



Judges (from left) Maurice Charles, Selwyn Romilly and Lionel Jones at workshop.

Bagambiire urges quota system for black jurors

By PETER McLAUGHLIN
The Daily News

Blacks would get a fairer shake from the Canadian criminal justice system if quotas were adopted to ensure blacks representation on juries, says Dalhousie University Law School Prof. Davies Bagambiire.

Bagambiire told a workshop at the Black Law Students Association of Canada yesterday that sweeping and fundamental changes are needed to the country's legal system to make it equitable for blacks and other visible minorities.

He said law schools, police training colleges, and even professional organizations such as the barristers society should be overhauled and their mandates reviewed in public.

He said these organizations help perpetuate racism because they are closed and are designed to uphold Canadian law, which is crafted to protect the middle and upper classes or, in other words, white property owners.

Bagambiire, who has championed a number of high-profile racism cases in the Nova Scotia courts, also said more black judges should be appointed to the bench.

But he said a jury system that ensures an accused is truly judged by

his or her peers is of prime importance.

"Maybe there should be quotas in the jury system. It's something that may have to be looked at," he said. "Let's not get stuck with the old concepts we got from England."

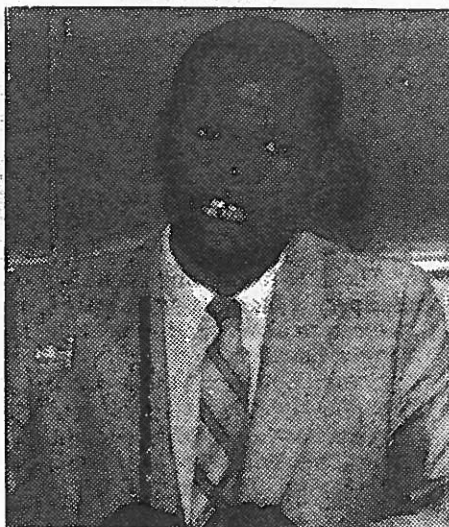
Aston Hall, a law student at Osgoode Hall Law School, said the Canadian legal system is racist, meting out harsher sentences to blacks than non-blacks for crimes of a similar nature.

"It's unbelievable the number of blacks in the justice system and jails," said Hall, adding that 50 per cent of the inmates in Toronto jails are black even though they represent only seven per cent of the metro population.

Cliff Summer, an Oneida and a lawyer with the Ontario Aboriginal Legal Services, said natives face much the same level of discrimination from the courts.

He said a community council project is being pioneered in Ontario to allow accused aboriginals to be dealt by a volunteer group of their own people outside Canadian court jurisdiction.

Three judges also offered their views on the Canadian justice system: Maurice Charles of Ontario, the first black judge to be appointed in Canada; Selwyn Romilly, the first black judge in B.C.; and Lionel Jones, the first black judge to be appointed in Alberta.



DAVIES BAGAMBIIRE