

To Hang Or Not

Last week in Montreal the Canadian Police Association held a three day meeting at which they called for the resignations of Solicitor-General Warren Allmand and Justice Minister Otto Lang. The Police Association called for the resignations because both Allmand and Lang have in the past commuted death sentences for prisoners convicted of killing prison guards and police officers.

Presently under Canadian Law only persons convicted of the murder of either police officers or prison guards can be sentenced to death, but the association would like to see reinstatement of the death penalty for all violent crimes in which a death results. This is an obvious step back into the middle ages and should be condemned in no uncertain terms by the taxpayers of this country.

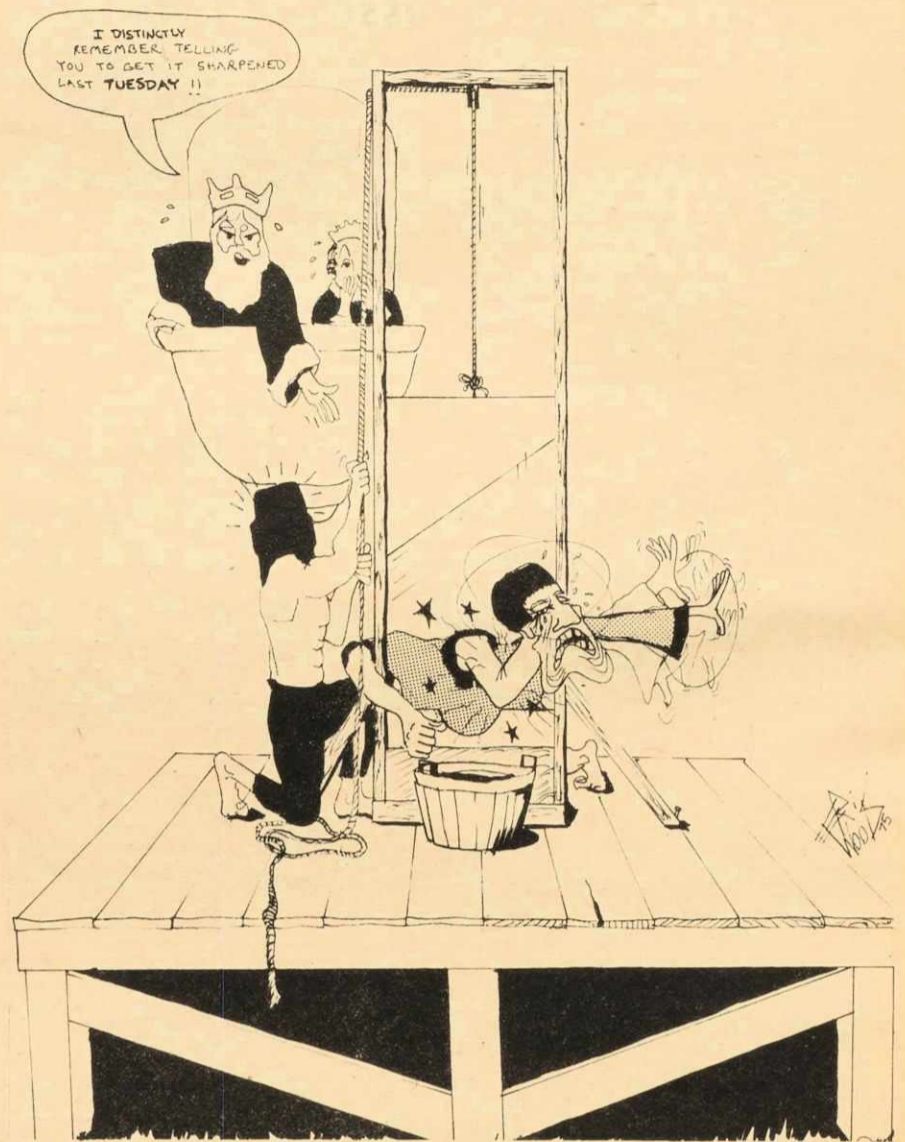
Allmand and Lang are responsible to the voters of this country at regular election periods. They do not determine the policy or laws on death sentences all on their own, but are responsible for implementing legislation passed by the federal parliament. They do, however, contribute in Cabinet to the government's policy on the death penalty which, under the present Liberal regime, has been strongly against the use of the death sentence.

It has been proven in survey after survey that the death penalty is not, and never has been, a deterrent to violent crime. It serves no purpose other than satisfying the public's or in this case the Police Association's, desire for vengeance. Vengeance to our way of thinking is hardly a rational reason for any action, much less an action which results in the death of another human being.

The Old Testament Law of "an eye for an eye" has not been commonly used in civilized countries for many centuries. There were of course exceptions to this and it was only in this century that we got rid of the final hangover of that law - the death penalty for murder. Reinstatement of capital punishment should be seen for what it is - a return to old ways which were wrong in the past and certainly can't be seen as right now. In fact, the claim can be made, and we are happy to make it, that the death penalty should not be permitted even in the limited areas it is now allowed; i.e. for the murder of police officers and prison guards.

Lang and Allmand should be commended for the stand they have taken on capital punishment. It is to their credit and to the credit of the Trudeau Government that the death penalty has not been used in Canada in the past few years. Rene Vaillancourt is scheduled to be hanged in Ontario on October 31 and we can only hope that between now and then the government will act as it has in the past and commute his sentence.

There are numerous philisophical arguments we could offer supporting the abolishment of all death penalties but they are too long and complicated to go into here. We could offer further



arguments against it based on past cases where convicted "murderers" have been sentenced to death only to have someone else later confess to the crime which the original person was scheduled to die for. Juries and judges can make mistakes - they are after all only human and the human error aspect of criminal justice must be taken into account in any discussion of capital punishment.

The Police Association's actions in calling for the resignations of Lang and Allmand and the extension of capital punishment must not go uncriticized. The Association claims can only gain any kind of twisted validity with public support and this support can and must be denied.

Canada's Oldest College Newspaper

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Letters

To the Gazette,

It has come to my attention that some misunderstandings exist regarding the article in last week's Gazette on the Council meeting held September 14. I was not present at that Council meeting but according to the Gazette story Lynn Fitzgerald, Arts Rep, thanked Bruce Russell and other members of the executive for their work on Student Aid over the summer. The article goes on to point out that Peter O. Clarke, Jim MacLean and I had been omitted from the list of those to thank. Unfortunately there seems to be some insinuation that it is a

normal procedure for Council to "forget" to thank persons other than members of its own august body.

First of all Lynn Fitzgerald is in no way to blame, if blame is to be laid anywhere, for omitting our names or the names of the many others who worked on Student Aid from her vote of thanks. Mr. Russell apparently apologized to the Gazette staff immediately after the meeting for not pointing out to Council those others who assisted in the Union's Student Aid pressure

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