

Judge Denies His Use of Term 'Faggot' Reflects Prejudice

By SCOTT C. SMITH
Staff Writer

Retired Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Henry W. Shatford, who sits on assignment in the court's Central Civil West division, used the terms "faggot" and "queer joint" during an in-camera conversation, court records show.

The 80-year-old jurist has denied that his remarks reflect a bias against gays.

The remarks were uttered during a discussion with attorneys. Shatford referred to an unrelated case to illustrate a point.

A transcript of the Jan. 9, 1997 conversation shows Shatford saying:

"It was a case where a guy stole a, a guard stole a brand new Mercedes off a rental lot in Beverly Hills and went off, and he was a faggot, and he went off to a queer joint, picked up some people and got drunk and then comin' back at seventy, eighty miles an hour, he blew a stop light an' just tore up two people enormously."

Los Angeles Superior Court Presiding Judge Robert Parkin said yesterday that he knew of no formal complaint being filed about Shatford's remark.

He declined to comment, adding that he needed more information about the remark and the context in which it was made.

Shatford said Wednesday he does not recall making the comment, but added, "if I did [use such terms], it was a nomenclature" from the past. He pointed out that judges, police officers, and prosecutors commonly used such terms throughout most of his career.

"It was a different trip in those days," he said.

Shatford added:

"I resent anyone suggesting that I would be prejudiced against a homosexual."

He noted he was disturbed that the matter was an issue, saying whoever brought it to light "does not know me."

Shatford said when he started practicing in 1947, he was one of a handful of attorneys willing to represent men caught in police sweeps of public parks and accused of homosexual acts.

"Lawyers didn't want to be bothered with those kinds of cases—they were considered penny ante stuff," he said. "I was the one guy in Monrovia who would defend homosexuals."

The judge recounted that police used to refer to Monrovia Public Park as "Homosexual Acres." They would drive by with their sirens on to flush out and arrest suspects, he said.

"Anyone who would say I'm prejudiced against homosexuals, they're out in left field," Shatford insisted. "I've known them, I've represented them, I've stood up for them...."

"They're as fine and as wonderful people as anybody."

Two attorneys who know Shatford from those days confirmed that he routinely took such cases. They contend that terms like "faggot" were commonplace then, and that Shatford's use of it reflects more his age than any bias.

As for Shatford's use of the term "faggot," Edwards said:

"Any remark like that must be a careless slip, because I know of no one who is more considerate."

He added:

"That word is repulsive to me, but it was in common use by police—it was a word that was bandied about a great deal."

Thomas F. Coleman, an openly gay attorney who won a landmark gay-rights ruling from the state Supreme Court in 1979, said yesterday that Shatford owed an apology to those who heard him utter the remark.

"It's offensive, it's hurtful," he contended, adding:

"And it does give the appearance of impropriety."

Coleman said the private context of the remark, Shatford's age, and his past help of gay people mitigated the offense, but added that judges are held to a higher standard.

He pointed out while Shatford's terminology may reflect his age, "no one would allow that excuse if he used the N-word."

Shatford probably assumed the lawyers he was talking to were straight, Coleman suggested, adding:

"But what if they weren't? Or what if they had a son or daughter who was gay or a lesbian?"

People in such a situation may be disinclined to speak out because they don't want to risk angering or embarrassing a judge, Coleman explained.

"A judge has a lot of power and [the judge] has to be very careful," he said.

Pasadena attorney Richard P.B. Tyson remarked:

"Police would use terms like 'queer,' 'faggot' and 'homo.' Those terms were kicked around quite a bit by officers and prosecutors."

Tyson said "queer joint" is simply the phrase his and Shatford's generation used to describe what today is called a gay bar.

"All kinds of expressions were used then that are not used now," he observed.

Tyson said Pasadena police would "set people up" by sending decoys into public restrooms. Shatford and others could often get the defendants acquitted because "most people don't like police to encourage crime," Tyson said.

Tyson said he, Shatford, and Pasadena attorneys Charles Hollopeter and Andrew "Bunny" Edwards "were in a class by ourselves" in representing people caught in such ploys.

"There were no public defenders in municipal court then," he said. "We handled all those cases free."

Edwards said Shatford is "a person who went out of his way to help people, and often they didn't have much money."

Metropolitan News-Enterprise
Est. 1901

Friday, June 5, 1998