

*Capital Punishment*

Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) pointed that out earlier this evening in his address.

Third, the interlinking between social and economic factors in Canada as well as the administration of our criminal justice system needs to be more closely understood, defined and applied. Most particularly, we need to revise, review and find creative answers to our systems of sentencing, plea bargaining and parole.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, at the risk of repeating the comments of Members who have already taken part in this debate, I wish to add my voice to all those in this House and throughout Canada who are vigorously opposed to reinstatement of the death penalty. I must say that I am in good company as, apart from the civilized nations which voted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, including this country, which declaration recognizes in article 3 that—

Everyone has the right to life—

—there are also many abolitionists in Canada, including the Coalition Against the Return of the Death Penalty, which includes thirty-two different organizations, such as the Canadian Council of Churches, the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Canadian Association of Social Workers and Amnesty International.

[*English*]

The leaders of our three political Parties have taken a strong position against capital punishment. As well, there is the most unique situation of the three presidents of the youth wings of our three political Parties, the Liberal, Conservative and NDP youth presidents, who jointly expressed their ongoing concern and, in a vote of solidarity, their wish not to see this motion carry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I think I should say from the start that many ordinary Canadians have wanted to express their views on this issue, as shown by the great number of open letters to the newspapers. With very few exceptions, including the noteworthy one of Guy Brouillette, professor of philosophy at the Collège Maisonneuve in Montreal, they are vigorously opposed to the reinstatement of the death penalty. Many editorial writers, both francophone and anglophone, have also taken a stand against the old principle of an eye for an eye and questioned the use of resuming a debate which seemed to have been concluded once and for all in 1976. They have also expressed surprise at the fact that the Prime Minister did not see fit until the last moment to take part himself in this debate to express his abolitionist views, that he did not see fit to join personally in a debate which he will surely describe as being historic, as he does everything from an annual meeting with the President of the United States to a Constitutional Conference.

• (2130)

[*English*]

Editorial writers, along with Members of this House, will not easily forget the mean spirit of the Conservative Government which promised an open and full parliamentary debate followed by a free vote, only to then try and choke off debate by calling for closure. The Government tried that trick not once but twice. This is a matter of life and death. The motion calls for the return of capital punishment and the very act of trying to force closure shows how the majority Government is trying to suppress what it considers to be minority opinion on this very sensitive matter. The Government proposed the motion and it should have better managed its legislative calendar. The Prime Minister, who gave a very moving address this evening, talked about genuine respect for opposing views. He said we need periodic review of public policy and that this debate is the instrument of democracy. I do not call it democracy when you try and choke off the debate. When you use the threat of closure on a motion of this kind, that cannot be called straightforward.

Neither is the motion itself straightforward. It does not call for the death penalty, it calls for a decision that this House supports in principle the reinstatement of capital punishment and then directs that a committee be formed to deal with the issue. If the Government calls for the reintroduction of capital punishment, then it has taken a position even though its Leader and other Ministers are against it. I suggest that is not a very strong way to lead. Normally the Government would introduce a Bill for debate, send it to committee for amendment, and then pass it. The method the Government is using in this case is not very democratic. This is not leadership. This is hiding behind the skirts of a committee which is supposed to go out and find out what people want. I am not interested in how people wish to kill and I think the Government should have taken its responsibility a little more seriously.

[*Translation*]

Admittedly polls report that a majority of Canadians favour restoring the death penalty. What does that mean exactly? In an excellent article published in the May 1987 issue of *L'Actualité* magazine, Mr. Jean Paré expressed serious doubts about a poll in which 78 per cent of our fellow citizens said they were for capital punishment. That poll, he wrote, needs much finer interpretation. Moreover, he said, and I quote: "That opinion is volatile as is shown in the experience made in 1975 by two sociologists, one from Massachusetts and one from Ontario." In their samples, the support for capital punishment fell from 51 to 38 per cent, after the reading of a report offering factual arguments against the death penalty. When moral and social arguments were added, the support fell from 72 per cent to 42 per cent. Quoting one of the authors, Mr. Paré adds the following: "Most people are badly informed on the issue. When they know the facts, they tend to take a stand against."