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STUDENT COUNCIL BY-ELECTION FOR FACULTY OF ARTS REPRESENTATIVE

- NOMINATION FORMS AVAILABLE FROM RECEPTIONIST 2 ND FLOOR SUB.
- NOMINATION DEADLINE, 4 P.M. MONDAY, JANUARY 15, 1973.

ELECTION WILL BE HELD
FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 1973

Alberta courts tough. ...but so are Albertans

by ernie vilcsak

Victor Matthews' report on crime in Alberta "Socio-Legal Statistics in Alberta: A review of their availability and significance" the last report issued under the auspices of the now defunct Human Resources Research Council, seems to indicate that Albertans are the most criminally inclined people in the western hemisphere. On the other hand, it also indicates that the police in Alberta are more efficient than in Canada as a whole.

For the year 1969, the rate of offence per 1000 population was 9.6 for Alberta, as compared to 7.4 for Canada as a whole; but in Alberta, 45.55 per cent of the cases were cleared, as compared to 36.21 per cent for the rest of Canada.

The report sketches an overall picture of Alberta criminality, "dimensioning" crime in Alberta with points such as: the number of criminal offences on a per capita basis has doubled from 1901 to 1965; Alberta courts are more inclined to convict an accused than are courts in the rest of Canada; and the Alberta courts are only about two thirds as likely to use the suspended sentence as a sanction as are Canadian courts in general.

(The disparity between Alberta courts and Canadian courts is of even greater significance when crime is viewed from Western World perspective; Canada has the highest incarceration rate in the Western World.)

At first glance, one might get the impression that Alberta simply has one of the most efficient legal systems. But the statistics on incarceration in jail for summary convictions cast doubt upon this conclusion, because Alberta is three times as likely to jail those convicted of a non-criminal offence as is Canada as a whole. Alberta courts are just tougher, and this could explain the illusion of competency, at least in part.

Matthews states that the information which is available suggests a backward and repressive society, but then terms this conclusion contradictory, for based on experience with other legal-justice systems, he has found members of Alberta's system to be concerned and co-operative as well as enlightened in their approach.

In his review of the availability of statistical data, Matthews notes a few faults in the system. Data are gathered independently by each agency for its own purposes, and these data are not comparable. There is no ready provision for following an individual through the legal system from encounter with police to departure from jail. There is no means of ascertaining whether or not an individual given bail is already on bail for some other offence in some other locale. This makes it possible, at least theoretically, for an individual to commit crimes and be bailed out throughout the province.

No formal means exists apart from the Finger Print Service in Ottawa, whereby a correctional institution can find out whether or not an inmate has been in other institutions or is wanted by police. There is also a straightforward lack of statistical data of some important kinds.

Matthews proposes the instituting of a central registry for legal-justice statistics which would compile, analyze, and disseminate legal-justice information, and would also perform the jobs noted by Matthews as not presently being done.

This proposal raises some problems concerning personal privacy. Matthews suggests that three rights of individuals should be recognized: an individual should have the right to know what information is being kept in the system concerning him, this information should be kept confidential, and he should have the right to appeal any information which he considers to be inaccurate.

British Columbia at present has a computerized central registry for its correctional agencies of the type proposed by Matthews. Here, reports concerning the number and nature of inmates as well as evaluation studies concerning the effectiveness of particular rehabilitation programmes are carried out.

Matthews states that the visit to British Columbia's central registry was profitable in that some of the problems which can arise when a data centre is developed without close liaison with knowledgeable computer specialists were demonstrated.

Letters to the Gateway on any topic are welcome, but they must be signed. Pseudonyms may be used for good cause. Keep letters short (about 200 words) unless you wish to make a complex argument. Letters should not exceed 800 words.

The Gateway is published bi-weekly by the students of the University of Alberta. Contents are the responsibility of the editor. Opinions are those of the person who expressed them.

Staff this issue included Allyn Cadogan, sports assistant; Kimball Cariou, Joyce Clarke, Leroy Hiller, deena hunter, arts; Terri Jackson, editor; Sylvia Joly, typesetter, Harold Kuchertz, Jr., Laura Leake, Loreen Lennon, arts assistant; Wendy McKenna, Colleen Milne, headliner; Walter Plinge, Les Reynolds, footnotes; Candace Savage, news; John Shearer, Margriet Tilroe, typesetter; ron trieber, production; Brian Tucker, sports.

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