

Blood n' Thunder

continued...

TRUST IN OUR SU REPRESENTATIVES ??!

Dear Editor:

I was somewhat surprised to read accounts of the events surrounding the actions of the UNB and STU Student Unions during the recent January 25 national student action opposing cuts to education and social programs. As a former student at both UNB and STU, and as the former Comptroller (1986-87) and Vice-President Services (1987) of the UNB Student Union, I was quite dismayed at what appears to be the betrayal of the students by their elected representatives, apparently precipitated by a desire on the part of certain student bureaucrats to disassociate from the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS).

The student action was called by CFS for January 25 and endorsed by numerous groups, including labour organizations, anti-poverty groups, womens' groups, immigrant groups, native Canadian organizations, and various others. The UNB and STU Student Unions attempt to portray the student action as the act of only a small group, such as the International Socialists, is somewhat ludicrous, and is clearly a form of red-baiting which is aimed at strengthening an anti-CFS position. One hundred thousand students protesting from St. John's, Newfoundland to Victoria, B.C. hardly represents only the work of one group of socialists, but rather represents something much broader.

It is certainly true that the International Socialists (a group to which I have belonged for over seven years) were involved in the student actions on various campuses across the country. The I.S. has campus groups in most cities made up of students who are serious activists concerned about creating a better society. It is not surprising that these student activists would participate as part of a fightback against cuts which will decrease their accessibility to education. In Fredericton, the local International Socialists, made up largely of students, meets weekly at Saint Thomas University in Room G12 of the Edmund Casey Building.

For the student unions to suggest that students should leave the business of protesting and organizing demonstrations up to the elected representatives on the stu-

dent unions is as absurd as suggesting that we should simply place all of our trust in our elected representatives in Ottawa, namely the Chrétien Liberal government. The logical conclusion of such an argument is that the students themselves are not intelligent enough to decide for themselves the direction to take in terms of whether or not to protest measures they find distasteful. For the student unions to attack organizers of the Fredericton student action is to attack the basis of democracy itself, which allows dissent and organization of protest.

It should be pointed out that various groups which have had, or do presently have, differences with the Canadian Federation of Students were able to put aside any sectarian bickering during the student action in late January. For example, at Langara College in Vancouver, where I have been active politically for the past two years, the Langara Students Union voted a year ago to disaffiliate from CFS. In fact, in the days and weeks leading up to the student action, Langara Student Union and CFS were in court, battling out an issue of over one hundred thousand dollars in dues for which CFS is suing Langara. However, at the same time, the Langara Students Union came out strongly in support of the student action called by CFS, becoming a key participant in the Greater Vancouver Student Committee to Fight the Cuts, a coalition representing seven post-secondary institutions, numerous high schools, and the Canadian Federation of Students. In fact, when approached by activists to participate in the fight against cutbacks, the Langara Student Union not only agreed to work with CFS, they donated ten thousand dollars towards the cause. Langara students were represented by a large contingent at a city wide demonstration of over six thousand students at which speakers from Langara, CFS, native groups, anti-poverty groups, and many others addressed the crowd.

I would strongly urge the UNB and STU Student Unions to put aside their differences with CFS long enough to work on the behalf of students on their campuses and fight the pending cutbacks to education and social programs which will affect every student on both campuses.

—Sincerely, Tony Tracy
Former Comptroller, UNB Student
Union (1986-87), Vancouver, British
Columbia

SPECTRUM

Metanoia by John Valk

Invitation to "John Doe"

appreciated reading "John Doe's" comments in his "The Religious Establishment and Social Change" (*Blood and Thunder*, Feb. 17). He has focused on a subject area not frequently addressed in the university's print media. In that way he does not display the usual aversion or indifference to religious topics so common at our public institutions of higher learning.

I sense that Mr. "Doe" is frustrated

Most helpful is careful and reasoned input. Thus it is important that criticism not come in the form of broad generalisations. Generalisations are prone to create distortions. Mr. "Doe's" letter tends in that direction.

Would Mr. "Doe" recognize when the "religious establishment" is a catalyst, rather than stumbling block, for positive change? Is he aware, for example,

change" in this world? Is it the World Bank or International Monetary Fund, which now admit that many of their projects in Third World Countries were complete failures? Or is it our own government, whose aid to developing countries comes with such strings attached that it is unclear who is benefiting the most? Or is it the "religious establishments", whose many churches or members are involved in numerous countries, not primarily to seek con-

"I sense that Mr. 'Doe' is frustrated with the 'religious establishment'. I hope he is angry. Constructive anger leads to progressive change. Indifference leads only to inaction."

with the "religious establishment". I hope he is angry. Constructive anger leads to progressive change. Indifference leads only to inaction.

There is merit in what Mr. "Doe" says. Could it be, as he seems to intimate, that the religious establishment is indeed too slow to act, that it operates with old paradigms? Does it consist of those too "old" to change, or too comfortable with the status quo?

If such is the case then we desperately need change, and that change may need to come from our youth. Many will recognize that hope for change in this world lies with the young. Indeed, they are our greatest asset. Hence, we need their input.

of the impact of Leo XIII's encyclical "Rerum Novarum" in healing much of the social devastation created by the "progressive changes" of 19th Century unbridled capitalism. Is he aware that Christian churches were among the first to send food, aid and personnel to Rwanda and Somalia? Is he aware that they continue to sponsor, at their own cost, refugees from these and other countries, long after the rest of Canada has forgotten about them or seeks only their "economically viability"?

We might further ask who is really involved in "progressive

verts, but to assist disadvantaged people in developing or improving their own crop production, water systems, health care, cottage industry, and housing projects, to list but a few?

Mr. "Doe" must recognize also that what may appear to be "progressive" is not such at all. It should not surprise us that the "religious establishment" frequently takes an unpopular stance, and a more difficult approach. Rather than acquiescing to divorce, for example, it offers instead pre-marriage counselling to prepare couples for the reality of marriage. Rather than advocating "pro-choice", it offers instead pregnancy counselling and care (even post-abortion healing) in order to provide life-affirming, not life negating, solutions.

Not much of the above is mentioned in the mainstream media. It prefers to report extremes and excesses, or reduce all issues to simplistic terms. If the mainstream media is one's prime source of information, then Mr. "Doe's" comments are entirely understandable.

That does not, however, negate some of Mr. "Doe's" concerns, for the "religious establishment" is far from perfect. For that reason it is important that those who seek to change the establishment also join it. They must be on the inside. Cheap shots from the outside, or the periphery, are just that—cheap. Only those on the inside can change the establishment.

One further matter. The "religious establishment" (at least the Christian one) rests ultimately on the teachings of Jesus Christ. That means Mr. "Doe", and others, must wrestle with the meaning of these teachings, how they apply to the present day, and how they are to be implemented to ensure that hope and justice prevail for all.

Will Mr. "Doe" journey to that end? Will he make himself known, and join with others who also seek real change? The need is all the more urgent, for today's indifferent youth can easily become tomorrow's "religious establishment".

Do you have something to say? Talk to us about getting a column in Spectrum. Contact the Brunswickan at 453-4983.

NOT that you asked... by Frank Pearce

I'm not entirely conversant with the details, but I seem to have heard some reports that our university's esteemed president, Robin Armstrong, has declared that all buildings on this campus are to be smoke free. This proclamation is to apply even to the student's Student Union Building, which will go entirely smoke free when the Social Club's current lease expires. In other words, once that fateful day arrives, it will be against university regulations to smoke in either of the two bars on campus.

I am not a smoker. In fact, I can find no redeeming qualities about the entire habit. My personal complaint about smoking (besides for the obvious second hand smoke issue) is those smokers who will sit at a table and completely ignore the ashtray, or coffee cup, or empty beer bottle, or whatever they are ostensibly using for their ashes. You sit down at one of these tables after they've left and you've got to spend about five minutes cleaning the table off so that you can sit there without getting ashes all over your clothes and books. Nevertheless, the anti-smoking

lobby has pushed the issue entirely too far.

Smoking has been the legal right of all adult Canadians since Confederation and before. During most of that period smoking has been socially acceptable. Even after the initial reports of the dangers of smoking first came to be known, smoking was still a socially acceptable aspect of Canadian life. It is only in the last twenty years that this has started to change. Before then, smokers were not the pariah that they are today.

The point is that Canada has a long tradition of tobacco smoking which is still cherished by a sizeable minority of this country. The government has tried to effect a type of prohibition by establishing huge taxes on tobacco products. This has failed miserably, just as did the prohibition of alcohol seventy years before, because of the very lucrative trade of smuggling cigarettes across the border. The prohibition of tobacco is failing for the same reason as did the prohibition of alcohol: an efficient smuggling network and a lack of the will of the people.

What the radical anti-smoking lobby

really wants to see is for smoking to become illegal. They are, however, realistic enough to realise that this is impossible. So, what they are willing to accept in its place is the pronouncement that smoking will only be legal in private dwellings. This seems to be the part of the lobby that Robin Armstrong is siding with.

Armstrong's decision to ban smoking in the Cellar and the Social Club is one of the most ludicrous of his tenure as UNB's president. The relationship between smoking and drinking is well known to any frequent patron of a bar. One of the reasons cited for the failure of the Pub in the Sub was that bar's initial policy of offering a smoke free alternative to the Social Club. What the university didn't realise is that drinkers don't really want a smoke free alternative. They want to be able to drink with their friends, even if those friends are so gauche as to want to smoke. A bar is in many ways a place of freedom. It is a place in which people can partake with numerous others of an activity which would be illegal out of doors. Once smoking is banned in bars, a major portion of that freedom will be lost.