

"ombudsman"

Brian Borley is a fourth year student in Education. For the past 20 years or so, he has been teaching Special Ed in the disadvantaged north of this province, with a teaching certificate. During this time, he has tried to squeeze in enough education courses to bring his qualifications up to the level of the B.Ed. which is now required of new teachers before they may teach at all in this province. With occasional summertime trips to Edmonton and attendance at the evening courses given at various centers throughout the province, he has picked up 10 courses over the years: but in his field of Special Ed, some of the courses required either by his program or his field of interest are available only during the regular session. So this year he is in Edmonton, finishing his program.

If you have problems you want the "Ombudsman" to help with, or if you're someone who wants to help solve others' problems, contact Dirk Schaeffer at 439-6486 or a person at 1010 Newton Place, 8515-112 St.) or Kevin Giliese in Gateway 432-5178 (Room 282, SUB) or at home, 433-2136.

For the last eleven years, he has been teaching at Lac la Biche, where his contract with the School Board specified that sabbatical leaves to complete degrees may be given to qualified candidates after five years of service. Before coming back to Edmonton, he applied for such a sabbatical. Eleven years in the most underdeveloped, underprivileged, and necessary area of education, and a desire to upgrade one's training to the current minimum level, would seem to be ample qualifications. His application was rejected, on grounds of financial shortage in Lac la Biche. That School Board's annual statement for this year, however, apparently listed a \$68,000 surplus.

So Brian Borley applied for a bursary from the Northern Alberta Student Bursary Program. That program was set up to encourage qualified teachers to work in the educationally disadvantaged North: bursaries are granted in part in exchange for a commitment to work in the North for specified periods. That

application was rejected too, on grounds that he didn't qualify: the program is designed to attract *new* teachers, not encourage those already there to stay there.

So he quit his job, sold his house, and moved to Edmonton. He doesn't know where he'll go from here: but certainly not back to Lac la Biche.

There is, as near as we can tell, nothing in any way illegal or *wrong*, in the technical sense, about the treatment that Brian has received from various agencies which *claim* to be concerned to bring better teachers to the North. There seems to us to be several things wrong with the system that has established these particular rules, however. So, we checked it out.

The Alberta Teachers' Association maintains a Grievance Board to handle complaints of this nature. There is nothing they can do: if the contract says "may" that means the School Board can make any decision they please.

The Provincial Department of Education professes over and over to be concerned about the quality of teaching in the North. There is nothing they can do: school boards have full autonomy and authority in contractual matters.

The Northern Alberta Student Bursary Program wants better teachers in the North. There is nothing they can do: the program specifically disqualifies those with previous teaching experience in the north.

The Superintendent of Schools at Lac la Biche is, in general, sympathetic to Brian and his request. There is nothing he can do: he does not sit on the School Board and can only "advise."

The Provincial Ombudsman is supposed to mediate between people and bureaucracy. There is nothing he can do: he has no authority over local school boards.

Not only is there nothing these people can do: there is nothing they *care* to do. Over and over, as I talked to these various persons and agencies, the impression I received was that they had rules, and that was that. Most clearly, the Associate Deputy Minister at the Department of Education, informed me that the situation was clearcut: either the school boards have autonomy, and you live with their decisions or you don't

- with the implication of heavy Provincial control, which is in many ways even more undesirable. (The ADM also assured me that the \$68,000 surplus probably existed "on paper only," whatever that is supposed to mean. The phrase seems to disguise an interlocking network of lies that simply boggles the mind.)

What virtually none of these people either recognized or wanted to acknowledge when I suggested it, was that there are alternatives between rigid rules and total anarchy. These include things like appeals procedures, review committees, and ombudsmen. Agencies of this nature allow one to give authority to whoever is best or most conveniently qualified to use it *in the general case*, but still retain the right to undertake corrective action when such authority is misused, or appears to be misused, *in the specific case*. By and large, they are the most sensible things bureaucrats have ever invented.

The Associate Deputy Minister simply did not want to hear of them; the Bursary Program could not conceptualize them; the ATA was too busy fighting to get *mandatory* sabbaticals into the contract to be concerned with them.

Back to Brian: what do you do? Nothing, really. He's made the only move open to him - faced with the option of continuing work in the North, at low pay because he lacks the B.Ed., and giving that up to finish his degree and take his chances in a new job market, he's chosen to move on, regardless of cost. It's his decision alone, and probably a good one. He's learned, the hard way, that good and effective teachers in fields like Special Ed - where goodness and effectiveness are measured in terms of *concern*, rather than in terms of *discipline* - are not the ones most likely to be looked on with favor and favoritism by School Boards and Administrations. He's learned that contracts with inviting clauses are more likely to be con games than reality. He's learned that the government feels that once you're hooked, they can forget about you. He's learned that as an applicant, he's got no rights whatsoever.

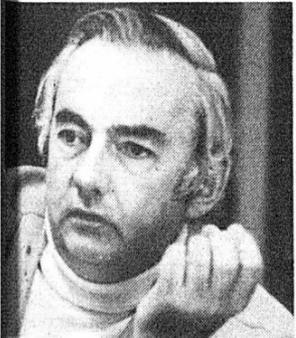
It's only taken him 20 years. With luck, some of the rest of you, heading for the same careers and same disappointments, can learn the same lessons just by observing closely this University around you.

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Reaction against proposal

A proposal circulating among faculty members which would reorganize the academic power structure at the U of A has already prompted strong reaction from student and faculty representatives.

"I don't like it," said Dr. Al



Dr. Al Mackay

Mackay Monday. Mackay, chairman of the elementary education department, said he disliked the idea of placing a disproportionate amount of power in the hands of department chairmen.

"Even though some of the stuff in the proposal is fairly important, I think the overall effect of the proposal would be to shift the power, the decision-making capability or whatever you want to call it, square into the hands of the departmental chairmen," Mackay said.

"It gives too much power to the chairman and takes it away from the staff and students within a department."

Students' Union president Len Zoeteman reacted to the provision in the proposal for student representation at a departmental level, criticizing what he called its "tight-line structure"

"The proposal, if implemented, would create the impossible task of finding between 300 and 500 students on

this campus with a keen enough political interest to fill the proposed departmental committees," Zoeteman said.

"But they (the chairmen submitting the proposal) are not concerned about that, even though they know that's the case," he said.

Zoeteman blasted the recommendation contained in the proposal that students be granted only departmental representation with no representation on boards and committees of higher authority.

"It's not even comparable to when there was zero representation on General Faculties Council (GFC)," Zoeteman said.

"It's even more right-wing than that."

Chemistry prof Dr. Bob Crawford, a member of GFC's executive committee, argued that the proposal, submitted by a committee of department chairmen, might not be a true indication of how all department chairmen on campus felt.

"They should have taken a referendum to see how many chairmen agree with this," he said. "My feeling is there are a lot of very good, conscientious chairmen who wouldn't go along with this proposal."

Crawford cited the hierarchical design of the proposal as its major weakness. "Somebody could take this proposal and turn it to their own advantage," he said.

"Although there are components that are good, administrative hierarchies are not representative... The university is such a complex thing and it has so many facets, that representation is difficult through administrative systems themselves."

Crawford used the Faculty of Science as an example of this by

showing 300 faculty members are represented by one dean on Dean's Council, whereas the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, with only 18 faculty members, is also represented by one dean.

"The faculties of Science, Arts and Education make up over one-half of all the students on campus, yet are represented by only three out of 18 deans on the Deans' Council. So you can't just have administrative hierarchies and expect them to be representative."

Although Crawford said there is a definite need to restructure the current academic power structure - "to remodel our system with GFC and make it more efficient" - he said streamlining the structure through granting more power to department chairmen was not the right way.

"It's my frank opinion that this proposal came out of chairmen's frustration with administrative details, the business side of academic life," Crawford



SU president Len Zoeteman.

said. "I think they wanted to attack the business side of the University and I think they probably would have good reason for that."

"But this thing is attacking the academic side where I think they really have much less to complain about."

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