

would have to vote on unequivocally for the retention of the death penalty. But the poll included also, in addition to the question of whether or not they were in favour of the death penalty, other related questions such as whether they were in favour of the parole system which is at present in effect in this country. Their reply was just as conclusive as to the previous question on the death penalty. My constituents' dissatisfaction about this is perhaps even greater than the dissatisfaction of those who have expressed their desire to keep the death penalty.

I therefore come to the conclusion that the first responsibility of he who represents an electoral riding is to inform his constituents and state clearly that the legislation the government tries to implement meets the needs of a society that we all want to improve, a society in which, on the one hand, individuals will have the right to live, in which they will feel protected and, on the other hand, in which they will feel that all the mistakes they might make, however serious they may be, will not be considered by the state as unforgivable, and deserving to be treated with violence and in a spirit of revenge, but which deserve to be judged fairly, with understanding and with a view to rehabilitating the individual, enabling him to play again his part for the establishment of a better society in which he may have played a part for which he was not necessarily the first responsible.

● (2130)

It is therefore in this frame of mind, Mr. Speaker, that I take part in this debate, after explaining on several occasions to my constituents, in my riding, that in my opinion, it was sad and unfortunate that we have to live in a society where we have to consider reinstating the death penalty taking away the most valuable asset: life—in an attempt to protect society from a minority which tries to destroy it and to deprive it from its most valuable aspect, that unique asset which is life.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite difficult to say to our constituents who may read in newspapers every week and sometimes even more often, the report of horrible things which publicity takes pleasure in making known to the public often without giving explanations, attenuations which would make those acts, at first sight horrible, not justifiable but sometimes explainable.

If I could be convinced, Mr. Speaker, that it is the real criminals we are punishing by death, if I could be given that concrete proof that it is really those responsible for the corruption who are given the penalty they deserve, I might have a different view from the one I express today. But since I have had personally the chance to practise law for about 14 years before entering politics I am in a position to say with profound conviction that I have proof—and that proof is not isolated—of cases where people were condemned because of the incompetence of their counsel, perjury of witnesses and that guilty people were able to avoid punishment because of the ability of their counsel, the money they handed out and which allowed them to avoid punishment under the law.

In a society seeking harmony, people want to be able to walk down the street or stay at home without fear at being bothered, molested or attacked, and we must recognize

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that injustices allow the real authors of reprehensible acts to avoid punishment.

Mr. Speaker, it is truly a difficult situation for a legislator, for a private member like myself, to try and strike a balance between a society where laws must be enforced and where we must also respect the individual's basic right, namely his right to live, his right to make mistakes, even very serious mistakes. Those two rights, society's right and the individual's right, are putting us in a dilemma which makes it hard for us to take a firm stand.

If I took the position of someone who thinks that society, the protection of structures and law enforcement come first, I would then be in favour of death penalty. I would advocate strict laws which would protect the individual against himself and against those who try to break, deliberately or not, the existing laws.

But if I remember that I am also a human being who has made mistakes, who will make mistakes in the future, then I become again someone who looks at his fellow man: An individual who was placed in circumstances different from mine, who has made mistakes for which he was not always responsible. Then I want to rehabilitate this individual, to understand him, to help him and to find ways for him to become again an individual who will contribute to improve our society. I will try to enable him to become again this essential tool which will help us to prove that we were able to understand the often reprehensible actions of individuals, to accept them and to take steps according to our responsibilities.

It is true that it is a society's duty to have laws strict enough to protect the individual. But I think that we should never forget that when a society has come to the point of considering capital punishment as a solution to its problems, this society, in my opinion—and I say that with a deep conviction and without passing judgment on opinions contrary to mine—does not accept its true responsibilities which are to tackle the root of the problems, to find human solutions where the individual must be punished for his faults but not at the cost of his life.

Everyone will agree, I think, that to take someone's life is the law of the underworld. It is this absolutely irrational and absurd law which says that when a criminal, to use this word, has committed a fault, he must lose his life for the problem to be solved.

● (2140)

Mr. Speaker, I think that this debate is not and should not be political. It was a pleasure to meet some hon. members from other parties and to see the interest they have for the question and that they do not intend to have a political debate. When we talk about a man's life, when we say that our society must be better, this meets the general willingness and this is the majority if not all members.

Tonight, as during the recent days when we had the opportunity to discuss that question, all of us know that what we are going to do is very important and that it will steer the course of our society.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that we must all agree that if capital punishment is an extreme, our parole system is inadequate; several of my colleagues have agreed on that and I would like to say just a few words to support hon. mem-