

Capital punishment not the answer, News reader says

Dear Editor:

Re: your column "Close To The Edge" (April 16). I would like to offer the following points about capital punishment.

I feel the state-endorsed use of the death penalty is a step backwards from

civilization. Countries like the USSR, Iran, South Africa, Libya, the People's Republic of China, etc., all represent states where civil rights and basic freedoms are virtually unknown from our Western perspective. The United States,

which is an exception to this general rule, has some states which have reinstated the death penalty. Interestingly enough, substantial groups of citizens in these states are gradually mobilizing the public will against the barbaric system (as happened in Canada during the 50s and early 60s).

You mentioned that some innocent people have been executed, but leave the impression that this is "the exception." Two Canadian court cases, involving Louis Riel and Wilbert Coffin, have consistently been addressed by responsible legal experts to show that our own courts are not above acting according to political expediency, rather than with respect to justice.

The UN and other world-wide groups like Amnesty International have

shown that capital punishment is not a deterrent. On the contrary, in some societies plagued by violence, the death penalty has been a factor in fuelling further violence. The countries of Iran and South Africa come to mind as examples.

Christian Churches in the main (Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Presbyterian, three of four Lutheran Synods, and others) have traditionally opposed capital punishment as official bodies for solid reasons. My own Anglican Synod of Bishops states their opposition on these grounds:

(1) That the death penalty represents sanctioned murder by the State,
 (2) That this official destruction of a life runs counter to the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ, who preached the

Gospel of love and reconciliation, and
 (3) That capital punishment is a direct violation of the Doctrine of Redemption, which addresses the potential of all human beings to be redeemed by God's grace.

You mentioned the Old Covenant injunction of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Reform and Conservative Jewish communities claim the Moral Covenant, which simply states "Thou shalt not kill" supercedes this injunction.

Among moderate Moslems, there is a distinct stand against the death penalty based on Allah's injunction "to have mercy" in the Koran. Among most religious bodies there is a strong tendency to oppose the use of violence against any individual, except for reasons of treason or conspiracy in times of war. Even this "Doctrine of the Just War," prominent among religious communities, is not unambiguously endorsed.

Other groups of citizens, ranging from Civil Libertarians to Civil Rights Advocates, oppose capital punishment on ethical and philosophical grounds. Brian Mulroney, John Turner, and Ed Broadbent

are justified in not allowing a free vote on the issue until Members of Parliament have examined the full implications of a return to the noose.

Justice cannot be carried out by Gallup Polls based on emotion; rather, it must be dispensed with a clarity of mind that examines all issues.

Like others I find Clifford Olsen and his heinous crimes against innocent children to be reprehensible and horrifying. The fact that the RCMP paid Olsen's family for his collaboration was wholly unwarranted and dangerous.

In cases like Olsen, the families of the murdered children are victims in the judicial process as well. I suggest that the issue here, as with other murderers, is not the need for capital punishment, but the requirement that the safety of the public and the support for victims and their families, of course, should take precedence over the rehabilitation of the criminal.

Sad to say, Conrad, a sick person like Olsen would likely have committed his brutal crimes whether capital punishment was in place or not. As well, his case suggests the

moral quandary as to whether he was responsible for his crimes. Psychiatrists and psychologists remain divided over this issue... a point that complicates the matter for the judicial system and for us.

In closing, I would like to respond to the real cause underlying a demand for the return of capital punishment: fear. Given the inequities in the present judicial system and the occasions when violent people return to threaten society, it's obvious that the whole process needs to be more consistent and more balanced.

A return to the death penalty would confuse rather than help the process of reformation within our justice system. The bottom line remains: we cannot remain a progressive society that cherishes the sanctity of human life if we step backwards into the Dark Ages to revive the barbaric practice of the death penalty. **Bill Le Grand Schreiber**

P.S. Please don't call Abolitionists "bleeding heart liberals." Among Bishops, leaders of other religious and civil rights groups, are numerous conservatives!

Police . . .

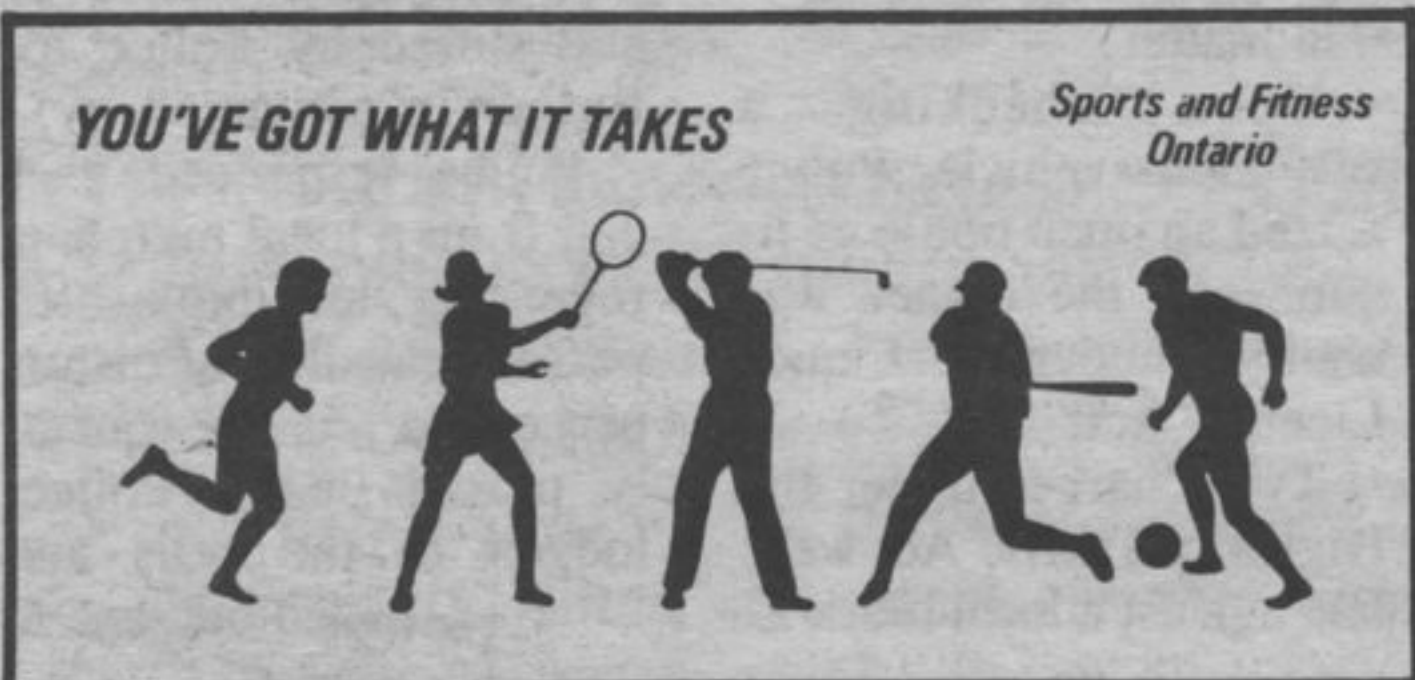
continued from page 5 charged under the Liquor Licence Act.

A complaint of a youth riding an off road vehicle in the Township was investigated and a warning issued that in future charges may be laid.

Police are investigating a complaint from a local merchant of nuisance phone calls.

The office of **Dr. J.E.M. St. Rose**

at the Schreiber Medical Centre **will be closed** April 24th to May 3rd



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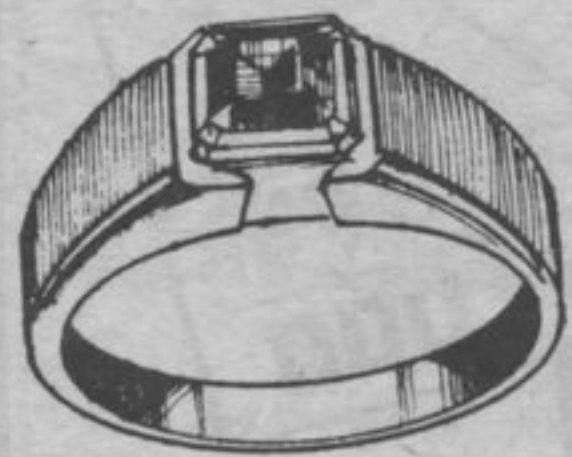
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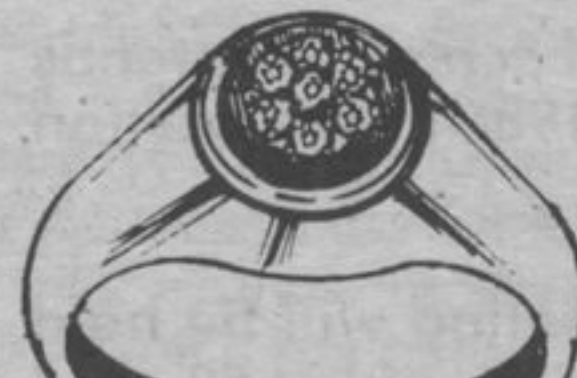
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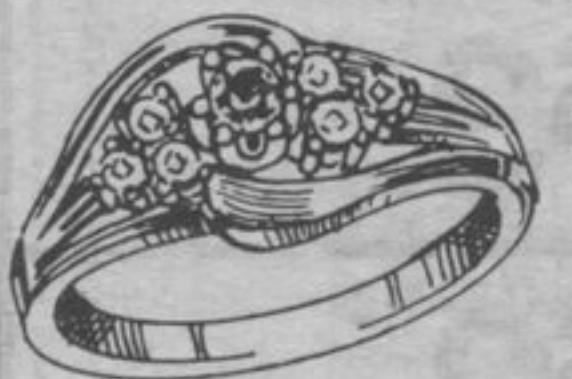
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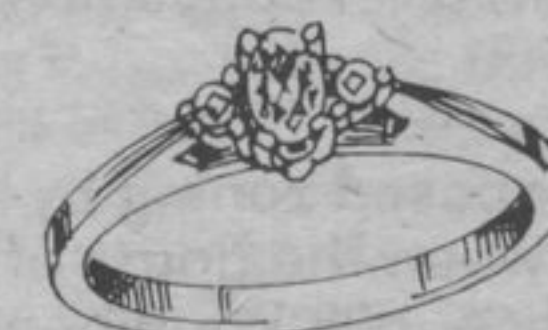
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