

The lawyers, the Law Society and even the judges themselves are in bed together to keep them cozy and protected from the laws that apply to ordinary people. Even if they break the law and destroy another family they have the power to let themselves off the hook.

Legal system protects its own

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By Paul McKay, the Ottawa Citizen

Lawyer Ed Hastings had raided trust accounts to finance real estate deals with cronies.

Hastings had stolen money from accounts to replenish trust money he owed. This "kiting" scheme lasted more than three years, until it finally collapsed in March 1997 - leaving at least eight clients out of a total of \$476,000.00

The facts were not in dispute. Hastings had waived his right to a trial and pleaded guilty to four criminal charges of fraud, theft and breach of trust. The charges carried maximum sentences of ten to 14 years in prison.

Then came the sentence. No jail time and no order to pay back his victims. Instead, Hastings was to serve 240 hours of community service. His conditional sentence also meant he was, in effect, grounded for 18 months - at home.

Judge Webster noted that while Hastings's two associates were convicted of running extensive real-estate swindles, the judge in that case had found Hastings - who acted as lawyer on the deals - "positively innocent" of any criminal intent.

Stratford businessman Ed Lalonde, a former client who lost some \$300,000 in stolen trust funds and in legal bills, isn't so charitable. He says Hastings thrived as a white-collar con man because of preferential treatment from judges and the Law Society of Upper Canada.

Hastings consented to disbarment last September largely because of evidence unearthed in an audit paid for by Lalonde. An earlier audit of the same ledgers by the Law Society had concluded that no money was missing from Hastings's trust accounts.

Lalonde sued the Law Society for his losses, but the judge ruled in the society's favour. "There's a different standard for lawyers than there is for the average person," says Lalonde.

"The legal system protects its own."