

Fred Rodell
HALT Advisor
Dies at 73

Fred Rodell, a member of HALT's Board of Advisors since 1979, and retired professor of law at Yale University, died on June 4th in New Haven, Connecticut. He was 73.

Prof. Rodell was best known for his scathing attacks on the legal system and lawyers. Yet, he won national esteem as a civil libertarian and scholar in Constitutional Law.

Rodell began his tenure as professor of law at Yale in 1933. He retired in 1973 after 40 years of distinguished teaching.

Rodell's healthy skepticism of the legal profession began while he was still in law school. He vowed at that time to never practice law and to never become a member of any bar association. Instead, he decided to teach law and attempt to influence the practice of law in the United States.

As a law professor, Rodell delivered the first of his many blows to the legal profession in 1939 with the publication of his book, *Woe Unto You Lawyers*. He attacked the pomposity of the profession and its use of legal language to mystify the law. The book claimed the legal professor was "nothing but a high class racket." And added that if people realized "how many of the mighty processes of the law are merely logical legerdemain, they would not long let the lawyers lead them around by the nose."

Rodell came to be known as the father of the Plain English movement. He constantly fought for clear and concise English—rather than legalese—in law documents and journals. "I am the last one to suppose that a piece about the law could be made to read like a juicy sex novel or a detective story, but I cannot see why it has to resemble a cross between a 19th century sermon and a treatise on higher mathematics."

He prided himself on writing for lay audiences and teaching others to do so. His Law and Public Opinion class cultivated a new breed—the legal journalist. Many of his students are the leading legal journalists of today.

Rodell paid for his criticism of the legal profession. Dean Eugene Rostow of Yale Law School refused to name him to an endowed faculty chair as are most other tenured faculty. He and many others felt that it was because he had shunned scholarly pursuits for writing in the popular vein, as well as for his active criticism of the legal profession.

Fred Rodell graduated from Haverford College in 1926, having earned his Phi Beta Kappa. After attending the University of London for a year, he entered Yale Law School and graduated *magna cum laude* in 1931.

Upon graduation, Mr. Rodell worked for Governor Pinchot of Pennsylvania as a special legal advisor. Two years later, he returned to Yale Law School as an assistant professor.

Among his other activities, Rodell was a contributing editor to *The Progressive* and to *Scanlon's Magazine*. He was also a consultant to the Council for Democracy, and served on the Bethany Zoning Board and Bethany Town Commission in Connecticut. His list of private pursuits included fishing, the Philadelphia Phillies, and writing volumes of limericks.

Mr. Rodell is survived by his wife Janet, whom he married in 1954, his son Mike (a Yale Law School graduate), and two grandchildren. HALT and the community of legal reformers will miss Fred Rodell. Abe Fortas' tribute at Prof. Rodell's retirement sums up the general attitude towards him: "Here's to Give 'Em Hell Fred Rodell, irresponsible, irrefutable, irreversible, irrevocable, irremovable and totally irresistible."