

An interview with Gerald Le Dain

Commission on drug use to focus on young

By JUDY TURNER

"The whole drug issue is essentially a human question," Gerald Le Dain told Excalibur last week in an interview concerning the non-medical use of drugs.

Le Dain, dean of Osgoode Hall Law School, is chairman of the Commission of Inquiry Into the Non-Medical Use of Drugs appointed by the federal government on May 29 this year.

When asked where the main emphasis of the commission lies, Le Dain replied that the primary focus must be on young people. Because of the time limits and the unwieldy mass of information, the commissioners must be selective and therefore they intend to con-

sider drug use among adults, use of hard drugs, and the alcohol problem only as they relate to soft drugs in the young population.

This bias is justified, Le Dain said, because young people form the generation who must live with the problem and who will suffer the consequences of errors in this field.

One of the major concerns of the commission at present is reaching the post-university drug users and the high school culture. While open meetings prove fairly successful in the university community, this method is not easily applicable to the other groups because of different ages and interests. Le Dain is very interested in receiving suggestions concerning approaches in the high school situation.

When questioned about the major aims of the commission, Le Dain explained that the purpose is basically to make the whole question of drug use more familiar to Canadians, and to contribute to a greater understanding so that Canadians can involve themselves in the problem in a cooperative and human way.

The commissioners are also attempting to identify and clarify issues of public policy and personal conduct. Le Dain said that un-

fortunately they must make decisions about public policy without absolute certainty; they have to balance values and costs and decide what is a wise and effective policy given known, unknown factors and variables. There is some hard scientific information which they hope to evaluate, but Le Dain pointed out that the commissioners do not underestimate the validity and importance of impressionistic insight based on direct observation, experience and discussion.

The commission will be looking basically at three areas.

First, it will be concerned with epidemiology; that is the extent and pattern of drug use — what drugs are involved, the psychology of the users and the relationship between various drugs.

The basic sources of this epidemiological material will consist of individual and small group contacts, plus police records, charges and estimates. "This police information is hard as far as it goes and provides an anchor in reality," Le Dain said, "but it must only be considered from a critical viewpoint."

The second major area of investigation concerns the effects of drug use — both physical and psychological, behavioral and social, educational and cultural. The most important evidence in this area is medical. Because of the short time allotted, Le Dain doubts the commission will be able to add anything significant to existing medical knowledge. Instead, its job will again be one of critical evaluation and perspective.

Thirdly, the commission is concerned with the causes of and reasons for the non-medical use of drugs. This area, which, according to Le Dain, may well provide the



Gerald Le Dain

most important contribution of the commission, includes investigation of personal motivation, peer pressure, social values and other external factors. The commission will be seeking a better understanding of the reasons behind drug use and the implications of these reasons with respect to legislation and public policy, education and treatment.

Le Dain explained that in his view legislative measures comprise only one part of the very wide and complex problem of social control; cultural and peer group pressures are often of greater significance. Commissioners must wrestle with the problem of the proper role of law in the future with a view to the technological revolution in the drug field.

At the three day hearing held two weeks ago, all the commissioners were impressed by a need for willing and competent services of assistance and treatment. The whole drug problem is not limited

to any area or age-group. It is a question of our times.

"Therefore," Le Dain said "we as a society must develop supportive services and must see that the medical profession equips itself to deal with this phenomenon."

When asked his opinion of the York meeting, Le Dain said he was very pleased with the spontaneous quality of the gathering and with the kaleidoscopic view of attitudes obtained. The recent session in Toronto plus future meetings to be held in other major cities this year are merely preliminary meetings to be used for the interim report. This report will put the question in some perspective, point out the vital issues and form a basis for further public discussion.

He added that the government has indicated that it will wait for the final report which is due in two years before making any policy changes.

To allay any fears about the possible misuse of information, Le Dain says that all documents are treated with the greatest care. He and the other commissioners have been given to understand that the report will not be exploited for law enforcement purposes.

When asked the stock question — don't you think you need personal experience with drugs in order to make an accurate evaluation of the problems? — he merely smiled and said he'd give his standard answer — that personal experience can be misleading and may even detract from objectivity.

Le Dain emphasized the complexity of the problems involved and the great necessity of participation by all facets of our Canadian culture. "Society," he said, "must develop a self-conscious awareness of the profound challenges to its effective and ordered existence; we can no longer bury our heads in the sand."

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