

Disarmament referendum nuked by city council

by Cathy McDonald

Halifax residents might be taking a stand on nuclear disarmament while electing their alderman and mayor, but it was decided last Wednesday that a referendum on the issue will definitely not take place during these elections.

The last chance to make arrangements between Halifax city council and the Coalition Against Nuclear War for holding a referendum on disarmament was defeated at the council's last meeting. This

culminated a lengthy debate over the legality and relevance of holding a referendum on nuclear disarmament in Halifax.

The Coalition Against Nuclear War, representing 35 Halifax organizations, wanted the referendum to take place "to give people the opportunity to express their views on disarmament", according to spokesperson Dr. Gerhardt Stroink.

Although approval was granted after a two-hour council debate on

August 26, the referendum was disallowed on the advice of the city solicitor that it was illegal. He deemed such a referendum to be not in the city's jurisdiction, and could possibly be used to invalidate the election process.

A second opinion from the Attorney General saw no danger of the referendum jeopardizing the election.

The Coalition agreed to provide the people, ballots and boxes to run the referendum parallel to the elections, at no cost to the city.

The city would have allowed the Coalition to set up their polls in rooms separate from regular polls, but the Coalition disagreed. "The whole purpose of the referendum was to incorporate it with city elections," said Marion Kerans, speaking on behalf of the Coalition. Of the 117 cities holding referenda on

nuclear disarmament in Canada this fall, virtually all of them staged the referendum along with their municipal elections.

Alderman Leblanc strongly opposed the referendum idea, saying he's "all in favour of providing access for people to express their views on nuclear disarmament, but in a form separate from the election".

Leblanc said he was in favour of providing a facility where interested people could sign a petition endorsing nuclear disarmament on election day.

Kerans accused city council of lacking "moral courage". A statement endorsed by all the religious leaders in the city asked city council to approach the issue from a moral standpoint rather than as a "narrow, legal issue".

The purpose of the referendum

was to be an indicator of the public will. Operation Dismantle, a national organization involved in organizing referenda on disarmament, asserts that referenda on nuclear disarmament will help pressure governments to achieve the goal of balanced disarmament. The referenda which Operation Dismantle refers to is in combination with other cities, and eventually other countries.

Three members of Parliament, one from each party, will address interested people on Friday October 14, a stop which was originally to encourage people to vote 'yes' on a disarmament referendum. They will still speak in Halifax, at the Anglican Diocese, their first gathering on a tour across Canada to cities holding such a vote.

So- you want to cast your ballot

by Leo Jacobs

Single students wishing to exercise their franchise in the October sixteenth Halifax municipal election will have to swear an oath of eligibility to be registered on the voters' list.

Students who take the oath at the polling station on election day may vote, says Sheila Allard, a Halifax Electoral clerk, "provided they have set up a residence in Halifax and don't intend to return to their family home".

To qualify for resident status a person must have spent the six months preceding the election living in the municipality and continue to live there.

Unmarried students are distinguished from ordinary citizens by section 14(2) of the Municipal Elections Act which states: "Where a person is an unmarried student having a family in the province, he is ordinarily resident where that home is."

The arbitrary classification of all

unmarried students as residents in their family's home is necessary to remove confusion for enumerators compiling the voters' list, according to Allard.

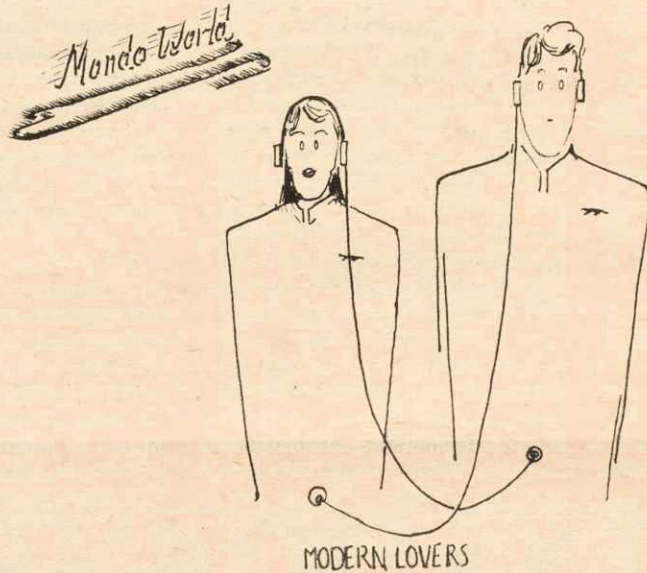
Out-of-town students who have set up independent residences are "responsible to register, if they weren't regularly enumerated," said Allard.

Students who don't qualify as residents of their local municipality can vote by proxy in their family home municipality.

Students wishing to vote by proxy must be on the voting list in their family home municipality, otherwise the student must go to the polling station on election day or to an advance poll and register.

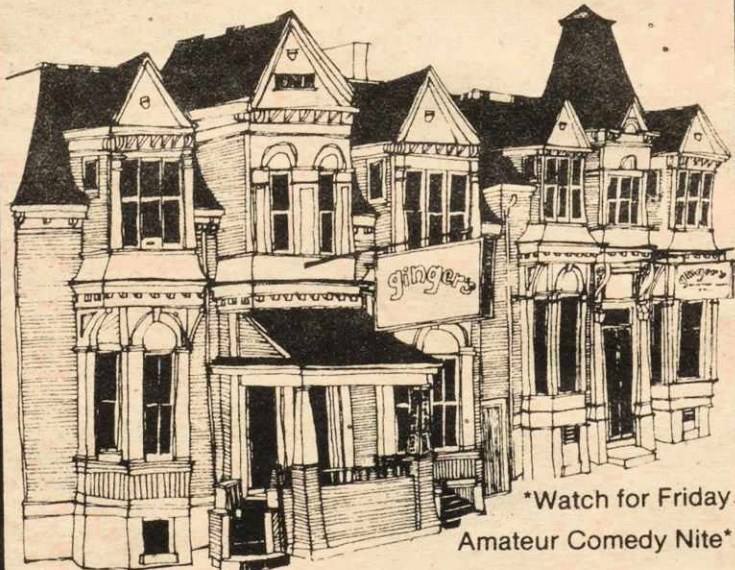
Proxy applications must have been filled in the home municipality by October thirteenth in order to be effective.

Allard commented that the problem of where a student votes occurs prior to every election and "will never be resolved".



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