

*Capital Punishment*

to improve federal-provincial relations. While differences of opinion are inherent to our system and continue, the nature of the difference of opinion is, for the most part, philosophical rather than the result of a complete failure to communicate.

Relations have improved with the United States. Prospects are good for a free trade agreement which will ensure access to the markets of our biggest customer. Environment issues are now receiving the attention they deserve. On all of these issues we do not claim victory, but we do claim progress.

Therefore, it is appropriate to commence this debate on the question of reinstatement of capital punishment at this time in our mandate. There are those in the Opposition who say that we are doing it now to curry public favour. That is nonsense for the reasons which I have stated, Mr. Speaker. We are bringing this debate forward now because we said we would bring it forward during our mandate. We are bringing this debate forward now because of the considerable progress we have made on several fronts.

However, although it is appropriate to commence the debate now, it is also appropriate to make certain other points. The Government has other important legislation which should proceed. Among those legislative initiatives are the revisions to the Patent Act, changes to the Criminal Code affecting pornography and sexual abuse of children, transportation legislation which will free up competition and deregulate transportation in Canada, as well as income tax legislation flowing from the recent Budget. There are other policy initiatives, such as income tax reform, child care initiatives and defence policy which may or may not initiate parliamentary debate prior to the end of June.

While we are committed as a Government to the debate on capital punishment, we are not committed to managing the debate with a heavy hand or forcing a vote by a certain date. That would be contradictory on a matter of conscience. One of my colleagues is reported to have said that we will look very weak if the vote does not take place before June 30 this year. With respect, Mr. Speaker, I do not agree. Our Government will, in the final analysis, be measured on our record on all issues, not one issue, and especially not a non-confidence measure which has been designated as a free vote.

● (1140)

Therefore, while there is a disposition and a will to proceed with the debate, the Government is also committed to the continued orderly process of the Government's business. In an effort to have a full debate involving every member who wishes to speak, the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) wrote to the opposition House Leaders suggesting that the House sit from seven until 10 each Monday, Tuesday and Thursday and that speeches in debate on the said motion and amendments be limited to 15 minutes with questions and comments in reply limited to five minutes. That suggestion would have allowed for a full and orderly debate, but unfortunately the opposition House Leaders flatly rejected that proposal and had no alternatives.

I have a personal suggestion with respect to this debate which I would put forward. I would suggest that we call the debate every Friday. That way, those who wish to debate the matter, either for or against, would be on notice that they must be here on Fridays. Twenty-five of the obstructionists in the opposition Parties who fear debate would be forced to remain so that the hours of debate would not be extended. Should the debate be extended, everyone present who wished to speak could speak and the vote could be deferred to the following Monday.

Although there has been considerable public debate, parliamentary debate and media discussion concerning the issue of the reinstatement of capital punishment, there has been very little consideration or consensus on the appropriate measure and mechanics for the parliamentary debate. I would like to pay tribute to the Deputy Prime Minister for the time and effort he put into the drafting of this motion. It is the result of considerable thought, review and revision as well as full consultation with members of the Government caucus which, I would point out, includes both proponents and opponents of the motion.

The motion provides an orderly process for the debate of the issue and the decision-making process if the motion is passed by the House. The motion first seeks the opinion of the House on the reinstatement of capital punishment. If the motion is defeated, the matter will end there. If the motion is supported, the motion establishes a parliamentary committee to prepare and introduce appropriate legislation within a certain time frame. As the Deputy Prime Minister stated in the House, the vote will not be considered a matter of confidence by the Government. If the motion is defeated, the Government will not consider it a motion of non-confidence.

I think it is fair to ask why we did not pursue other legislative methods such as a private Members' Bill. A private Members' Bill to reinstate capital punishment would not have allowed for orderly debate on the principle followed by an orderly process of drafting a Bill. Furthermore, the present rules for Private Members' Bills allow for only five hours of debate. That would not be sufficient time for all Members of the House who wished to participate in this debate to do so.

One might also ask why the Government did not bring in a government Bill. We feel that that would not have been appropriate because the Government's commitment was to a full and open debate followed by a free vote. If the motion passes, the members of the committee of the House and not the Government will decide upon the crimes for which the punishment applies and the method of enacting the punishment. We feel this motion is the best possible and most reasonable approach for all Members of the House regardless of their position on the issue.

The motion has been in the public domain since February 12, 1987. This has allowed for constituents to contact their Members of Parliament, as many have. It has allowed for public debate, both organized and unorganized. It has allowed for media consideration and it has allowed for Members of