

Professor Meltzer

Ask any former student of Bernard Meltzer: one *suffered* through his course in labor law. Reading the material, even reading it closely and carefully, seldom lessened the frantic scramble to avoid getting completely lost each class. Who could anticipate which footnotes Professor Meltzer would focus on? Who could see the connections he found between these footnotes and some case read weeks or months earlier? And to top it off, who but an archaeologist could decipher the bewildering array of “R”s and “E”s, circles and lines found on the blackboard by the end of the hour? Class with Professor Meltzer was always exhausting, often confusing, and occasionally infuriating.

Yet the things that made Professor Meltzer’s class such a tribulation were the very things that made it special, and many of us who began the course with no particular interest in labor law finished it with an abiding interest in the field. We were taught the complex methodology of the legal process and expected to appreciate that process as something independently valuable. We were forced to think hard about the relations of cases to each other, of cases to statutes, of courts to legislatures and to administrative agencies. The art of construing a statute was taught seriously: statutes were to be *read*, not treated merely as statements of principle. Above all, rather than simply cataloging the ideas and concerns embedded in the field of labor law, Professor Meltzer introduced us to the difficult task of integrating the various considerations, of finding the interweaving patterns of thought that give labor law continuity and life. For most of us, real understanding was usually just beyond our grasp. But occasionally the answer to a frustrated student’s question or an explanation offered in passing would make startlingly clear the breadth of Professor Meltzer’s understanding and the preciseness of his vision of labor law. And although such moments were often followed by another period of night and fog, the knowledge that there *was* an integrated picture inspired renewed efforts. Eventually we got the idea—more or less.

One result was that we learned an awful lot about labor law. But we learned other, more important lessons as well. We learned to respect the legal process as something more than an opportunity for clever people to manipulate ideas. We learned to respect our

role in that process. We learned the value of legal craftsmanship and the importance of engaging in the craft well and honestly, whatever the particular result. We learned, in other words, to believe in and to respect law. In this post-post-realist period, that is a lesson of inestimable value.