

### *Capital Punishment*

responded yes. Third: I am generally in favour of the death penalty except in a few cases where it may not be appropriate. Some 40.1 per cent responded yes. Fourth: I am strongly in favour of the death penalty as an appropriate measure. Some 28.9 per cent responded yes.

This whole process is beginning to cause Canadians to think more profoundly about the issue and indeed to use the light rather than generate the heat. However, there are certain situations when society demands that the state take the most extreme action. I quote Simma Holt, a former Member of this House, who said:

Five of us—myself, two ex-Mounties, and two lawyers—fought to save a very bright but notorious western safecracker/bank robber charged with a Seattle holdup-murder we knew he did not commit. As a result, he was acquitted. Subsequently, he became my "adviser" on the justice system from his perspective. When capital punishment was taken from the books he told me: "We never carried bullets in our guns in our holdups because we knew if someone got killed we would hang . . . I tell you, Simma, capital punishment kept a lot of us from firing real bullets.

I predict loaded guns will appear in robberies now."

In conclusion, I believe imposition of the death penalty can best serve justice in the most extreme cases. I believe the case of greatest degree is when the entire nation is threatened. That would be treason committed in time of war. Second is first degree murder. Third is murder while committing an indictable offence.

Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Finestone:** Mr. Speaker, I think everyone in this House respects the right of each individual to his or her own opinion. Certainly I have great respect for my hon. colleague. However, he made a statement which raises a question in my mind.

I listened very carefully to the Prime Minister's (Mr. Mulroney) speech a little while ago. He said that the rate of first degree murder had declined by 25 per cent over the last 25 years. In particular, 1986 was a 15-year low. I wonder if the Hon. Member could reconcile that with his statement that the rate of first degree murder has gone up.

**Mr. Edwards:** Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for my hon. friend from Mount Royal. I also have great respect for the Prime Minister's research. My statistics are taken from a study compiled by five criminologists at the Centre for Criminology, Research Centre of Sociology, at the University of Alberta, who to a man, and they are all men, opposed capital punishment.

I listened, as did my friend, to the Prime Minister's remarks. The statistics I have indicate there has been a rather steady increase since 1976 in the incidence of first degree murder in Canada. From 1984 to 1985 there was a levelling off, not a decline, a levelling off. I stand by my statistics, which as I say were derived by these noted criminologists from StatsCan figures.

**Mr. Crosby:** Mr. Speaker, in his excellent and even-handed presentation my colleague from Edmonton referred to polls and the opinions of Canadians taken over a period of time, particularly those expressed by his constituents. The point I want to make to Members of the House, indeed to all Canadians, is that this is as much an exercise in democracy as it is an exercise in decision-making on a given subject. We in Canada believe that the will of the majority governs, and it is very difficult to deny that will when it is so clearly expressed by so many people who have a right to express a view on a subject like capital punishment. This is not a question dealing with monetary policy which requires expert knowledge and experience. It is a subject on which any Canadian can rightly express his or her view. I compliment the Hon. Member for recognizing the importance of the view of his constituents and the general public on this subject.

In expressing that view in the House of Commons does he not recognize, as I have said, that this is an exercise in democracy as much as an exercise in decision-making? What does he think about those in the House of Commons who would deny the Canadian people an opportunity to express their views to a parliamentary committee? They would deny the House of Commons the opportunity to send a parliamentary committee across this country to elicit the views of Canadians so that we can develop a consensus, not the elite view of sociologists, or a view that denies the right of other Canadians to express their views.

We have a motion before us which would construct a parliamentary committee to give Canadians the opportunity to express their views. We are not making a decision here and now on the issue of capital punishment. We are not voting to execute anyone. We are simply voting to decide on a process. I would like the Hon. Member to comment on the process involved here.

**Mr. Edwards:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to clarify my views on that. In the first instance, I hope I made it sufficiently clear to the House and my hon. friend that there are certain, very few but certain, very fundamental issues on which I think we would all, certainly I would, respect the right, indeed the duty, of individual Members to go against what they perceive to be the opinion of their constituents. On this issue I do not believe I have that difficulty, although I have many, many constituents who feel at odds with me on this issue and whom I love dearly and whose judgment I respect. I have great empathy for my colleagues in this House who will be voting with their conscience when they know it goes against the strong majority view in their constituency.

To get to the process, my friend raises a very significant point. The resolution put before this House provides for a joint committee of the two Houses to travel the country to ascertain the view of Canadians on this fundamental issue. I think it is put in such a way that we would learn rather than be inflamed and we would be enlightened rather than antagonized one against the other. I think that is a healthy part of the process. I