

## Honor court changes

# Realistic reforms needed to bolster justice system

By Lou Billionis

This week marks the golden anniversary of perhaps the most infamous travesty of justice this nation ever experienced. Fifty years ago today, two anarchists Massachusettsers, Sacco and Vanzetti, were convicted for murder and sentenced to death in the electric chair.

The record now shows that their trial was questionable. Prejudiced attorneys and judges, as well as an intolerant public unwilling to grant the political freedom which our constitution tacitly grants, convicted the two immigrants in a trial marked by circumstantial evidence and ethnic epithets.

The Governor of Massachusetts is now considering a formal pardon for Sacco and Vanzetti. He has been asked to perform a symbolic gesture designed to underscore the past failures and inequities in our judicial system, as well as our present improvements.

So much for the republic's judicial system. We have seen its shortcomings, but have also seen

the past year's emphasis on public responsibility and integrity to provoke needed change.

All the talk of judicial reform has drifted to the nation's campuses. And problems of crisis proportions at West Point over that academy's judicial system and honor code have opened the whole world's eyes to the troubles of society, law and order.

This University has not been immune from these troubles. In fact, Carolina's Honor Court, as one local attorney said last February, "is a sort of kangaroo court. The proceedings are conducted in a rather cavalier fashion compared to how important the outcome is to the individual."

On March 1, former Student Attorney General Chuck Lovelace noted the proliferation of cheating at Carolina, recommending that the system as it now stands be abolished in favor of placing the faculty as the chief agents of enforcement and prevention.

And now, a student-faculty committee is studying alternatives

to the Honor Code. With, at last count, 64 per cent of the students at UNC admitting that they have, at one time or another, cheated, yet less than 19 per cent of the student body actually going before the court, the system seems to be ready for some reform.

What will be done? The Committee on Student Conduct is still investigating the possibilities. It seems, though, that there are definite guidelines and avenues which the committee would be wise to adopt. First, it should acknowledge the fact that every student did indeed sign the honor pledge, and, given that pledge, is expected to carry a degree of responsibility. That responsibility should also be extended to the selection of any new system recommended by the committee. To grant the faculty control without the approval of the student body as a whole is a potentially disastrous action.

Every student at Carolina came here with the knowledge of his or her role under the Honor Code — to abandon it in favor of faculty

rule without any open opportunity for the student body to attempt a revival of the system signals an administrative takeover.

But should the system be revived? It seems that the consensus is that the Honor Code is dead. Students, it seems, are failing to uphold their end of the contract.

The committee is undoubtedly faced with many options, some which signal the end of student participation in the maintenance of academic integrity. Proctoring of examinations would be a step in that direction. Though we all agree that cheating is not an admirable form of conduct, the committee would be well advised to first determine its final goal of reform. Should cheating be wiped off the face of this campus? An unattainable ideal. In that case, is there a target figure toward which

we should strive? Once the committee realizes a target, it may then realize that the Honor Code as it now exists is a viable instrument from which to build a stronger system.

Simply, we have seen the injustices and inefficacy of the Honor Code, and recognize the failure of students to uphold the pledge which they made as freshmen. But any action to reform the system must be preceded by a lucid understanding of the attainable goals. A police state may reduce cheating substantially, but not without costs to student morale and self-integrity. But a movement to toughen the administration of exams—with agreed participation of students — will narrow the cheating-conviction gap while retaining a student conscience in the academic process.

Indeed, no system is foolproof. For that reason, the Saccos and Vanzettis of this world will still fall prey to the injustices any society wreaks. But as long as those susceptible to the travesties understand and participate in the system, all is not lost.

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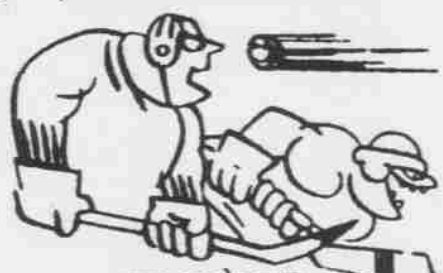
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