

During the early hours of February 12, 1962, I joined other students in a vigil outside the Don Jail to protest the back-to-back executions of Ronald Turpin and Arthur Lucas. We were strenuously opposed to the death penalty and troubled by the ugly clouds hovering over both prosecutions. We had no idea at the time that Turpin and Lucas would be the last two men to be executed in Canada – or that Lucas had almost been decapitated during the bungled execution. (For some reason the authorities never told us that!)

Turpin was a small time hood who was convicted of first-degree murder of Toronto police officer Frederick Nash during a traffic stop.

Lucas, a black pimp from Detroit, was sentenced to death for the brutal murders of Therland Crater, another American who was scheduled to be a witness in an upcoming American drug trial, and Crater's common-law wife, Carolyn Newman.

Hoshowsky says in an introduction that one of the reasons he wrote *The Last to Die* is "to prevent Canadians from forgetting that Canada once had the death penalty and put more than 700 men and women to death between the time of Confederation in 1867 and 1962." Hopefully the other executed people had fairer trials than Turpin and Lucas before being hung.

What chance did Turpin have successfully arguing self-defense based on his evidence that Nash struck him with his revolver, when the trial judge, Justice George Gale, told the jury that they were entitled to consider Turpin's "previous criminal and anti-social activities" to determine if he was the type of person likely to shoot a police officer?

The Last to Die: Ronald Turpin, Arthur Lucas, and the End of Capital Punishment in Canada

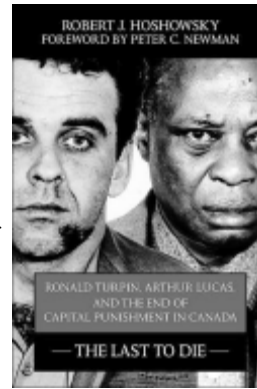
By Robert Hoshowsky
Hounslow Press, 2007, 224 pages, softcover

Reviewed by Harold Levy

The Supreme Court of Canada also had no problems with the fact that Gale permitted the jury to hear evidence that Nash was a man of good character and unlikely to resort to violence, as stated in court by his former superior and head of the morality division.

What chance did Lucas have ... poor Lucas who never ceased protesting his innocence until he could speak no more because the state had cut most of his head off? Lucas's grounds of appeal fell on deaf ears even though they included:

- Tainted evidence by an admitted perjurer whose testimony was the sole source of information about Lucas' dealings in the drug trade;
- The same witness positively identified a revolver found on the Burlington Skyway as belonging to Lucas;
- Damning evidence about his criminal background – including the fact that his wife was a harlot and that the pair had been kicked out of Toronto by morality officers – stood in the way of an unprejudiced verdict by the jury;
- Forensic evidence filed on appeal which suggested someone with a different blood type was the killer;
- Suspicion that police had tested a human hair found underneath Newman's finger-



nails without making disclosure of the results to the defence;

- What Hoshowsky calls "the curious absence" of Lucas' fingerprints in evidence.

In his well-researched book Hoshowsky exposed the danger and resilience of capital punishment, which goes under the surface from time to time but never seems to completely disappear.

One paragraph makes the point elegantly; "Long after the hangings of Ronald Turpin and Arthur Lucas at the Don Jail, Sheriff Ambrose told reporters he would never throw away the hangman's name and contact information, just in case. "Politicians being what they are, you never know if they'll bring it back again."

Hoshowsky performs a valuable service by refusing to allow Turpin and Lucas to remain "virtual unknowns." Almost 50 years later, the stench of injustice still hangs over their deaths.

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The Last to Die can be purchased from *Justice:Denied's* BookShop for \$23. (check, money order or stamps) Use the order form on page 21, or order with a credit card from *Justice Denied's* website at, <http://justicedenied.org/books.html>

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