

Unpopular Laws Still Merit Respect

UNION leaders and certain legislators have launched a move to revise Oklahoma's law which prohibits strikes by teachers.

The reason stated by one spokesman was that "the non-strike clause has never kept anyone from striking." Perhaps not, but it certainly brought the one this year to a sudden stop.

Arguments that the law should be modified because it may be broken is shallow logic. If this course were put into full effect, advocates also might be expected to recommend lifting of laws against murder, drunken driving, robbery, thievery and a host of other laws that are disregarded almost every day.

The rate of murder in Oklahoma City almost doubled during the first six months of 1979 and other violent crimes increased 24 per cent over 1978 rates. Should these oft-broken laws be repealed?

There is one weakness in state laws prohibiting strikes by teachers or other public employees. That is the total reluctance or disregard of

sworn duty by public officials to prosecute those who violate the law. Illegal strikers do not fear punishment.

The short-lived strike that frustrated union agitators represents proper action of the school board as agents of the public. One suggested change in the anti-strike law would transfer authority to negotiate from the elected board into the hands of appointed referees under a plan called "binding arbitration."

The theory has been bouncing around for years that laws should be repealed if they are not popular, if officials dislike to enforce them, or if they are broken with considerable frequency.

It also has been argued that laws involving morality should be eliminated, along with so-called "victimless crimes."

None of these is a valid reason for legalizing actions that may be contrary to the public interest and wellbeing.

Morality is integral to civilization. If amoral persons are permit-

ted to engage unrestrictedly in whatever activities appeal to them, rights of moral people may be invaded and subverted. Some people recognize no morality except that imposed on them by law.

There is no such thing as "victimless crime." National columnist Anthony Harrigan says: "There's always a victim of a crime, whether it is the perpetrator himself, a consenting participant, the perpetrator's family or associates, or society at large."

Educators have a responsibility for setting good examples of respect for the law and teaching others to do likewise. Of all people, teachers should be aware of the necessity and desirability of laws to preserve peace, protect the public and promote the general good.

"It is time for the law to be enforced," said Jimmy Carter, candidate for president in 1976. "We cannot educate children, create harmony among our people or preserve human freedom unless we have an orderly society."