

### *Capital Punishment*

capital punishment, if it were reinstated, would have a deterrent effect here or in other countries.

In short, Mr. Speaker, this debate has taken place hundreds of times in every civilized society since the end of the Second World War. No new facts or unique discoveries have enhanced it in the past few years: in the United States, where this punishment was reinstated in several states, experts in that field have not been convinced that it had any measurable social impact.

The application of death penalty is not only discriminatory, it is irrevocable. Our justice system is human and therefore fallible. Similarly, and due to the wide range of specific circumstances surrounding an offence, individuals who commit murder are very unlikely to be deterred by the consequences of their crimes even if those consequences include the death penalty.

To be meaningful, a punishment should create a memory. A child is punished so that he will remember that a specific gesture, a specific behaviour is wrong, and he will not do it again. A punishment supposes the ability to think. There probably exists also a social memory, and even the least hardened criminals may be sensitive to the deterrent power of capital punishment, but they are not those this motion is aimed at. Again, Mr. Speaker, would it be fair to reinstate the ultimate penalty in Canada while ignoring the complex causes of crime which we must address if we want to create real justice in Canada?

In this troubled age, when our value system has been affected by many changes in the last few decades, we have the duty as individuals, as groups and as governments, to make immediately the decisions necessary to deflect, divert or channel these turbulent flows of changes.

As a Member of Parliament, I must naturally consider the requests of my constituents. However, I also have the right, the duty and the responsibility to act in their best interests by looking for effective solutions to the problems which concern them. It would be doing them a disservice to opt for a quick, ineffective and illusory solution.

Mr. Speaker, such a debate has the disadvantage on the one hand of polarizing opinions, but on the other, it also provides a great number of possibilities for effective political and social action.

If we take refuge in a low level of solutions or challenges, neither individuals nor institutions will be able to face the high diversity and fast-paced changes which must go hand in hand with evolution.

In my opinion, our only option is to vote against the motion if we want to transform our institutions to face these new conditions. This is the price of the passport which will open up the borders of a viable and reasonably compassionate future. To cross this border, we should certainly not try to eliminate those we feel incapable of changing or view as hardened criminals, but we should instead use our imagination and our

ability to prepare our own future, our future as a country and our policy for the future.

**Mr. Guy St. Julien (Abitibi):** Mr. Speaker, the question before the House this evening is important for Canada's future.

Many of my constituents are opposed to the reinstatement of capital punishment in Canada, and today, the debate on the death penalty is again being discussed in all the media. In 1976, the Canadian Government decided to abolish the death penalty. With many Canadians, we thought that this country had written a major page in its history that would show the world our concern for achieving a greater degree of civilization.

Today, our society can hardly backtrack and go back to a system that tries to substitute one evil for another, without undermining the very basis of its moral strength: its respect for life, for all human life. The gesture of John Paul II who forgave his aggressor helps us understand that in a society like ours, there is always room for forgiveness. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that in Canada and in this House, there are Canadians and Members who have forgiven the murderer of one of their loved ones.

I received many letters from my constituents, including a letter from Msgr. Duchemin, who said:

The death penalty is a punishment that is unfair, unjust and above all irreversible. Its use increases contempt for human life and lends a false legitimacy to our propensity to seek revenge.

Mr. Speaker, I have to admit I also have constituents who are asking for reinstatement of the death penalty because they are convinced there is a lot of crime in this country. They see acts of violence on television and dozens of reports in the newspapers. Obviously, how to punish such crimes is one of the first things that comes to mind.

Deep inside every human being, there is a powerful instinct that drives him not only to defend himself but to seek justice. It is true that this instinct has been demonstrated in the past, through wars, slavery, torture, discrimination against race, individuals and nations. Although there are still vestiges of these cruel customs, we can say that in recent years and centuries, a better understanding has developed of the dignity of human nature.

The idea of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" would probably come to most of us if someone attacked our nearest and dearest. Our immediate reaction would probably be to vote for the death penalty, and not necessarily an easy death. It is precisely for this reason that it is forbidden to take the law into one's own hands, that we have theoretically objective and impartial judges and jurors to make such decisions. Before restoring the concept of pure and simple vengeance in our court system, we ought to give it serious thought and consider to what extent we might stand to lose more in the long term. As punishment, Mr. Speaker, the death penalty is the most absurd option. Punishment is meted out as a corrective