

any action that would diminish that reality and would lessen that value.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: I realize that there are many arguments and many considerations. One, of course, deals with the empirical evidence. Let us deal briefly with that empirical evidence.

No executions have been carried out in this country for a quarter of a century. The death penalty was legally abolished more than a decade ago, in 1976. Ten years later, in 1986, the homicide rate in Canada reached a 15-year low. Last year the murder rate declined by 20 per cent. First degree murder charges have declined by nearly 25 per cent in the last two years.

What about the argument that the fear of execution will deter would-be murderers? That goes to the fundamental notion of those whom I respect but hold views different from mine. When one sees the incredible crimes that are inflicted upon young people and the elderly across this country, other Members articulate that concern of the deterrent. In the United States, the highest murder rates are in states such as Texas or Florida where capital punishment is enforced. In the State of Florida, the murder rate has increased by 30 per cent since the restoration of capital punishment.

As Lord Parker, the Lord Chief Justice of Britain said at Westminster in 1965:

The great deterrent to crime is not severity of punishment but certainty of conviction . . . I have agreed with John Bright when he said, "a deep reverence for human life is worth more than a thousand executions in the prevention of murder".

I am not persuaded by this argument of deterrent. The burden of proof for the restoration of the death penalty must rest, and must rest very heavily, on those in favour of it.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons frequently advanced for the reinstatement of capital punishment is the supposedly high cost of keeping a prisoner incarcerated for life.

But in Canada, we do not and should not engage in a "cost benefit analysis" when it comes to questions concerning the value of a human life.

No matter how it is administered, capital punishment terminates human life. No matter how thorough the evidence, the possibility of executing an innocent person remains.

Mr. Speaker and dear colleagues in this House, for me, this is unacceptable and abhorrent in a civilized society.

[English]

Let there be absolutely no doubt about what this resolution is all about. If it is adopted, the House will be voting in principle for reinstatement of the death penalty. This debate is in and of itself an instrument of democracy in which the voices of the people are heard through their elected representatives. I

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commend the thoughtfulness with which people have intervened on all sides of this issue in terms of the parliamentary debate.

The views of our constituents are, of course, very important, but in the final analysis, the most demanding constituency of all in this regard must remain our consciences. This is a matter on which the House of Commons owes the country its independent judgment and this is a matter on which each Member owes the House of Commons his or her moral leadership.

For all of these reasons, I shall be voting against the resolution, against restoration, against capital punishment. But most of all, I shall be voting against it because I believe it is wrong.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Every Member who speaks on this resolution is subject to being questioned by other Members of the House after he concludes his remarks. I realize that under the rules the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) is exempted from that requirement. However, he is participating in this debate, which is not a government measure and which requires a free vote. He is participating as a Private Member.

Therefore, I wonder if he might agree and there may be unanimous consent to have the normal question and answer period that has applied to all other Members?

Some Hon. Members: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Malépart: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I also want to ask whether the Prime Minister would be willing to answer a few questions with the unanimous consent of the House. In passing, I must congratulate the Prime Minister for his eloquent speech. What I want to ask the Prime Minister is this: When this debate concludes, will the Government make a commitment to bring in Bills and programs to reform our penal system so that we might discuss practical means of improving the situation and preventing crime?

[English]

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Members of the Liberal Opposition are seeking to have extended to the Leader of the Government a practice that I understand did not extend to the Leaders of the two other Parties. The Member who has just put a question in the context of a point of order has, in effect, tried to have things two ways. He seeks to have the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) respond to comments and questions because he is a Private Member but then, using that excuse, he raises questions concerning government policy.

The Hon. Member cannot have things both ways. I submit with the greatest respect that the rules that were agreed to should be respected.