

editorial

SU apolitical

The recent decision by Students' Council to adopt a Vietnamese refugee family is commendable. The support it has received so far from the Education Students' Association and The Chinese Students Association is encouraging as well as exceptionally bold, for U of A student groups. But this decidedly apolitical action, spearheaded by members of the executive and prompted by last year's vp external Steve Kushner, only serves to accentuate the lack of political commitment on the part of Students' Council.

Since 1973 at least, the SU elections have seen battles based almost entirely on managerial abilities rather than political stands. President Dean Olmstead prides himself on being apolitical and has thus far exhibited a fair administrative ability but no political gumption.

And Olmstead is the rule, not the exception. The election of activist Cheryl Hume to the presidency last year seems now to be an anachronism rather than the beginning of a new trend. Candidates successful in SU elections are usually the most non-committal and non-political in the campaign. Because of this, our Students' Union has become an administrative group serving as business leaders and financiers instead of political leaders. Olmstead does not lead; he doesn't even fight.

The refugee adoption plans have thrust the SU into a political mess they haven't stopped to examine or understand. Though the motives haven't been offered or discussed, it seems fair to say that humanitarian concerns were behind the plan.

I congratulate this humanitarian outlook and hope the adoption plan is successful. But I don't feel overjoyed about it, nor do I feel the SU's role in the Vietnamese problem should be limited to the tokenism this plan suggests. Just as the boycott of Southern African products is in itself no solution but a small beginning, so is the adoption scheme a small gesture.

The SU should demand that the Canadian government begin sending aid to Vietnam. If we want to stop the plight of boat people, it makes sense to try and stop the problem internally. When the countries of Europe, allied and enemy, received aid after the Second World War, the aid was offered to help the countries reconstruct so they could prevent an obvious post-war deterioration. Why isn't the same being done in Vietnam?

Further to this, if our Students' Union sees fit to involve itself in this issue, then they should examine the facts and analyze their actions. One refugee family is not the answer, as a boycott of Rothman's is not the answer. Besides opening coffee shops and redesigning their offices, the executive should be leading students in political matters.

Elections should be brought back to some form of political confrontation. Whether you're left or right does not matter. What is important is that you are given the chance to vote for an executive *along those lines*. Right now we are electing a Board of Directors; staffing a quasi-Grad School in Business Administration.

More importantly, the time has come to re-assess the role and function of the Students' Union. We have been electing careerist administrators over the past few years and student concerns have ended up being insignificant compared to the smooth, profitable operation of RATT and SU Records. Perhaps we should break up the huge centralized bureaucracy and replace it with students representing students.

Gordon Turtle

the Gateway

If it happens on campus...it's news to us.

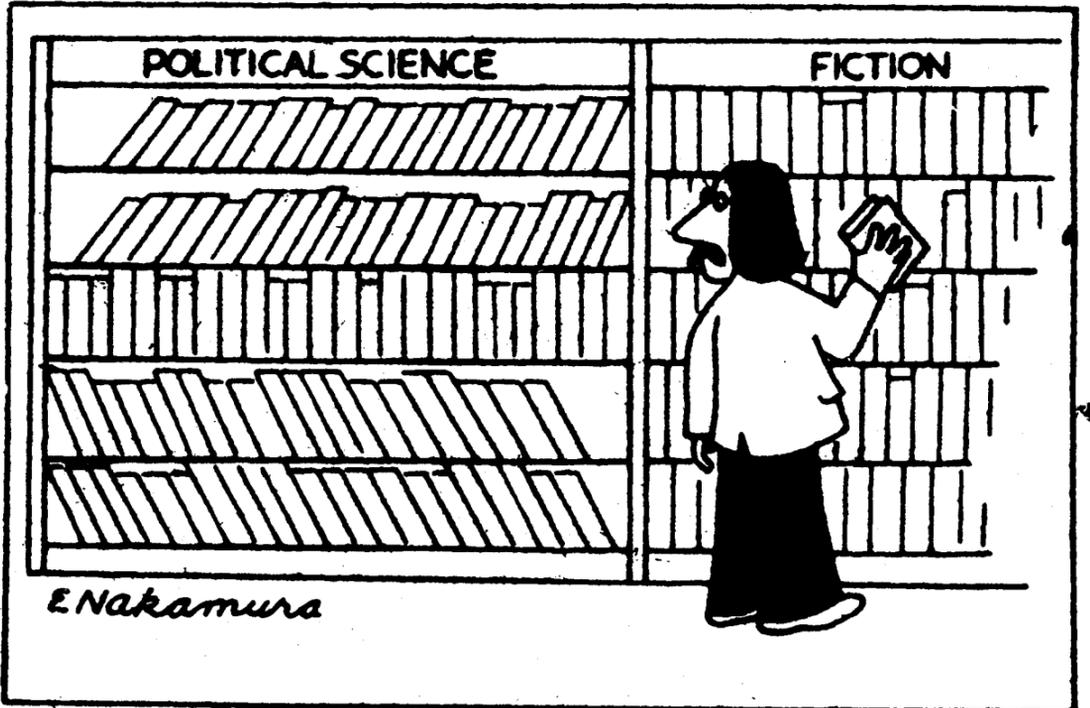
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Irish problems complex

One is not surprised to see over-simplifications of the extremely complex Irish problems. However, Mr. Robert Orr, as a presumed graduate student, should know better.

The space of a letter does not allow enough to state these complexities. That would take a book. I would suggest F.S.L. Lyon's *Ireland Since the Famine* as the most impartial and comprehensive work available.

To deal briefly with Mr. Orr's letter:

1. One of the biggest questions about majority and minority rights is this: majority of what? One has several choices. Majority of the British Isles? Or Ireland? Of the northern half (fifteen counties) of Ireland? Of Ulster (all nine counties)? Why the six counties which are presently in union with Great Britain? The answer is that your other alternatives all produced a majority which favoured disunion, and the six counties were the largest area in which a comfortable Unionist majority could be found. The unionist "majority" is something of a creation.

2. Until 1973, there was indeed "one party" rule. The Ulster Unionist party was well able to contain dissident unionist groups until the introduction of a proportional representation system, which eliminated fears of "splitting the vote" in individual constituencies. Since then there has been considerable fragmentation, but it is important to note that this is a recent development.

3. Mr. Orr, (and I suspect, Mr. Marples) do not understand the difference between majoritarian tyranny and majoritarian democracy. In Glasgow the Labour Council at least attempts to govern on behalf of all Glaswegians; Conservatives are not exempted from the benefits (or, if you prefer, hazards) of society. Even in Alberta the government keeps up the pretence. However, if such a government assumes that a part of the non-majority is itself to be excluded systematically from the benefits of government, this becomes a majority tyranny. Minority rights are an essential condition of democracy. Such as the nationalist "minority" enjoy are a consequence of Westminster's legislation, not Belfast's. It was precisely because Lord O'Neill attempted to introduce the idea that the Stormont government should govern

in the interests of all, that caused his downfall. I assume Mr. Orr is not aware that it was not even possible for a Roman Catholic to become a member of the Unionist Party until 1970.

4. It is, unfortunately, unclear that Unionist opinion is of one mind about the union with Britain. Presently, there are two distinct strands of thought. The first is genuinely unionist, in its belief that Ireland would be better united with Great Britain, for various economic and ideological reasons. The second favors union only if the exclusive supremacy of the Orangeist population (I don't know what to call it, local majority, over-all minority, or what. It is unfair and misleading to call it Protestant) can be maintained. The second party's end is not union with Britain, as such. It would like Stormont back (which was the glue holding the two unionisms together), or even independence. The first party would prefer all Ireland united with the United Kingdom, but has settled for what it can get.

5. Similarly, Mr. Orr seems unable to distinguish between nationalist and republican opinion among the rest; in fact, republican parties have never done very well compared to the successors to the old Parliamentary Nationalist Party. The differences are fairly complex, but basically, the nationalist tradition is less sectarian and less adamant than the republican.

6. I agree with Mr. Orr that "the IRA seem to have a disproportionate share of the world

stage." Certainly, one should pay more attention to the Ulster Volunteer Force, Ulster Freedom Fighters, etc.

7. The financing of these para-military organizations is indeed of great interest. The "red" IRA (the so-called officials), and the Irish National Liberation Army are financed and equipped by the Soviet Union and Libya. The "green" IRA (the so-called Provisionals) get arms largely from the United States, although it also receives aid from Libya. The UVF, UFF, NOA, etc. are financed and equipped by fundamentalist Protestant groups, and from various "loyalist" organizations throughout the former British Empire. Undoubtedly some money goes to both sides from Canada. Both are supplied by sundry unofficial armaments exporters. There are demonstrated links through Belgium and South Africa. The ideological implications are not simple, and Mr. Orr would do well not to jump to conclusions about detente.

I would undoubtedly comment further about Mr. Marples' responses not been as sensible as they were. I can only state that Mr. Marples' knowledge is manifestly second-hand and grossly over-simplified. If things were as simple as they are generally made out in the media, they would have been resolved long ago.

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Quixotic concerns

Last week there appeared in your pages a "reader comment" by David R. Marples of such an extreme nature that I felt obliged to reply to it in order to set the record straight. Today I was appalled to open the *Gateway* to find that this same Mr. Marples has been awarded a regular column. On a first reading it seemed as though a successor to Frank Mutton and Paul Bumstead had been found, but a closer inspection forced me to the conclusion that Mr. Marples was trying to be at least marginally serious. Now, whilst Mr. Marples has every right to his somewhat eccentric opinions, I question the editorial policy of inflicting them on a wider readership. It is obvious to anyone aware of current student attitudes that students are no

longer interested in this type of leftist pseudo-environmentalist moralising. Today's students realise that they are in a privileged position, which is not to be abused by dabbling with these groups that are attempting to undermine the society that has given them this marvellous opportunity to study.

I would suggest that the hard working students of this University would be better served by a columnist that more closely represented their own viewpoint. I am not denying the right of free speech, but it seems strange that a representative of minority opinion be allowed a regular feature in a paper that is run for the entire student population.

Charles Farley
Comm