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Page 6

Judge Halleck, Once Law and Order Man, Becomes Radicalized

By United Press International

WASHINGTON (UPI) - Three years ago when Judge Charles W. Halleck was appointed to the District of Columbia's court of general sessions, he was a gung-ho law and order man, right wing in his politics, and by his own testimony, a militant "square."

He once told a couple of long-haired youths brought to court on marijuana charges? "If you come in here looking like a bunch of kooks and dressed up in crazy clothes and beads, you're going to be found guilty before they call the case."

In those days the Judge wore his own hair conservatively trimmed in a crew-cut.

But all that's changed now.

His friends speak with awe of what they call "the radicalization of Charlie Halleck." The Judge himself doesn't think it's so surprising that the should have altered his life-style and outlook. "It isn't just me that's changed, the whole system is changing - people are becoming aware of what's happening," he said in an interview.

Halleck now appears in court wearing bell-bottom trousers and ankle-high black boots under his judicial robe. His greying hair has grown over his collar. His once clean-shaven face is now adorned by luxuriant sideburns, a mustache and a chin-beard.

But the change goes beyond mere physical appearance. The judge once know for his aversion to hippies and for the long sentences he imposed on some defendants now prefers to hand down advice instead of jail terms.

"There was a guy in here - one of the editors of an underground paper - who was on probation," he said recently. "Instead of asking me to lift

his probation he asked if I could let him go to Cuba.

"I told him the Cubans will just bring you down there and use you, and I lifted his probation instead."

He tells marijuana users who are haled before him that he doesn't care personally whether they want to "blow a little pot," but it's against the law and until Congress decides to change the rules they will "have to get all the hash and marijuana out of their house."

Halleck is a former prosecutor, Navy officer, subpoena server for the Senate Internal Security Committee and the son of a former House Republican leader, Charles A. Halleck of Indiana. He was appointed to the bench in October, 1967, by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

The 42-year-old Judge said his transformation began about two years

ago "when I saw all the people I was sending to jail were coming back."

At that time it dawned on him "it isn't any good just to put people in jail."

With that realization, he started to read books and studies of social problems. He also began to visit jails, reformatories and prisons "to see what we were doing with people."

This convinced him that "long punitive sentences don't deter anything."

"There's hope for these people," he says. "They need something in the nature of an adult authority that would encompass all the duties of the corrections department."

Halleck is most concerned today about the number of drug-related crimes being committed. He said that on any given day, 80 per cent of the criminal cases he handles involve drugs one way or another.

"The reason we have crime is all of the drugs. Do away with the drugs and it would get rid of 80 per cent of the crime."

Despite his new approach, Halleck continues to have a reputation for strict sentencing in crimes of violence. He believes courts must deal firmly with "the sort of thing that makes the streets unsafe for people."

In October, 1969, he was divorced from his wife of 18 years and remarried to 33-year-old Jeanne Wahl, a drug abuse project worker with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. "We have a genuine sharing of ideas, she's somebody who really understands what's going on," he said.

He and his new bride live on his suburban Maryland Hunt County estate, "but with all this work I just don't get to hunt and ride any more." He has seven children by his first marriage, but they live with their mother.

Early in his tenure, Halleck amazed the city's legal community by locking up several defense attorneys for contempt of court when they appeared late for trial. Early in November of this year he locked up a court clerk who he thought had mislaid the file on a case.

During the 1968 racial riot in Washington's black ghetto, Halleck kept a 45-caliber pistol in his desk. It's not there anymore. Instead his chambers are fitted out with a stereo record player on which he listens to anything from Bach to Rock.

How does he feel about his new approach to life and his responsibility as a judge?

"I'm happier now," he said, "but I've got an ulcer that eats my gut out."