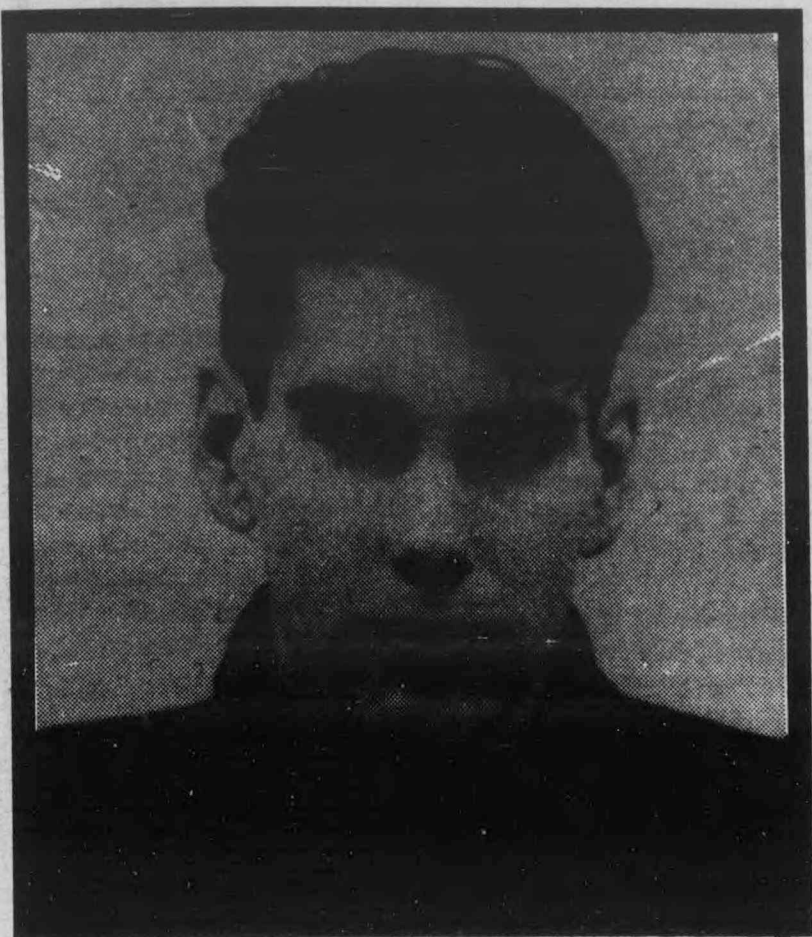


A letter from Tokyo



More than five years since his dramatic departure from UNB, former Student Union President, John Bosnitch demonstrates that for him, the issues brought up during the traumatic early eighties are still relevant to an understanding of Student politics today.

The content of this letter reflects a single person's perception of the events that took place during the early eighties at UNB. There is little doubt that many will hold different views and will have very contradictory recall of the events. Despite this, Bosnitch's letter offers him a chance to make a case for himself in a paper that saw it fit not to grant him such a forum in the past.

The following represents only a part of a longer letter written by Bosnitch to the Brunswickan in response to an article published in this paper a few weeks ago. In the second half he refutes, point for point, many of the allegations made against himself and his supporters in the Brunswickan article. We regret not being able to publish the letter in its entirety but are committed to using it as the basis of a fully investigated article on the Bosnitch era to be published in early Fall.

academic treatment from faculty or administrators. Many members of the faculty, Senate, and Board of Governors, who were accustomed to doing whatever they wanted, were upset by the prospect of being subjected to serious student criticism.

Our last objective was to translate the energy of the student body into some sort of political power. We believed that the presidents of the Student Union, Faculty Union, and Staff Union, should all be treated with respect by the President of the University. Students formed an overwhelming majority of the population of the campus and simply had to be consulted on all issues concerning their affairs. We also recognized that students formed almost a quarter of the population of the city, and wondered why there were no student representative (or even observers) at city hall. We flexed our muscles with actions intended to influence provincial and federal policies. In so doing, we entered a field that was always been closed to Canadian students - the field of political participation as equal citizens. This most progressive action created even more opposition from established civic and political leaders who told us we couldn't participate in politics until we had "grown up."

In fact, what we were trying to do at UNB in the early eighties was exactly what students have succeeded in doing in countries all over the world in the past two years. We saw things that we knew were wrong, and we set out to change them.

Unluckily for us, our opponents were very strong and well organized. An alliance was formed to destroy the student movement. It included old-line political party groups, businessmen who thought the University belonged to the civic leaders who thought the "kids" on the campus were "makin' too much of a fuss", and the University administration which saw its ivory tower kingdom being turned into a democracy.

We were eventually locked out of our offices. Still idealistic enough to believe in the rule of law, we took our case all the way to the highest court in New Brunswick. Two years later, the court declared that the University lockout of the Student Union had violated the legal by-laws of the Union. By then, so much time had passed that legitimate student leaders could not be reinstated. At a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars in public money, the University had killed the Union. It was, however, a hollow victory for them insofar as our court battle had established once and for all that such take-overs were unlawful.

I understand the hardships that must confront a reporter trying to find the facts amid the wildly biased Brunswickan reporting of that era. However, I have a duty to the students of that era and to the ideals for which we fought, to see the truth appear in print. Exactly five years have now passed since the Administration destroyed the Student Union government at UNB. I hope that your editors will agree that the time has finally come for the students to hear this hidden story.

Sincerely,
John Bosnitch

Dear Editor:

I just received a faxed copy of your recent article about my years at UNB. Your long overdue admission that the Brunswickan's coverage of that period had been "heavily biased," has enticed me to write this response.

To start with, that period of student activism has never been analyzed from the perspective of what it was that the students were trying to achieve. The University administration and the local establishment were extremely successful in suppressing the publication of any articles which examined the goals of the student body during those years.

Virtually all of the people who eventually became central figures in the struggle for campus democracy were originally scholarship recipients, academic prize-winners, and serious students. Contrary to the image of student activists portrayed by the press, we came mostly from the "serious" faculties of engineering and science. We arrived as bright-eyed young idealists in our freshman years. We were told that having graduated from high school, we were now going to enter that privileged class called university students.

I became a dedicated surveying engineering student - working without sleep for several weeks to win the North American prize in my field. After that effort, however, I caught T.B. and spent the next six weeks in an isolation ward in the hospital. That brush with death caused me to re-examine my own life. I realized that no matter how well I did in school, I had done little if anything to improve the world around me. With this in mind, I began to look at things from a new perspective.

I quickly realized that the University was not designed to teach me how to make the world a better place. It was in fact, only a machine built to make students conform and buckle down under the weight of the system. Instead of promoting the ideals of experimentation and free open thought, the University served primarily to make us all fit into society as tiny cogs in a wheel over

which we exercised absolutely no control.

The image of the great 'university student' faded from view, and we students started to recognize that we were being treated as children. We realized that we were being gouged financially on all sides. Our own university bookstore turned profits of tens of thousands of dollars. The stores in the SUB charged whatever prices they wanted. Students worked for minimum wage in restaurants all over town and yet the administration wouldn't let us run our own cafeteria. Any time the administration wanted to raise money, they would lean on the student government to raise its fees. Of course, all these "rip-offs" would be matched by a hefty annual tuition hike always approved in the summer when students were away on vacation.

Accommodations in town were expensive, cramped and hard to find. Things were twice as bad if you were black. Regular reports of racism eventually led to the firing of the University administrator in charge of foreign students.

On campus, even simple tasks seemed impossible. To get something photocopied you had to stand in line for hours - if you were lucky enough to get to the library while it was still open. Parking places for students just couldn't be found.

In the classroom there were professors who actually took attendance reminding us of our kindergarten days when the teacher would stick a pretty gold star in our books to show Mom and Dad that we actually came to class. At examination time, some students had to write as many as three exams in a single day. Student representation at all levels was feeble and ineffective.

Enough was enough. A small group of students organized to change the university. The student movement on campus, dead since the sixties, was reborn.

First, the student government had to become a real "union". It had to start confronting problems aggressively. It had to operate totally openly. Closed, secret meetings were banned. Representatives who continually failed to show up were automatically impeached. Controversial issues were decided by the whole student body by

referendum - as many as fourteen questions appeared on a single ballot. Students on the Senate and Board of Governors were required to report on what they had done to help the students. We declared an end to all Student Union fee hikes and cut the fees to \$30. We replaced what were mere popularity contests, with real elections fought on principle. Naturally, we made enemies among those who thought student government was just a game designed to add a line to a resume.

Our second objective was to place students in-charge of their own services. The SUB was brought under direct Student Union management for the first time since it was built in 1968. The stores in the building were told they would have to compete for their lease against student cooperative ventures. We refused to allow any raise in price of alcohol at student events despite the university's desire to generate profits from student parties. We opened a convenience store of our own in the SUB which was non-profit, open from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 a.m., sold text books, food and stationery, and offered photocopying at five cents a page. We provided free legal services, a housing placement service, job bank, and tutorial and typing exchange. We spearheaded the purchase of Rosary Hall to serve as a new student residence. Students realized that the only thing that had stopped us from doing all these things earlier was a lack of will-power and determination. Everything started to seem possible to us. Of course, the businessmen who lost profits because of our new services were furious.

The third goal of the movement was to improve the academic quality of the University. We published the results of our own Student Union faculty evaluations - printing (unedited) comments and evaluations that students made of their professors. We organized an academic lecture series that grappled with the real issues of the day, always inviting speakers from both sides of an issue, no matter how unpopular they might be. We introduced academic reforms at the Senate and Board of Governors. The Student Union set up an entire department for academic matters, and successfully defended students who had not received fair

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