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Lawyer's Guild, BALSAs Hold Demonstration Against Racism

by Philip J. Kochman

A small group of students, composed largely of members of the National Lawyer's Guild and BALSAs, picketed Marshall-Wythe on Wednesday, March 18, to protest the lack of adequate minority representation at the school. A rally which followed drew a lunch-time crowd of 70 students to hear speakers denounce racism in the legal profession and the school.

According to Susan Larson, one of the protest's organizers, the demonstration and rally were held, "to publicize a real problem at Marshall-Wythe: the lack of minority faculty and students." The organizers considered the rally a success in this regard, because it attracted prominent coverage by much of the local media.

Eileen Olds, the President of BALSAs, was the first speaker.

She related the statistics: 13 black students presently enrolled, 31 black alumni, and no black faculty members. "We are disdainful of the fact that while we have been patient for a change in the system, all we continue to get is excuses, despite the vast amount of resources available to the school," Olds stated. She argued that "this failure" effects all students. "All will leave this institution unprepared to function in a multi-racial society."

Richmond attorney Bessida White, last year's president of The Student Bar Association, charged the school with "institutional racism." She applauded the students' willingness to make their grievances public. "The needs

will be met only if pressure is used," she stated. "Students must demand change by whatever means are necessary."

The final speaker of the program was Saad El Amin, a black Richmond attorney. In 1974 Amin received an offer to teach at Marshall-Wythe. It was later withdrawn by the college's Board of Visitors, allegedly because of his association with a number of controversial causes. While the other speakers spoke of "institutional racism" at Marshall-Wythe, Amin charged the school with "overt racism." "There is overt racism here," he stated, "for how else can you

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Richmond attorney Saad El Amin charges Marshall-Wythe with 'overt racism' at mid-day demonstration.

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advocate
marshall-wythe school of law

Speakers Denounce Racism at Marshall-Wythe

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explain the fact that not one faculty member is black."

"If this law school will not listen to reason," Amin continued, "we must disrupt business as usual, because this is the only way our society will respond. We have used words long enough." Amin concluded with a parting shot at the faculty. "The Marshall-Wythe faculty is both mediocre and cowardly. Their mediocrity is based on exclusivity and their cowardice revealed itself in 1974

when they didn't stand up for me."

Although the protest's organizers had invited the administration to present its views, the administration declined. Dean Timothy Sullivan responded to reporter's questions after the rally. "We believe that any fair inquiry into the record of this law school would show we are in full compliance with all laws." He stated that the law school regularly recruits black

undergraduates and that a number of blacks had been offered teaching positions at the school, but had refused. "The record was not accurately described by the speakers here," he added. When asked to capsule the administration's position with regard to charges of racism, he concluded, "We have done all we can given our resources. The results have not been all we hoped, but we have made a good faith effort."



The demonstration drew widespread coverage in the local media. Here a local reporter interviews Bessida White, former SBA President.