

things cool down so that people could negotiate some kind of resolution of the conflict.

● (1130)

Rather than returning to the blood feud, to the killing, I believe we should be looking for ways to resolve these conflicts, to rehabilitate even killers—it has been done—and to mend and heal the conflicts which erupt in killing in our society rather than trying to hide them by destroying one life at a time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions or comments? Debate.

Mr. Geoff Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, I speak today against the amendment and in favour of the principle of reinstatement of capital punishment. Many of my constituents have written requesting information both pro and con concerning this topic. It is interesting to note that there is a considerable amount of abolitionist material put out by a number of well-organized and well-funded groups. On the other hand, pro capital punishment material is difficult to find. The reason for that, I believe, is that, as in many other issues, there is a silent majority out there which is unorganized. As my constituent, Mrs. Ruth Lee Knight points out:

Many who oppose the return of the death penalty are the same people who have lobbied so successfully over the years for the rights of offenders and they are well organized in their efforts.

Many operate on Government funds and our concern is that, because of their resources, the Canadian public will be presented with only one side of the issue as they have in the past.

In considering this matter I propose to deal with a number of the arguments against capital punishment in order to better explain my position. We are first told it is cheaper to keep murderers in prison than to execute them. Some have suggested that execution would save costs of prolonged incarceration while others say the threat of the death penalty would lead to endless appeals and legal manoeuvres which could cost even more. I would prefer to reject both approaches. I believe there is a matter of principle here about the value of human life and the validity and integrity of our justice system. I believe the question is one which is beyond monetary considerations.

The second argument put forward is that capital punishment is barbaric. Some abolitionist material tells very graphically of lingering death at the end of a rope, the faulty electric chair and of agony in the gas chamber. But no matter the method, it is clearly the death itself which opponents of capital punishment consider barbaric.

One does not have to like the death penalty in order to support it, anymore than one has to like radiation or radical surgery or chemotherapy in order to treat cancer. We are faced with letting the cancer spread or trying to cure it using the methods available today, methods which one day may be viewed as barbaric. In the context of capital punishment, the disease, of course, is injustice. We may not like the death penalty, but it must be available to punish the most heinous

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crimes of murder, cases in which any other form of punishment would be inadequate and, therefore, unjust.

In this context I cannot help but think of the 11 individuals who have killed six or more times over the past 20 years in this country, those who would assassinate their political enemies on our soil or those who would place bombs in airplanes, thus intentionally taking hundreds of lives. If we create a society in which injustice is not tolerated, then incidents of murder, surely the most flagrant injustice of all, will diminish.

A third point put forward by those opposing the death penalty is that no other civilized country has it. Obviously, the laws of each country will differ according to conditions and traditions, but the fact is there are only 28 countries in the world which do not have capital punishment at all. These countries have less than 10 per cent of world population. The death penalty in fact is available in Ireland, Belgium, China, Japan, the United States and in 123 other countries for ordinary crimes and in another 18 countries, including Canada, under conditions of military law.

A fourth argument is that capital punishment cheapens the value of human life. Surely, for example, if the penalty for rape were lowered, it would signal a lessened regard for the victim's suffering and humiliation. It would cheapen their horrible experience and expose them to an increased danger of recurrence.

What does lowering the penalty for murder do? It displays a lessened regard for life, the victim's life. It is by exacting the highest penalty for the wanton and inexcusable taking of human life that the state reaffirms the highest value of life. I say that those who support the death penalty are no less human, no less compassionate, no less concerned and no less Christian than those who oppose it.

Another argument is that the death penalty somehow discriminates against the poor and disadvantaged. With the greatest respect, I do not believe this is so at all. We have in Canada a system of justice wherein all Canadians are entitled to counsel and to the full protection of the law. It is a system which is second to none.

A number of opponents of capital punishment put forward the Biblical admonition, "Thou shalt not kill". Others translate that as "Thou shalt not murder". In this debate it seems, and I say this with the utmost respect, that the problem with a number of the Biblical points of view is that the passages taken from scripture are often pulled out of context. I have received many letters and representations from constituents and others quoting scripture, some offered in support of abolition and just as many offered in support of reinstatement. Many of the great philosophers including Kant, Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, Montesque and Mill, agreed that natural law properly authorized a sovereign to take life in order to vindicate justice. Indeed, the Constitution of the United States, which is widely admired as a model, condemns cruel and inhuman punishment, but does not condemn capital punishment.