

Law Weekend in review

Response poor

Law Weekend held recently at the Law School proved at times to be refreshingly innovative. However, it also was illustrative of the distressingly low level of social and political awareness and concern among the students and faculty at the School.

Judge Sandra Oxner of the Provincial Court, and more recently of the Law Reform Commission of Canada, started off the weekend at Thursday morning's Law Hour with an address entitled "Societal Change and its Impact on the Justice System." Why Oxner was selected to tackle such a subject is questionable. Her rambling, hodge-podge delivery coincided well with her understanding of the subject. A feeling for the topic was shown in such cogent thoughts as "Law does not exist in a vacuum" and "Society is changing and the Law must change with it."

Oxner called for a re-examination of our legal system so as to ensure that it keeps pace with the changes in society. "We must not only ask what the rule is", she told the audience, "but we must also ask ourselves about the purpose and function of the rule." Conveniently, she omitted any mention of who is to participate in this re-examination and what are to be the limits of such an exercise.

There is little of interest that can be written about the well-attended car rally/bash held on Thursday evening at the law frat. Undoubtedly everyone involved had a good time since law students as a rule tend to thrive on this type of



Sandra Oxner and Graydon Nicholas taking part in Law Weekend.

activity.

A mini-conference on "The Role of Law in Social Change", organized by some of the more progressive elements in the school, took place on Friday. The film 'Attica' was shown to an audience of over one hundred, a very small minority of whom were law students or professors. The film documented the prison uprising and subsequent police riot which took 40 lives at Attica prison in New York in 1971. It was a powerful commentary on the prison system and on one state's brutal reaction to a non-violent call

for reform and fairness within that system.

Later that evening "The Gong Show" was held in the McInnes Room. The show was not in any way a part of the conference and this may explain why it was so well-attended. This type of event is the forte of John Q. Law Student. It consisted of skits and songs prepared and performed by the students themselves, so I leave it to the reader to write his or her own review.

The conference continued on Saturday morning with a series of presentations on the subject "Legal Resources as a Mechanism for

Social Change." The various approaches ranged from those of Walter Thompson of the Nova Scotia Civil Liberties Association who stressed the need to improve the structures we now have, to those of Graydon Nicholas of the Union of New Brunswick Indians who concentrated on the need for fundamental changes to make the legal system more responsive to the various groups and interests which currently lack representation.

Between these positions came Judge Oxner, and Dick Evans, Director of Dalhousie Legal Aid, who centred his remarks on the expansion of legal aid services into areas where the legal professional has not traditionally operated such as community organization. Given D.L.A.'s poor track record in this regard, Professor Evans must feel particularly frustrated.

In the afternoon several workshops were held on topics such as the role of persons with legal training and the question of whether Native Canadians can achieve their goals within existing legal and social structures. These workshops provided smaller forums for some spirited discussions between the panelists and members of the audience.

On the whole, the Saturday sessions were a refreshing attempt within the Law School to examine several issues and areas which up to now have been largely avoided. The unfortunate aspect of the sessions was the poor turnout of law students and faculty. While the organizers were satisfied with the support which they did receive, one cannot but construe such a lack of interest as indicative of the depressingly narrow concerns of the people in law today.

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You refuse to acknowledge me. You make me into a joke. I am not a joke; I am a human being. You harass me, beat me, fire me and take my children away from me. You give me a hole to crawl into, overcharge me for the watered drinks, then send the police to keep me from getting ideas. Sometimes you kill me; in the fires of the Church, in Nazi ovens, in Canadian prisons.

I am not asking favours. I am asking for my rights. My right to live and love in peace. My right to a fair share of the world I have helped to create. My right to be visible, to show that my life, too, is a human life; to be accessible to my gay sisters and brothers. I am asking now, but if you will not give me what is rightfully mine, I will take it. Even after all that you have done to me, I want to be your friend. But I cannot until you respect me as an equal.

Yours sincerely,
Robin Metcalfe.

Useful debate

To the Gazette:

Anyone who attended the last Student Council Meeting certainly found out that the phrase "Politics

makes strange bedfellows" is founded in the truth. Anyone who follows Council must have sat with astonished looks as they witnessed myself, Bruce Evans, and Mike Sherar voting with Bernie Macdonnell and Fred Schmidt on a major issue before Council. Perhaps, someone would say, the radical fringes are not that far apart after all. Or, is it deeper than that?

The issue, of course, was the question of whether or not Council would throw out the results of the Student Union Elections. The vote was extremely close - 9 for, 10 against, with 1 abstention. I was very pleased with the debate, for despite personal bias, I think that this rarely surfaced. The nine who voted for the motion spoke in ringing tones for the defence of Democracy and the Idealistic Dream. The ten who voted against spoke of the fact that no one on campus really wanted to run a new election, and about the shortness of time. All but a very few agreed that there was indeed valid ground for declaring the election invalid.

This fact was evident when I talked to one of the Members who voted against the motion. He told me that he had every intention, when he arrived, of voting to declare the election null and void, but decided that it wasn't worth the effort, since in the long run, the detractors would have out-weighted the benefits. His vote would have changed the outcome.

The only problem with changing the outcome would have meant that the Council meeting would not have ended until five a.m. The motion merely stated that Council would "suspend" the election results and we would have spent all that time deciding what the motion meant. However, the whole debate centred on whether or not to throw out the election, so that if the original motion had passed, one declaring the elections null and void would have passed.

However, I think that the debate continued on page 16

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