

*Capital Punishment*

hope of rehabilitation is not to have pity, but rather to respect human life.

The death penalty does not get to the causes, the roots of human misery, only its effects. It liberates people with good conscience from the obligation of pursuing further research and action for the improvement of the quality of life for all citizens.

Many of those who use violence had an unhappy childhood which prevented them from becoming responsible citizens.

The first thing is to try to understand, even though it is sometimes difficult.

As many other members, I received a letter in which Mrs. Lesley G. Parrot, of Summerhill Avenue, in Toronto, urged us to take her deep conviction into consideration and refuse reinstatement of capital punishment.

If it is painful for each of us to learn through the newspapers or television about the murder of a child, older person or a police officer, try to imagine what must be the reaction of a parent, a brother, a sister or a friend of the victim.

We would find it easy to understand at first if a desire for revenge lingered against the murderer.

That is why it is so touching and so convincing when you receive a message from the mother of a murdered 11-year-old girl rejecting categorically the reinstatement of capital punishment.

Like my colleague for Saint-Michel—Ahuntsic (Mrs. Killens), I would like to quote Mrs. Parrott:

I do not want to be part of a society that brings up future generations with the belief that killing can be legitimized under certain circumstances. Let the message be clear and unconditional: human life is sacred; killing is always wrong.

I wish to thank sincerely Mrs. Parrott for enlightening us with her testimony.

I was saying that when a murder is committed, the first thing to do is to try and understand, even if it is difficult at times.

Very often violence comes out of emotional wounds, psychiatric troubles or inadequate moral development.

● (1600)

Once we have understood, we can first try to prevent and then to protect, by ensuring that the person involved does not do it again, by acting on the causes at the root of the problem.

This is how, ultimately, we will perfect our prison system and avoid the use of a punishment as cruel as the death penalty which, in the end, does not prevent in any way the perpetration of violent crimes.

On the contrary, capital punishment favors spontaneous reaction and fuels the most primitive expression, the principle of an eye for an eye, to the exclusion of some reflection on the

causes of this violence, on preventative and social protection measures, and on reform of the prison system.

Remember these words from the famous Soviet dissident, Andrei Sakharov, a man in a good position to know about human suffering: "I view the death penalty as a barbaric and immoral institution which undermines the conscience and the legal foundations of a society. I reject the contention that the death penalty has a deterrent effect on potential murderers. In fact, I strongly contend that the opposite is true and that brutality only leads to more brutality".

On a different perspective, it is important to know that public opinion widely overestimates the phenomenon of violence within our society. According to a Gallup poll taken in 1982, some 75 per cent of the respondents believed that more than 50 per cent of crimes imply violent actions, whereas violent crime only represents 8 per cent of all known crimes.

Two thirds of the people believe that the number of murderers has increased since 1976, while it has in fact remained relatively stable.

The more uncommon an act is, as in the case of a murder, the greater its visibility when it happens.

It is therefore no surprise that for want of adequate information, people try to relieve their feeling of insecurity by calling for harsher penalties including the reinstatement of death penalty.

People are also very misinformed on the circumstances of murders and on their authors. Few people know that about three victims out of four are killed by someone they know; instead of that, people tend to think that it happens between people who are total strangers.

On the other hand, it should be noted that 61,8 per cent of murderers are serving a first jail term.

When those people who are found guilty are paroled, very few of them commit a second crime: there have been less than six such cases since 1963. In short, the murderer who kills just anyone for no special reason is an exception, contrary to popular belief.

As public opinion is so distorted, I find it difficult to understand how some Members of this House can, with a clear conscience, use surveys carried out in their own constituency to justify their position about capital punishment.

A Member of this House recently expressed his views in these terms in a Montreal area newspaper: "I believe that my first duty is to express the will of those who have elected me as their representative in Parliament and to give a voice to their opinions."

While I respect the views of this Member and of all those who have used this argument in the House, I find it would be much too easy to invoke public opinion to avoid taking a stand ourselves and analyzing carefully all the arguments in our own minds.