

The Hon. Member asked if I have always done what a majority of my constituents want. No, I have not always done that but I am fortunate in this instance. I am on the side of the majority.

I will be looking forward to seeing how members of the New Democratic Party vote on this. I cannot understand why my good friend and colleague from Winnipeg Centre is voting the way he is. I am sure the majority of his constituents are in favour of the return of capital punishment. If they are not, they are living in a pocket in the middle of no-man's land. I know that the majority of Winnipeggers support capital punishment. It will be interesting to see how the Hon. Member votes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Debate.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, I will vote as I will always vote on any resolution before the House to restore capital punishment. I will vote against such a resolution or motion.

I will not be guided by polls. I will attempt to follow logic and principle. If you follow polls you are in great danger. A Decima poll published in *Maclean's* today indicates that the percentage of Canadians in favour of capital punishment has dropped from 72 per cent to 61 per cent, with only 38 per cent absolutely convinced of its necessity. There is a lesson there. Polls should not be the final determining factor in the actions we take in this House. Parliamentarians have an obligation to consider an issue of this sort with great care.

● (1730)

There are people paying a great deal of attention to what we say. That is an argument against any notion the Government may have in this free vote to impose closure on this House in order to stop debate and thus deny the Canadian people the opportunity to consider this question with great care.

The essential question in this debate is why Canada should be poised, in the view of many in this House, to be the first civilized western nation to restore capital punishment having once abolished it. Is it because Canada is overwhelmed with the violence which characterizes the televised portrayal of America? Is it because ours like U.S. cities are under siege by criminals? Is it because Canada is so overwhelmed with poverty that there is no alternative to crime, for which this measure is seen as a solution to the problem in the U.S.? Is it because we have found, after years without capital punishment, that the deterrent effect has been lost and there is a great upsurge in the homicide rate? Is it because we have a system of justice so perfect that there can never be an error? Or is it because we have absolute equality with no possibility of discrimination which would deny to the Indian, the black, the Ukrainian and the Francophone equal treatment under the law? Or is it because we have a Government under siege and looking for an easy way to enhance its popularity and is intent on doing so by resorting to the views of its most primitive

Capital Punishment

Members who seek simplistic answers to the fundamental and complex questions facing this land?

I have listened with attention to the declarations of those who advocate the restoration of capital punishment, and I am not convinced. It seems to me we are listening to many people with simple answers to everything. It also seems to me that if we restore the most absolute and irrevocable of punishments, we had better be prepared to advance the most absolute and irrefutable arguments in support of it. We may make those arguments on rational and intellectual grounds. We may seek to demonstrate that the existence of the threat of capital punishment deters the murderer. We may seek to demonstrate that it deters the husband who, in a fit of anger, kills his wife. Or the person playing cards with friends or relatives who, in a fit of passionate anger, decides to attack someone and as a consequence kills him or her. Or that it deters the person who, in the process of robbing a corner store, becomes momentarily frightened and shoots someone. All of those people, I am sure, are standing or sitting there carefully considering the consequences of such an act.

Do we see in statistics some justification for capital punishment where it exists as opposed to where it does not? If one examines those countries without capital punishment we see no evidence that its absence has led to an increase in homicide. We do not see that murder is deterred in the U.S. as compared to Canada. We have not seen in the last 10 years a vast increase in the rate of homicide in Canada.

The fact that in Illinois they kill people who kill people has not made Illinois a safer place with a lower homicide rate than Michigan where they do not kill people who kill people. If you look at the 13 states with capital punishment you will find they have a higher rate of homicide than in the 37 states which do not kill those who kill. Furthermore, we have the interesting statistics from Florida and Georgia which show that immediately after the restoration of capital punishment the rate of homicide increased. We have to agree with the president of a police association who said that to try to win the argument for capital punishment on the basis of its deterrent effect is futile. It is indeed.

It seems to me that if we are going to resort to capital punishment we must be convinced that our system of justice is infallible. It can never be in error. I would simply ask the ordinary citizen out there, when he or she is stopped for a traffic offence, whether they would want their lives to depend on the infallibility and fairness of the system which confronts them on the street when they receive that ticket. The evidence is abundant that unless we have infallible people we will not have an infallible system of justice. That system of justice is least infallible when it affects the poor, the racial minority, or a man as opposed to a woman. One has to assume infallibility in a system which mirrors our society and all of its frailties. We have to assume a system each stage of which will ensure that justice is done. Yet we know justice is not always done. We know that in the last century at least 25 innocent people were executed in the U.S. for murder. There is a legion of