. Member’s time has expired.

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OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

CITIZENSHIP COURT CEREMONY

Mr. Reginald Stackhouse (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, recently the constituency of Scarborough West was honoured to host the largest citizenship court ever convened when 400 Canadians of Greek origin became citizens of this, their chosen country.

It was an inspiration to witness these people, in the presence of the Secretary of State (Mr. Crombie) and Citizenship Judge Suzanne Warren, take their oath of allegiance to Her Majesty The Queen of Canada as this country’s head of state.

Afterwards the judicial character of the evening was happily replaced by a party spirit when ethnic dancing and singing took over the proceedings.