

Cannabis controversy

Gov't isn't going to pot yet

By S. Jennifer Hunter

There is increasing pressure on the federal government to justify its position on the legality of cannabis, Gerald LeDain told a group of students and faculty in Osgoode Hall Law School, Monday afternoon.

LeDain, who headed the Royal Commission on the non-medical use of drugs, is currently a professor at Osgoode Hall. He was speaking at the president's Fortnightly Forum on the role of science, philosophy and law in relation to drugs.

"The assumption was made that because we couldn't give a clean bill of health to cannabis, there should be no change in the law," LeDain said.

"In some cases we've been obliged to make drugs (liquor, cigarettes) legally available because of public pressure. Official policy does not recognize any benefit of cannabis for medical use. This is a large bone of contention because many drug users claim that there are benefits.

"To what extent do we have a right to prohibit the use of something and deny the majority use of it to protect a small minority from harm?" LeDain asked. "If the government decides the risk of harm is significant to prohibit all use, this denies use to the majority.

It's one thing to look at experiments in a lab and its another thing to determine the amount of possible risk to the population, LeDain said.

"There are very definite limits to the capacity of science to give solid facts. In many cases certain types of drug use aren't amenable to scientific research."

"The cannabis controversy reveals in a dramatic way the limits of science," LeDain stated.

Judy LaMarsh, also a professor of law at Osgoode and former minister of Health and Welfare in the Pearson cabinet, said that "unless you can say, as far as cannabis is concerned, that

there is no adverse affect, the health department won't let it become legalized."

ADULT USE

"Other drugs are so established there is no way of getting them removed," she added. "All the adults who use it should make public that they use it."

"If we could look at people who have used soft drugs over a long period of time and are still successful, it would help immensely. But even if you make soft drugs legal, you still have the problem of living beside another country that goes hairy over the subject."

Law professor Daniel Baum said: "Scientific evidence is sometimes used as a buttress behind government policy that has already been made. The judgments often reflect political decisions and sometimes they are totally irrational."

Another professor stated, "The problem is that there is no hard evidence one way or another. Science has fallen badly down here. The scientific results that have come out are the result of scientific prejudices. If it were clear cut, like the thalidomide cases, then the public could make the

decision rationally."

CYCLAMATES

LeDain cited the example of cyclamates, "Where you have the determination of a risk by science. It was based on animal studies which proved that in certain doses cyclamates produced cancer in the bladder of mice. A public disclosure was made and there followed a demand for the complete removal of cyclamates.

"But cyclamates were tested under special conditions in the laboratory. They were given in large doses to the mice and they might not have affected humans the same way," LeDain said.

"There intervened the factor of public alarm which took the true appreciation of the risk away from the scientists. Is it in the public interest that before scientific investigations have had the true measure for sounding alarm, steps are taken? There was a decision made in the end more by public decision than scientific investigation."

LeDain stated: "Drug effects depend on a lot of variables, and the difficulty is generalizing the dose, the conditions in the lab, and the frequency to use, to the general population."

Job information

People just aren't aware of how to get information on jobs, according to Bonnie Shaffer, career counselor at York's Career Planning Place.

The Career Planning Place will hold an informal discussion on Friday March 22, at noon in Room 162, Behavioural Sciences building, to inform students of the basic procedures for getting a permanent or a summer job.

"There are people 30 years old who

don't know how to look for a job. Some have never had a job or they got a job by pure luck," Shaffer said.

"There are certain things to be aware of when looking for a job such as information on where to find the job you want, interview techniques or how to draw up a resume letter.

"The employer views the job candidate suspiciously. We want to give students a chance to reply to these questions," said Shaffer.

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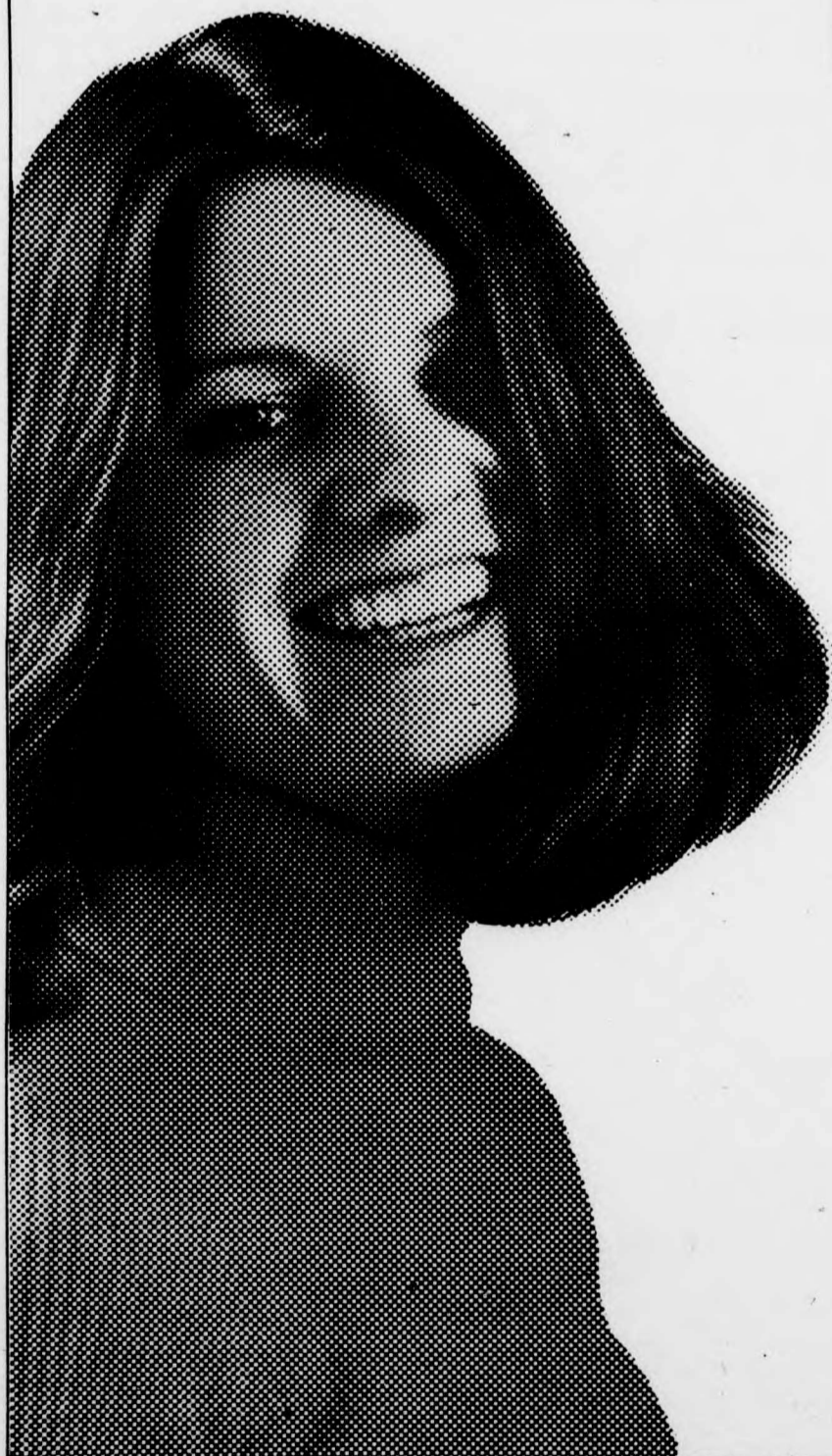
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