

### *Capital Punishment*

eloquently sets out the concern which I and my colleagues have on this issue. It reads:

It is easy, to the cynical temptingly easy, at time of anxiety and uncertainty over jobs, over the dwindling value of the savings of a lifetime, over Canada's capacity to hold together, to whip up an emotional firestorm that exploits the dark side of the human psyche. This instinct to try to exorcise doubt and fear through the clenched fist, to seek shelter from the unknown in the embrace of a punitive authoritarianism, is as powerful as the urge that sends the lemmings stampeding to self-destruction. And we exploit it at our peril.

● (1730)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** Before recognizing the Parliamentary Secretary, I see the Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata) in the Chamber. I would just like to remind him not to involve the Chair in the debate, whether it is Private Members' Business or whatever.

I noticed that in his last sentence, as I was paying attention to the other side, he brought the Chair into the debate. I hope he will not involve himself in that process any more.

**Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to enter into the debate on the motion. My remarks will not be directed strictly to the substance of the motion but rather to the process, because I submit that in any debate about capital punishment the process by which the debate proceeds is vital to a full and fair resolution of the issue.

I respect the views of those who propose and those who oppose this motion and this measure. I also respect their right to speak and represent not only their views but the views of their constituents.

In this matter we must address the following questions. When should the debate take place? Who should participate in the debate? Where should the debate take place—in the House of Commons, in a parliamentary committee such as the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General, or a special committee? Also, should that committee travel?

I suggest that we should look at what the House should debate—a specific motion such as the one the Hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr. Domm) brought forward, or a motion which, if successful, would set forth a plan of action to draft a specific Bill? As Members of Parliament we have a responsibility to address process just as seriously as we address substance in this particular matter.

During the last election campaign the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) promised that a Progressive Conservative Government would allow a free vote on the question of capital punishment. That free vote will be held. However, the first question is when. On September 4, 1984, Canada was beset by economic and social problems. Our Government took action on many fronts. We concentrated first upon Canada's economic problems. Interest rates are down. A Canadian can go out and obtain a mortgage at the lowest rate in years as a result of our action. Unemployment is down. It is not where we want it, but it is down. Investor and consumer confidence are up, to name a

few economic indicators. There are still regional disparities, but our solutions are working and we are recovering from the recession.

On the social front, we took tough action on the problems of impaired driving, prostitution, and pornography. I suggest that that was the business the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General should have considered first. The Divorce Act has been revised to bring about realistic and thoughtful solutions to the problems of the eighties. Indian women have regained their rights. We have made significant progress on social issues.

Much has been made about the Government's promises. No Government can possibly be expected to complete action on all its promises and commitments on the first day of its mandate. We have not kept them all but our record is remarkable and responsible.

It would have been irresponsible to launch a full scale debate on the issue of capital punishment before we addressed the major economic and social problems of the day. Progress has been such that we are now in a position to proceed in an orderly fashion to consider the issue of capital punishment. I reiterate that a subject as important as capital punishment deserves a full and fair debate in a democratic society.

My colleague has brought forward his motion. He has other Bills on the Order Paper. No matter where one stands with him on the issue, he is fairly behind a full discussion of the matter. No matter where one stands, whether one is with him or against him, he has never denied the right of anybody to debate the subject.

The question remains: How do we do it? If the question is simply that the House resolves that capital punishment should be reinstated in Canada and the question fails to pass on a free vote, the matter is resolved. There is no question that the matter is resolved. However, if the question is resolved in the affirmative, what is the next step? I have always said that the debate must be framed so that if the House votes to reinstitute capital punishment we have an orderly process to determine how the specific question is to be answered.

The Government has been considering an appropriate process for some time. The issue for process is not taken lightly by those who favour it on both sides of the House and by those who oppose it on both sides of the House. In the very near future I am sure we will see a proposal for an orderly debate on this important issue.

Every Member of the House, no matter what is his or her position on the issue, owes it to society to debate the issue on as high a level as possible. I suggest that this debate will be the ultimate test of every Member of the House. There will be some Members who will be in the fortunate position where their personal views and the views of their constituents will coincide. There will be others in a position of conflict, and their views will be at odds with those of their constituents. That is a tough position. We all know that as elected representatives.