

Around the Third World and Home in Wisconsin

Dean Cliff F. Thompson

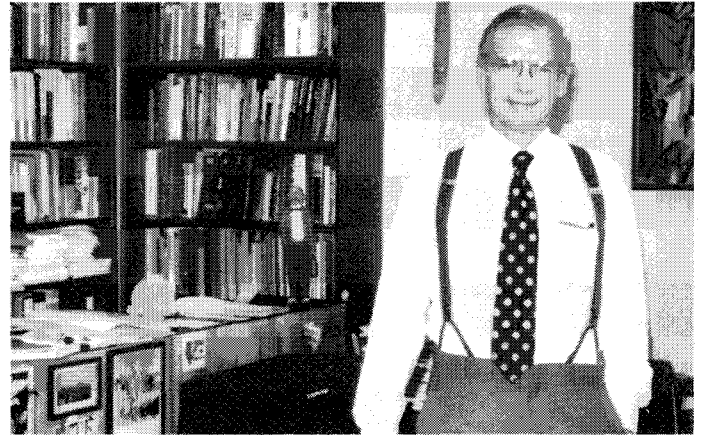
In this issue, Professor Chuck Irish provides insights into developments in the Third World. Reading his article led me to reflect about legal education at the University of Wisconsin, contrasted with the tasks I shared in African nations between 1960 and 1973. My thoughts soon overran the proper limits of a note from the Dean. But a few comparisons may interest you.

In Africa, the educational needs were fundamental, stark, and immediate. For example, Zambia at the time of independence had about ten citizens who were lawyers, so that there were virtually no local persons ready to carry out essential tasks such as negotiating agreements with foreign copper companies or staffing the judiciary. In helping to start Zambia's law school, basics were uppermost; subtleties in curriculum were secondary.

At the UW Law School, we have curriculum needs, but they are often in shaded tones, and though important, amenable to long reflection. Our faculty is currently considering at length different models of supervision for our practice clinics. The basic idea, the educational value of a clinic, was settled years ago. Yet this example also demonstrates a problem: the idea of practicing clinics in law schools was vigorously argued from at least 1930 onwards, whereas most schools got around to starting them only in the past 15 years. An established law school like the U.W. has its basics well in order, but the real challenge is in avoiding complacency about the *status quo* and the improved nuances we achieve.

Thus, while work conditions in Africa were sometimes hard, the choice of the work was relatively easy. Accepting the charms of Madison is easy, but the need to improve our programs at the margins—and at the same time retain a lively questioning attitude about what we've established—is a tough task for our faculty.

A related contrast is that the conditions I found in Africa often had the potential for sudden and dramatic change. Some of our quick victories have evaporated, but others set a useful path still followed. At Wisconsin, I am sure that we believe in the possibilities for rapid improvements, but they must not obscure the fact that profound change often takes many years, and the patience and



sustained efforts of faculty to achieve it. With a history of 117 years, a great law school has the luxury to measure its progress in decades, and the responsibility to plan with commensurate vision.

Chuck Irish's emphasis on the shortage of hard work in many Third World countries is the basis for my final comparison. In my early days in Sudan, I had long discussions with a teaching colleague, Hassan Omar Ahmed, a good example of an African's capacity for intellectual achievement and sustained application. He went from an L.L.B. degree at the University of Khartoum to receive one A and two A+ grades in the Harvard L.L.M. program, and today he puts in long hours as a deputy director of an inter-Africa agricultural development corporation. We agreed that our students needed to learn how to work hard. Whatever the web of cultural and colonial heritage that produced the problems, we aimed to do what we could to create the work habit during law school, a formidable undertaking.

In America, many of our citizens learn early in life how to work effectively. This is fortunate, because law school days are a brief passage. You don't have to go to law school to learn to work hard, but I believe law school must require it, to sink those who only want to float, and to reinforce those who have begun to swim. Our students emerge from law school into private and public service, and take charge of people's welfare and lives. Of course, we demand a high level of analytical achievement, but other requirements, such as regular and punctual fulfillment of work assignments and classes, are related to the work habit needed professionally to represent the interests of others. Our law school does not have to attempt to create this habit out of the whole cloth, but as a part of our educational effort, we take this goal as seriously in Wisconsin as I did in the Third World.