

Pot smokers abused by the legal system

by Gregory Hamara

Every week over 1,250 Canadians are arrested and charged with a cannabis offense under the narcotics Control Act. To Andy Rapoch, president of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), this figure represents the number of people for whom the Canadian judicial system has become a hollow, yet frightening, mechanism.

Speaking to the Dalhousie Law Society last Thursday, Rapoch made it clear that, in his view, the problem with marijuana is not its use, but the legal abuse suffered by the estimated 3,000,000 Canadians who smoke it.

"For most Canadians, our marijuana laws represent the first and only contact with the Canadian justice system, and it is a very rotten impression indeed," he said.

Rapoch said that over the past 10 to 15 years there has been a growing disrespect among young people for the institutions of government, and that in many cases this disenchantment can be traced to "draconian and hideous" drug laws.

"It is simply not good for a society if the population-at-large does not respect the laws, or the institutions which create those laws," he argued.

Between 1969 and 1978, over 315,000 Canadians were charged with a cannabis offense, according to Statistics Canada. There were almost 200,000 convictions for simple possession during that same period.

Part of the problem, Rapoch said, is that among individual provinces there is wide variance between the arrest rate and the type of sentencing handed out.

"Alberta is the worst place in the country to be arrested. For simple possession of a couple of grams you are going to get a minimum \$200 fine. Undoubtedly you will go to jail for a second offence," he warned.

"On the other hand, in Quebec, you are going to receive a discharge, or, at most, a small fine," he said, adding that, "since 1976 pot has been virtually decriminalized in Quebec."

Rapoch attributed Quebec's leniency to what he termed that province's "relaxed view of moral law."

Since its inception in 1976, NORML has become the chief lobbying force in favour of Canada's cannabis laws. While the organization does not call for the outright legalization of marijuana, it has repeatedly called upon the federal government to remove all penalties for simple possession and cultivation. At present, the maximum penalty for possession is seven years imprisonment.

A federal civil servant with the Public Service Commission, Rapoch, 36, described Ottawa's approach to reforming narcotic laws in terms of "applying a band-aid to an urgent social dilemma" He was particularly

critical of Health and Welfare Minister Monique Begin, who contends that a public education campaign on the potential hazards of marijuana cannot begin until legislation dealing with decriminalization has been enacted.

"Above all, Begin does not want to give the impression that the government condones the smoking of marijuana. However, by not conducting a public education campaign, Begin is implying that there is nothing so serious about marijuana that the Canadian people need not be alerted right away. In effect, by not releasing health information, the government is saying smoking marijuana is OK," Rapoch argued.

Opposition to reforming Canada's marijuana laws has come from a variety of groups, most notably insurance companies, Rapoch said.

"The recent advertising crusade by All-State claiming that one in eight traffic fatalities can be traced to marijuana-use was sheer rubbish," he said. Rapoch claims a more accurate figure would be "less than one half of one per cent."

NORML attempted, through the department of consumer and corporate affairs, to file a misleading advertising suit against All-State, but despite the department's contention that the organization had a "compelling case", NORML was forced to drop its legal action after the Traffic Injuries Research Foundation refused to contest the

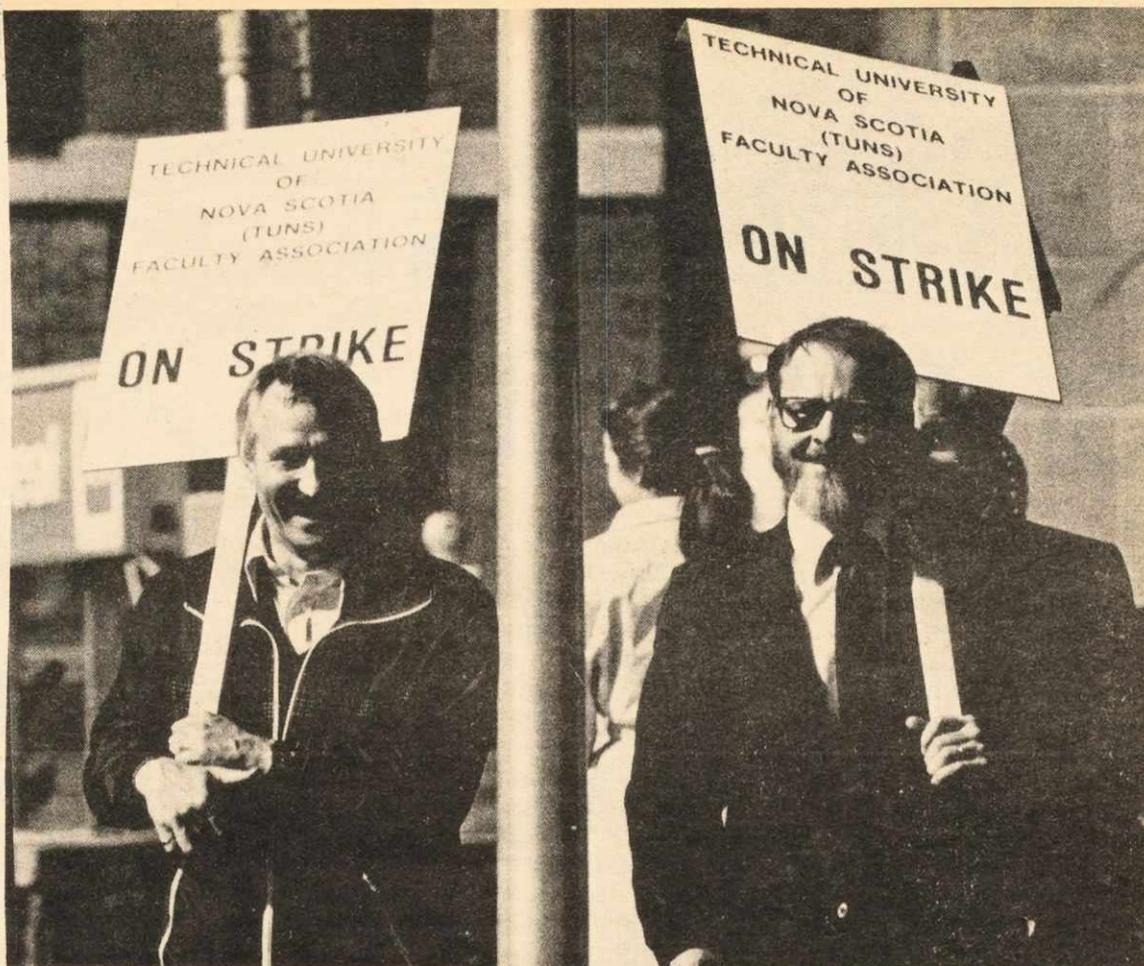


All-State figures. "Given the fact that the president of All-State also sits on the board of directors of the traffic research foundation, it is hardly surprising that they did not challenge All-States' advertising," Rapoch said.

He also singled out the Ontario Secondary School Headmasters Association as another group which, in spite of their opposition to decriminalization, refuse to allow public education on marijuana within their classrooms.

Despite calls for decriminalization from Canada's three major political parties, and influential bodies such as the Canadian Bar Association and Canadian Medical Association, Rapoch is not overly optimistic that changes in the current laws will be forthcoming shortly.

"Unless parliament acts before the summer of 1982 we can forget about any substantial changes for at least three years. Anything after that date would be too close to the next federal election, and there is no way the government would face the issue just before going to the voters," Rapoch said.



Genev/Dal Photo

These distinguished looking picketers are the Technical University of Nova Scotia Faculty, who went on strike last Monday.

Back to the bargaining table at TUNS

by Walter G. Speirs

After 17 months of negotiations, two strike votes and Monday on the picket lines, faculty of the Technical University of Nova Scotia are working to rule.

According to Faculty Association Acting President Allan Penney, TUNS professors are back teaching classes for now but refusing to serve on any committees or carry out any administrative duties. Penney said, "there is no real reason the students should suffer, we don't want them to."

The two major issues remaining to be settled are teaching workloads and salaries. TUNS faculty also want an agreement on employee benefits and want outstanding cases before the Labour Relations Board to be resolved as part of the contract. Penney gives an example of one professor not being given a fair tenure hearing. "We feel very strongly about this", Penney said.

Reagan says let em eat Skippy

(ZNS/CUP) Nutrition and farm groups have launched their counterattack against Reagan administration plans to cut the size of school lunches.

The agriculture department wants to save money by substituting peanut butter and nuts for meat and classifying ketchup and pickle relish as "vegetables."

The Food Research and Action Centre says in poor

An agreement regarding the longstanding issue of peer committee evaluation of prospective teachers was reached last week according to Nelson Ferguson, a TUNS administration spokesman. In the past the Board of Governors at TUNS had maintained that they could hire professors without the peer committee's approval and without prior notice.

Penney stated that, "we are not fundamentally far away from agreement on the straight forward issue of salary". Faculty is seeking parity with Ontario salaries. He said, however, that they are at opposite ends with regards to workload and the opportunity for consulting outside the university. According to Penney, TUNS professors have a heavier teaching workload and fewer opportunities for consulting than in other Canadian universities. He said in some universities, one day a week working in the professional field

is required of faculty in order to keep abreast of developments in industry. Faculty only want the option of consulting. Not only was this refused but it was proposed by the Board of Governors that money made from consultation fees be turned over to the university. Penney also said the Board would not agree to binding arbitration and he found this curious since it is such a common method in university negotiations elsewhere.

In an attempt to reach a settlement, Education Minister Terry Donahue has appointed Senator G.I. Smith as negotiator, in a compromise move.

Penney was quoted as saying "I personally am very upset at the idea of having to strike. It is utterly unnecessary to be negotiating for seventeen months."

Penney stated, "after having taken a strike vote in June and another one in September, the Board must have known that we would strike."

