

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I maintain that killing a person only for the sake of punishment is nothing more or less than vengeance. I believe the state should have the political will to identify the causes of our society's malaises and evils, and seek preventive, non-violent solutions to new problems.

Lastly I should like to quote from a letter I received from Denise and Pierre Thériault of Pélouin Street in my riding and with which I agree. Here is what it says:

I am firmly opposed to capital punishment for the following reasons:

- (1) Capital punishment has no deterrent value, therefore it does not protect society.
- (2) It hides the real causes of criminality.
- (3) It is inequitable, unfair and the only irreversible punishment.
- (4) Its application reinforces disdain for life . . . which I consider sacred.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, such are the reasons which prompt me to vote against the death penalty, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the House to vote against the restoration of capital punishment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments.

Questions and comments are over. Debate. The Hon. Member for Winnipeg—St. James (Mr. Minaker).

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. George Minaker (Winnipeg—St. James): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this historic debate. It is probably the most serious and historic debate in which I have had the opportunity to take part in my 20 years in politics in different levels of government. I should like to say from the start that I am speaking against the amendment to the amendment and in support of the return of capital punishment.

My decision was not an easy one. I gave it much thought and carefully considered all aspects of my decision on this serious subject. As I suggested, it was not taken lightly.

In spite of the differences we may have as Members of the House on this subject, I respect the position of Members who have taken the opposite point of view in the debate. I am aware of the difficulty they may have had in reaching this decision. It was even more difficult for them because of the fact that the majority of Canadian citizens would like the return of capital punishment to our justice system. I recognize the difficulties faced by some of my caucus colleagues at this time.

In this debate we have heard statistics on both sides of the issue, dealing with crime rates, homicide rates, and many others. I know that to many they are just numbers; that is what they are—numbers. However, figures cannot begin to tell us about the pain, the horror, or the suffering which even one murder represents when it takes place.

Capital Punishment

I should like to cite the case of two-time murderer, Eli Guay, who was convicted in 1956 for murdering a Sudbury area man. He beat him to death during a robbery, and he was committed to prison for it. He was paroled four years later. In 1981, in front of witnesses, he threw his common-law wife out of a picture window, retrieved a knife and proceeded to slice open her throat. That is the reality of first degree murder—senseless brutality. In 1981 Guay's homicide was just one of 648 such offences.

We can put these criminals in prison, hopefully to rehabilitate them. However, what happens when they are paroled? I believe there are some 11 instances where first-time murderers have been paroled and have gone out to commit murder again.

It is wrong to imply that our system works just fine the way it is. I believe a return to capital punishment is a step in the right direction.

I want to be clear. I wish to state that my support for the death penalty is in its application to certain specific crimes of first degree, planned, and premeditated murder. These cases would include serial killers such as Clifford Olson, contract killers who gain personally from the crimes they commit, hostage killers such as terrorists, kidnap killers, and killers of police officers and prison guards.

There could be instances where the jury may want to find the person innocent. An example might be where a spouse has suffered mental cruelty through the years and suddenly, through pressures and so on, may decide to go out and get a weapon to eliminate or kill the spouse who caused the mental cruelty. There must be some leeway for the jury to decide whether or not the person is innocent. If it were just premeditated murder, the jury would have to find the person guilty. This is why I am specific in the particular areas where I believe first degree murder would justify the deterrent of capital punishment.

In the main motion we are proposing putting together a committee of the House of Commons to go across Canada to get the feelings of the majority of people and to find out their reaction on when they would like to see the return of capital punishment or what form of capital punishment. I believe this is the correct approach on a major decision which the Government and the House of Commons must make.

In the debate in which we are involved at this time, I do not plan on getting into the statistics, the moral insults, the religious arguments, or the "what ifs" which supply the basis of the abolitionist argument. My support for capital punishment is grounded in principles which stand on their own, regardless of statistical evidence one way or another.

First and foremost, my support for capital punishment is grounded in a belief in my democratic responsibility to respond to the will of the people. I stated my position on the issue when I ran during the election campaign, and my position remains consistent. The voters in my riding of Winnipeg—St. James and indeed across Canada have consistently supported