

# Law School upholds Conservatism

by A. Snipe

A month has passed since first year law students began classes, and already some of them are discovering that the Law School isn't all that they expected. Most of them seem to find the experience interesting and even enjoyable. But there are certain facts which disturb them.

Faculty are the object of a lot of criticism. Many students are upset with the way professors treat them. Students are told they are not going to be "spoon-fed" or "babied", as they supposedly were during their undergraduate years. They are mature adults and will be given responsibility for their own work.

But if the student is not punctual, does not do his/her assignments in the manner chosen by the personal likes and dislikes of the particular prof, the consequences are not enjoyable. The student may expect to be harangued in class, sternly reprimanded, and have a mark put beside his name on the class list, in clear view of the rest of the students.

**IN EFFECT THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP** closely resembles that found in Grade One, now what one would expect to find in a class where adults teach adults. One of the more infuriated students called the teaching method "nothing short of paternalistic".

Another student laughed at

the pathetic anxiety shown by the faculty over the lawyer's professional image. During Orientation Week, some profs made frequent mention of people who were "sniping at" the Law School as just another "technical school". They are also disturbed by the image of lawyers as "money-grabbers" and "crooks". In fact, many of the faculty are quite defensive about their status in society.

This is a great contrast with the advice given to the students — never be apologetic, always be confident, aggressive, and sure of yourself when defending any legal argument. There are few professions which strive so anxiously to be 'professional' and yet feel so uncomfortable about many of their colleagues who do not act in an exactly dignified or professional manner.

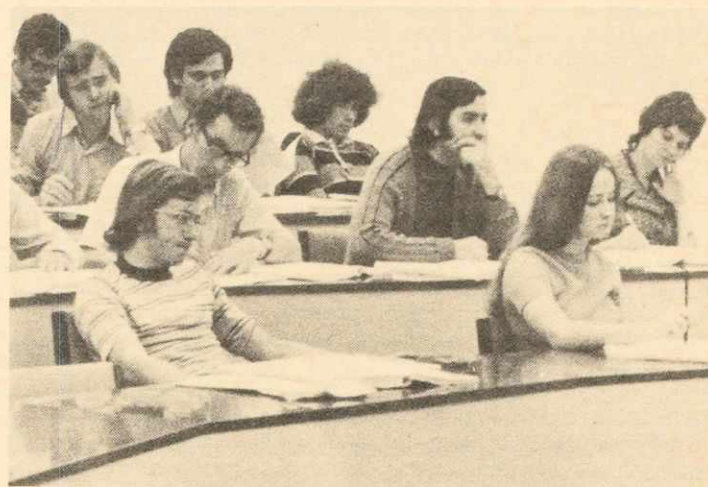
Faculty members also attempt to portray the lawyer's function as a great talent — indeed an art certainly not just a technical skill. Some faculty members seem torn between comparing law to medicine on the one hand, and to philosophy on the other. In a frenzied way, they wish to achieve a status equal to that of doctors, without being labelled as mere technicians. They clutch at the mantle of professionalism as it keeps slipping from their shoulders.

**THE IGNORANCE WHICH MANY FACULTY MEMBERS**

have of a sociological understanding of history and law is disappointing to many students with social science backgrounds. It is a shock to hear supposedly learned men explain, for instance, differences in legal systems according to variations in "human nature". The French simply "could not conceive" of such a legal system as ours because they "just don't think that way!" Even the most conservative or incompetent social scientist — and certainly any reputable "intellectual" — has long ago abandoned such simplistic, quasi-racist analysis. Such behaviorist explanations usually come from people who have not been exposed to "higher education" but when it comes from a professor of law...?

Politics is described to law students as an "either-or" thing, an occupation like any other. It is not described, as some students feel it should, as an activity that transcends all isolated occupation and pervades everyone's day-to-day life, whether they know it or not. Politics is simply seen as something one might decide to "get into". It has its rewards — status and material gain which are forthcoming to the politician himself — like any occupation.

**STUDENTS ARE ADVISED** THAT if they decide to enter politics, they should be very careful to do so at the opportune moment. "Beware of entering the political arena before you have a successful law practice and a respectable public image." Public relations, status



(dorothy wigmore/gazette)

and personal image are emphasized as primary concerns of anyone planning to be of "public service".

There is a glaring contradiction there. Should "serving the people" be looked upon as a career — a business in which the primary concerns are the opportunities it offers the politician to become a "success"? Of course the phrase "serving the people" is itself nothing but pure corn, an outworn, romantic notion to be cynically scoffed at, of course.

Last but not least, some first year students are repulsed by the degree of male chauvinism in the Law School. During the Orientation Week the few women in the class were encouraged to attend the sports events because "We need cheer leaders" and "We like to see pretty faces", as if that summed up the utility and capacities of women at social gatherings — to giggle and scream and show their pretty faces. Yes, the image of the dumb broad is still alive and

well at Dalhousie Law School.

**THESE ARE ONLY SOME OF THE PROBLEMS** facing the first year law class and other students. There are a few things which disturb most of the students, and a lot of things that disturb only a few of them — paternalism, professionalism, status-anxiety, behaviouralism, male chauvinism, political careerism elitism, racism, etc., etc., — in a word, all the components which make up the mentality dominating our culture.

It is regrettable that these components are so intense in an institution which could be at the forefront of a movement for social change. Our legal system is meant to be flexible and everchanging. It is supposed to be responsible to the needs of changing times.

Lawyers, with their higher education and tools for social reform, are potentially in a good position to destroy some outworn traditions and to institute change. And yet, here they are, saturated with a conservatism equal to that found in any other sector of society. Their whole value system upholds the status quo.

**SOMEONE ONCE SAID** THAT THE IDEAS of the ruling class are the ruling ideas in every age. The Law School does nothing to contradict this proposition. The values propagated within the school are clearly the values of the dominant class of our society.

The present legal system, and the way it is explained to law students, does not encourage change. The paternalism, professionalism, male chauvinism, racism, political careerism and elitism exhibited in the school are conservative values upholding the desires of the ruling class. They perpetuate prejudice, inferiority of women, elitist and careerist attitudes and authoritarianism. They do not allow real progressive change of any nature.

Although people critical of the present system lost respect for the law and the legal profession because of these attitudes, law becomes a very powerful mechanism in spreading and perpetuating conservative values throughout the whole society.

## AROUND HALIFAX

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22**

Contemporary Dancers of Winnipeg  
Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, Dalhousie University  
8:30 p.m.

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24**

Dalhousie University Film Society  
Don Quixote  
Oxford Theatre 2:00 p.m.

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 25**

Atlantic Symphony Concert Series  
Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi,  
"Saint-Saens Concerto No. 1"  
Rebecca Cohn Auditorium 8:30 p.m.

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 26**

Lecture on Art  
Douglas Hall "20th Century Sculpture"  
Dalhousie University Art Gallery 8:30 p.m.

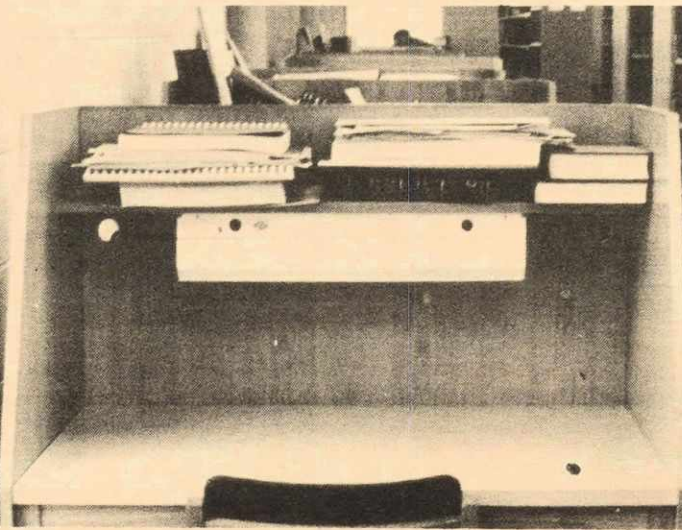
**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27**

Halifax Community Concerts  
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Rebecca Cohn Auditorium 8:30 p.m.

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(dorothy wigmore/gazette)

Law students forced into slot.

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