

QUEST FOR FUNDS

Baldwin speaks out against protest at GFC

an analysis by Allen Young

If you are wondering as a U of A student whether or not you should join your colleagues this Thursday in the protest march to the Alberta Legislature asking for better university funding, then perhaps the best statement which may help you make up your mind was given last week by University Vice President of Academics George Baldwin.

In debate on whether or not the General Faculties Council (GFC) should cancel classes in support of the student protest, Baldwin gave an anecdote which he said summed up his brief involvement in student activism during the 1960's.

Baldwin said the bulk of his political activism consisted of his hiding in the bushes north of the Faculty Club with a camera man awaiting the arrival of representatives of government and University members who would attend a meeting. The Reps arrived, put coins in the parking meters, and then walked into the Faculty Club for their meeting. This 1960's political action was a waste of time. Young Baldwin and his camera man were left hiding in the bushes with a feeling of oppressive and overwhelming "embarrassment".

One may wonder if as a member of the Board of Governors, Baldwin feels comparable embarrassment over the non-results of the past ten years of negotiations for operating funds. It is certainly understandable that the members of the Board may feel frustration. We have seen effective cuts in the number of instructors on this campus as the University has been forced to adopt a policy of not hiring new staff members as positions become vacant. We have seen the University Library

truncated as funding for acquisitions has barely been adequate for the purchase of essential new publications, let alone for filling in the gaping holes left in the collection by oversights and underfunding of years past. Even as the GFC listened to Baldwin's anecdote, any member who cared to roll his eyes to the ceiling, with its alternate darkened fluorescent fixtures, would have noticed that the debate went on under half-light.

Finally, one of the worst aspects of underfunding, also apparent at the GFC meeting, is that we have seen the various University departments split in their approach to fundraising and disastrously divided in their attitudes towards the problems facing the university.

If embarrassment was what typified some of the student protests of the 1960's then it was probably frustration that typified the protest march of five years ago. One of the concessions the University was asking for in 1977 was for information regarding operations grants to be given for five year budget periods. It was thought that this would ease the frustration faced by the administration forced to make firm budget commitments on a nannual basis without knowing how much money would be available. It would also ease the confusion faced by students forced to enter their three of four year programs without knowing what the level of their tuition fees or the condition of the library would be in the final years of their studies.

Instead, the University has had to deal with repeated surprise announcements of underfunding and the students face increasing fees for a steadily declining quality of education. The notion of "five year plan" a concept which is more consis-

tent with a philosophy which believes in progress, appears as a filthy notion for the conservative government.

The frustration felt by everyone listening to the line given by Premier Lougheed on the steps of the legislature in 1977 (that Alberta has the highest per-capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada) was given the clearest articulation possible. Students told the Premier that his words on university funding were bullshit.

So if you are still wondering whether you should join the protest Thursday - weather permitting - then you need only consider the nature of Baldwin's argument to GFC. By confessing to the Council the misery of his own act of political activism, he was hoping to paint this Thursday's protest march with the color of his personal embarrassment.

Baldwin, like the rest of us, is a rhetorician. He could not give an honest reason why the GFC should not have supported the students so he chose to urge the Council to join him with a subtle sort of red baiting and a denial that there has been any sort of progress or evolution of student political consciousness.

Just as the government seems to be philosophically insensitive to the notion of progress with its refusal of five year funding plans, Baldwin's attempt to tell us that the March scheduled for Thursday will turn out the same as events which took place during the 1960's is an inhuman and pessimistic denial of the belief in man's ability to improve himself, a belief as integral to the concept of a university as the belief in fraternity, described above as a notion which is rapidly being eroded by inadequate funding.

The extensive lobbying and painstaking preparations which have gone into the student organized National Week of Protest, is anything but an embarrassment. No one is hiding in the bushes and if members of the government and University will be as up front in their dealings as the students have been in organizing this bit of activism then it is unlikely that the speeches will be interrupted by the frustrated shouting that characterized the demonstration of 1977.

A demonstration can be

anything the students, the government, and the community make of it. It can be a protest against underfunding and an appeal to the community by a concerned and united university facing certain ruin if restraint continues.

Perhaps it will turn out to be only a feeble statement against the creeping fascism that has characterized the beginning of this decade. The only way a demonstration from this university can be an embarrassment is if it is poorly attended, regardless of the weather.



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