

Editorial

Stop judicial murder

“Thou shalt not kill” is one of the tenets of western civilization, even though there are occasions, such as just war and self-defense, when a higher, life-saving imperative supersedes the commandment. Judicial murder, the execution of criminals, is not one of these, and almost all civilized nations have recognized this by taking the death penalties off their books. Not so the United States, which is now reintroducing executions, and even curtailing the right of appeal of prisoners sentenced to die.

In the United States it has come to the point that establishing one’s innocence will not prevent an individual from being executed, if he or she has failed to meet court deadlines. Thus the distinctions between good and evil, truth and falsehood, are no longer a primary concern of our legal system. The possibility of executing an individual who may very possibly be innocent, is no longer a deterrent to carrying out the death penalty in the United States.

The Supreme Court certainly reflects the politics of the Reagan and Bush administrations, in riding roughshod over the most basic human rights. Should Bill Clinton win the Democratic nomination and be elected President of the United States, we can expect no improvement. Clinton has presided over two executions so far this year, and a young retarded black man in Clinton’s state of Arkansas, Barry Lee Fairchild, is now awaiting execution, because he confessed to a capital crime after being beaten.

In the United States, there are currently over 2,500 death row inmates, and the number of those actually executed is steadily growing. On the night of May 20, Roger Keith Coleman was killed in Virginia’s electric chair. He was the second prisoner in the United States to be executed that day, and the 19th to be executed so far this year. Already, the number of Americans executed in 1992 exceeds the total number of executions in 1991, when 14 were killed.

This is a clear reversal of the landmark 1972 Supreme Court decision which effectively declared that all existing capital punishment laws violated the Con-

stitution’s Eighth Amendment clause against “cruel and unusual punishment.” The decision was based on the court’s conclusion that death sentencing procedures were “arbitrary and capricious and pregnant with racial discrimination.”

The majority opinion stated: “It is the poor, the sick, the ignorant, the powerless, and the hated who are executed in America. [The law] leaves to the uncontrolled discretion of judges and juries the determination whether defendants committing these crimes should die or be imprisoned . . . these discretionary statutes are unconstitutional.”

After a 10-year moratorium in which the death sentence was not imposed, state statutes have been rewritten to attempt to address these objections, by allowing the prosecution and defense to argue whether or not the death penalty should be imposed. But capital punishment is not a technical question. The revival of the death penalty today is part of the general malthusian disregard for the sanctity of human life, which is a symptom of profound moral deterioration in the United States.

Still, there is hope. A resolution to outlaw executions is now being circulated within the Democratic Party, by supporters of Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, among others. It has been signed by a number of prominent Democrats from all currents in the party. The European Parliament has also passed a resolution condemning this reversion to barbarism, and calling upon all the nations of the world to abolish capital punishment.

Every literate person should know that the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime. In fact, execution by the state has the effect of legitimizing violence in the society, and therefore increases crime. What the death penalty brings forward, is the sense of sanctioned violence and revenge. This is not the emotion of justice.

When the state executes an individual, even when there is no question of possible innocence, every one of us is diminished. We are not only killing possibly redeemable souls, but we are destroying ourselves, by denying the sanctity of human life.