



PAUL HALVONIK (LEFT), ANTHONY AMSTERDAM, JEROME FALK
 The three attorneys who led the legal attack on the death penalty

IP Wirephoto

Lawyers' Long Battle to Eliminate Death Penalty

Yesterday's State Supreme Court decision to abolish the death penalty came after a years-long tenacious battle by the combined forces of the American Civil Liberties Union and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Anthony Amsterdam, the Stanford law professor who organized and argued both the state case here and the similar case still pending before the U.S. Supreme Court, was pleased yester-

day but unwilling to call the battle over.

"There are 579 men still on death rows throughout the country," he said. "The work will go on."

Amsterdam was joined in a Stanford news conference by ACLU attorney Paul Halvonik and San Francisco lawyer Jerry Falk — together comprising a Bay Area team that has handled the most significant challenges to capital punishment in the nation's history.

EVOLUTION

The ruling by the California Supreme Court is significant, Amsterdam said "because it is the first judicial recognition that the evolution of our civil standards of decency has come to condemn death as a penalty for crime."

But he took sharp issue with Governor Ronald Reagan's comments earlier in the day about the high court putting itself "above the people" and about California being "less safe" as a result of the decision.

"This is the kind of vicious and unreasoning rhetoric that can be expected from a political demagogue. The court did its inescapable job to interpret the Constitution as a safeguard for all the people. When this job is turned over to demagogues, then the state will be less safe," Amsterdam said.

CAREER

Falk predicted that California, now relieved of the financial burden of appeals of death sentences, could save "up to \$100 million" as a result of the decision.

Amsterdam, 36, is the son of a Philadelphia business executive. His brilliant record at the University of Pennsylvania led to his appointment as clerk to the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. Later, Amsterdam became a criminal prosecutor and assistant U.S. attorney in the District of Columbia.

But he began winning a reputation as an activist lawyer and noted legal scholar when he returned to Pennsylvania to teach law and in his spare time fight civil rights cases in the South.

He has been on the Stanford Law School faculty since 1969, and during that time has been sought out as a legal scholar by lawyers for such defendants as Angela Davis, Bobby Seale, Father James Groppi and the Chicago Seven.

DEATH ROW

The case that resulted in yesterday's ruling specifically concerned Robert Page Anderson, a Death Row inmate convicted of the 1965 killing of a San Diego shopkeeper.

For Amsterdam. a

cigar-chomping, intensely hard-working lawyer, it was a banner day.

"No one is more sympathetic to the victims of crime than we are," he said yesterday. "To take life is an atrocity. But this decision reaffirms the value of all life."

Businesslike, he termed it "foolhardy" to try to predict the next dramatic decision in the U.S. Supreme Court.

"But I hope it's favorable," he said.