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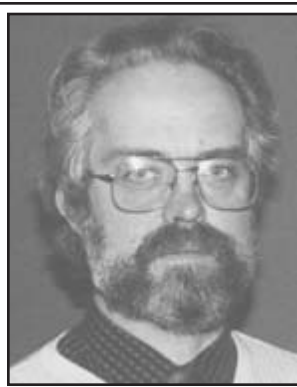
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## Bill's Bulletin Board

By Bill Rea

I took a day off last week.

I mentioned this to an acquaintance in the community. She replied with a look of disbelief, and asked, "Did hell freeze over?"

I read something later in the week that made me ask the same basic question.

The Toronto Sun editorially criticized Prime Minister Stephen Harper Saturday for his government's failure to try and get the death sentence of a Canadian man overturned. The editorial also contained a statement that almost made my jaw drop, "Canada is a country that opposes the death penalty. Period."

I repeat, this was the Toronto Sun, a newspaper that used to be an apologist for Reformers like Harper, as well as those who want to see executions restored in Canada.

I'm not sure if the statement in the editorial, which incidentally was attributed to Licia Corbella, is accurate. I know there are many people like me who vehemently oppose capital punishment, but there are many others who favour it. It's hard to know who's in the majority these days,

although we don't seem to hear calls for executions in this country the way we used to. But to read such an assertion in the Sun surprised me, and it pleased me too.

For what it's worth, I'm with the Sun on this one. It's not because I'm opposed to capital punishment or I'm opposed to Stephen Harper being prime minister. I'm opposed to this country's government not doing its job, and that job includes looking out for the best interests of Canadians abroad, even Canadians who transgress the laws of other countries.

I don't have a whole lot of sympathy for a guy like Robert Allen Smith. According to what I have read, he was picked up by two young men in Montana in 1982 while hitchhiking. He graciously repaid these fellows by depositing bullets in the backs of their heads. He also, according to Corbella's editorial, told the judge at his trial that he wanted to experience what it was like to kill someone.

If the information contained in that editorial is true (and I have no reason to believe otherwise), then Smith is scum. But he is

Canadian scum, and the mandate of the government of Canada is to look out for the well-being of all Canadians, even the bottom-dwellers.

There is an argument that a person in another country is subject to the laws of that land and they have to abide by them. If he or she fails to, then they have to answer to the authorities in that country. I go along with that. We as Canadians want people visiting here to abide by our laws and customs, so Canadians have to be expected to set the appropriate example when they're abroad. But I am not suggesting that Smith be allowed to walk away clean. Assuming he's guilty of the crimes and he actually killed these two men (the possibility he did not is one of the basic reasons for my opposition to capital punishment), then I want him locked up for life, or at least until he's a very old man, and that's what I expect my government to lobby for.

But Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day stated the government will not try to bring back murderers who have been tried in a democratic country that supports the rule of law. Why not, Stockwell?

Exactly who determines what a democratic country is? Who defines the term "rule of law" and whether or not it's being practiced?

How many countries maintain they follow the rule of law when in fact they do nothing of the sort? For that matter, which

countries do not maintain they follow the rule of law?

What's a democracy? There are examples of countries that have maintained they were democracies, when in fact they were not.

The former state of East Germany actually had an official name, condensed to the acronym D.D.R. Translated into English, D.D.R. meant German Democratic Republic. How did the Green Party do the last time they held an election in East Germany?

There are countries in the world where people can be put to death or face harsh penalties for offences we in Canada would consider minor. In some cases, these aren't even offences in Canada. As I stated a above, a person in a foreign country has an obligation to respect his or her hosts, but there is also such a thing as realistic thought, and it is realistic to assume that our government is going to be there for Smith, even if it's only to offer moral support.

How do we know Smith received a fair trial? How do we know he was giving the benefit of competent legal counsel? For that matter, how do we know for sure that he really did kill those two people?

Is it possible that an innocent man was convicted in Montana? True, from what I've read, the evidence seems to have been pretty overwhelming. But was that not also the case some 48 years ago, when many people believed the evidence against Stephen Truscott was pretty overwhelming

too? He has since been acquitted. But there have been many cases over the years in Canada in which innocent people have been convicted. Anybody want to try and convince me the same things don't happen in the States?

We've also been hearing suggestions that the real reason the Harper government is not trying to help Smith is they are really biding their time until they can form a majority after the next election, and then bring back the capital punishment issue. That seems a little over the top to me. If Harper's agenda includes provisions for the death penalty, then why hasn't he come out and said it. It doesn't threaten his minority government unless he tries to put forth legislation which he figures represents a matter of confidence in the House of Commons, and there's been no indication that's in the works.

It would be interesting to see what would happen if he were to try and raise an emotional issue like capital punishment in a future election. As John Tory recently learned the hard way, one issue can take over a campaign very quickly indeed.

The issue is not whether killers should be put to death. That will be determined in due course in the proper forum. The issue is the obligation our government has to Canadians, and in the case of Smith, I think our government is falling short.

It's refreshing to see the Toronto Sun agrees with me.

## Editorial

# Tax cuts are wonderful, but the feds need to be careful

It was great news that federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty offered us last week.

Taxes are going to be cut by some \$60 billion over the next five years, although that's probably predicated on the Conservatives being in power for the next five years, and assumes the economy doesn't tank in the interim, thus obliging the government to amend its plans.

Hands up all of you out there who like paying taxes. None of us do, but since they are a necessary evil in life, we want them to be as low as possible.

Canadians have long been in the habit of complaining they are overtaxed. Yes, cutting taxes the way

the feds are planning to is guaranteed to make a lot of people happy.

We expect they will really be pleased at income tax time early next year. Since the income tax cuts are retroactive to the start of 2007, the refunds that most people should be expecting promise to be pretty impressive.

The cut in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from six to five per cent should put smiles on a lot of faces too when it kicks in at the start of 2008. The reality is chopping one per cent off the price of anything is not going to make a major difference in the great scheme of things, but it is true that every little bit helps, just as it's accurate to say that a tax

cut is a tax cut.

But in the midst of all this glee, Canadians are going to have to bear in mind certain other realities. We have to remember why governments collect taxes.

They collect them to fund the programs on which we depend. Our government uses taxes to finance a military which is currently in operations, especially in Afghanistan. Our government uses taxes to help provinces finance some of their programs. Our government uses taxes to help people in need. Our government needs tax dollars to do what we expect of it.

That leads to a basic question. Is the government cutting taxes too much? Are programs going to be

scrapped that many Canadians want, and some actually depend on?

We received a hard lesson on the dangers of excessive tax cutting in Ontario a couple of years ago. Mike Harris was big hero when he cut our tax burdens. He sent out cheques of \$200 to many of us, telling us they were rebates for having been taxed too much. Those cheques made a lot of us very happy.

But it wasn't until later that we learned those tax cuts represented some other unpleasant realities. The question still looms that program cuts in the wrong places might have contributed to the Walkerton tragedy. The government supplemented the reduced

tax revenue by selling off certain assets, like Highway 407. There are other examples.

"But that could never happen again," many people might be inclined to exclaim. "The Harris crowd is out of office."

Flaherty was part of the Harris crowd.

There is a basic rule that children are supposed to be taught by their parents: Nothing in life is free, and nothing good ever comes without a cost.

When we get services from our government, we're expected to pay.

And when we get tax cuts from our government, we pay too. It's just that sometimes that tab is hidden.