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On capital punishment question . . .

Abbott predicts tough time in the House

By TINA IVANY

Mississauga MP Tony Abbott told a concerned audience at the Burnhamthorpe Community Centre last week that he and his colleagues in the House "will have an extremely difficult decision to make" in the near future.

That decision will be whether or not to vote in favor of retention of capital punishment. A bill on the subject is expected to be introduced in the House within two weeks.

Abbott reiterated his leanings toward abolition, saying that it has not been proven that capital punishment acts as a deterrent to violent crime.

"However," he said, "the replies to a question on the topic in a newsletter to my constituents last year indicated that the majority of those who answered

were in favor of retaining capital punishment."

Abbott emphasized that he will most seriously consider the views of his constituents when making his decision.

He stressed the importance of the legislation, stating that although the commutations on death sentences that the Cabinet has exercised since 1967 are not outside of the law, they nonetheless have brought the law into disrespect.

In Canada, those convicted of killing policemen or prison guards are liable to the death sentence. In every case of conviction since 1967 however, that sentence has been commuted by the Federal Cabinet.

Asked by Murray Thompson, one of the 35 constituents who turned out to Abbott's Town Hall meeting, if a national referendum on the subject would

be possible, Abbott replied, "It would be unusual to have a plebiscite. Generally, your MPs should use their judgment on your behalf."

Abbott indicated that on an issue of fundamental importance, he would be prepared to buck the line.

"But it would have to be on an issue about which I felt most strongly," he said, "I would first make my views on the issue forcefully felt."

It is believed, however, that the vote on capital punishment will be a free one.

Abbott came under fire from many members of the audience for the Federal Government's wage and price guidelines, instituted on Oct. 14.

Some expressed concern about the "socialist" slant that they read into the Prime Minister's recent speeches on the state of the economy.



TONY ABBOTT