

# the Gateway

## EDITORIAL

### There is life beyond mere budget restraints

As modern technology discovers ever new ways to treat formerly incurable diseases, there are people who would argue that the massive costs to and the declining resources of society dictate that the new curables should be left behind, like the eskimos, in the snow, unseen, to die quietly.

That is a primitive view, to be seen on the popular show *Animal Kingdom* where in cold blood nature's rule of law - survival of the fittest - seems to work marvelously well, if you are fit. For most, this is too crude in its simplicity. So, if you prefer equations, you could compute the marginal utility of every extra dollar society allocates to a class we might generally call handicapped - set off against the opportunity of using that extra dollar for the good of the rest of us. Below some point where the curves intersect everything ceases to exist.

The question of how long we can afford to take care of those who do not take care of themselves has been confronted several times recently. Many articles have dealt with the heady stuff of treating sick, unborn babies (or fetuses), the chronically ill whose deaths are but prolonged, and those with incurable diseases for which cures are just around the scientific corner.

The questions have been put: 1) can we even argue about the costs, monetary and spiritual, of maintaining a life and 2) if so, who will decide, and at which point, that a life is no longer worth living?

Though far from academic, it is relatively easy at least to argue the question of whether we have the technology to sustain the marginally alive human being and whether our resources are or are not so finite that we can or can not afford to do so.

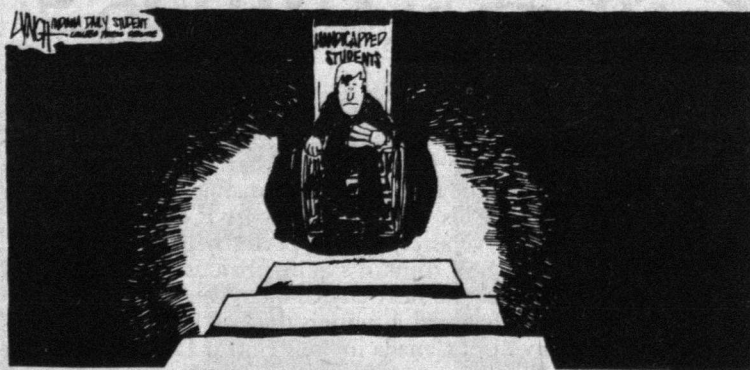
It is less easy, and certainly less socially acceptable to talk about the marginal utility of helping those we might call the nominally handicapped - the disabled people in wheelchairs, with problems of seeing, hearing or talking, or other difficulties which do not force the immediate and dramatic confrontation between life and death: apparently, from the absence or avoidance of debate, we are agreed that such disabled people are good for society and should be given every opportunity to participate as full members in it.

At least, in theory. But one article from the whole doomsaying collection asks at what cost will society continue to help the disabled. In one, Roger Starr of the *New York Times* editorial board asks: 'Could our finite resources be used better (i.e. more efficiently) taking care of normal people - would not society be better off as a whole?'

The same kind of argument has been used in defense of expedient, undemocratic government. Thus, the marginal usefulness of participation in the state and responsible government is not worth the great bureaucratic, procedural expense of running a democratic system.

Democratic government, however, whether or not it works, is something people will still provide for. Like ensuring the rights of disabled people it is unrealistic to compute the costs of maintaining a political system that ensures freedom and liberty; really, it is just a simple matter of priorities. So far, we have maintained that the right to life is as important as the right of freedom, but we are confronted increasingly with value/cost decisions about the value of life - worse, the value of disabled lives. At some point we will have to face the moral, human commandment that we are not free to make such choices.

Peter Michalyszyn

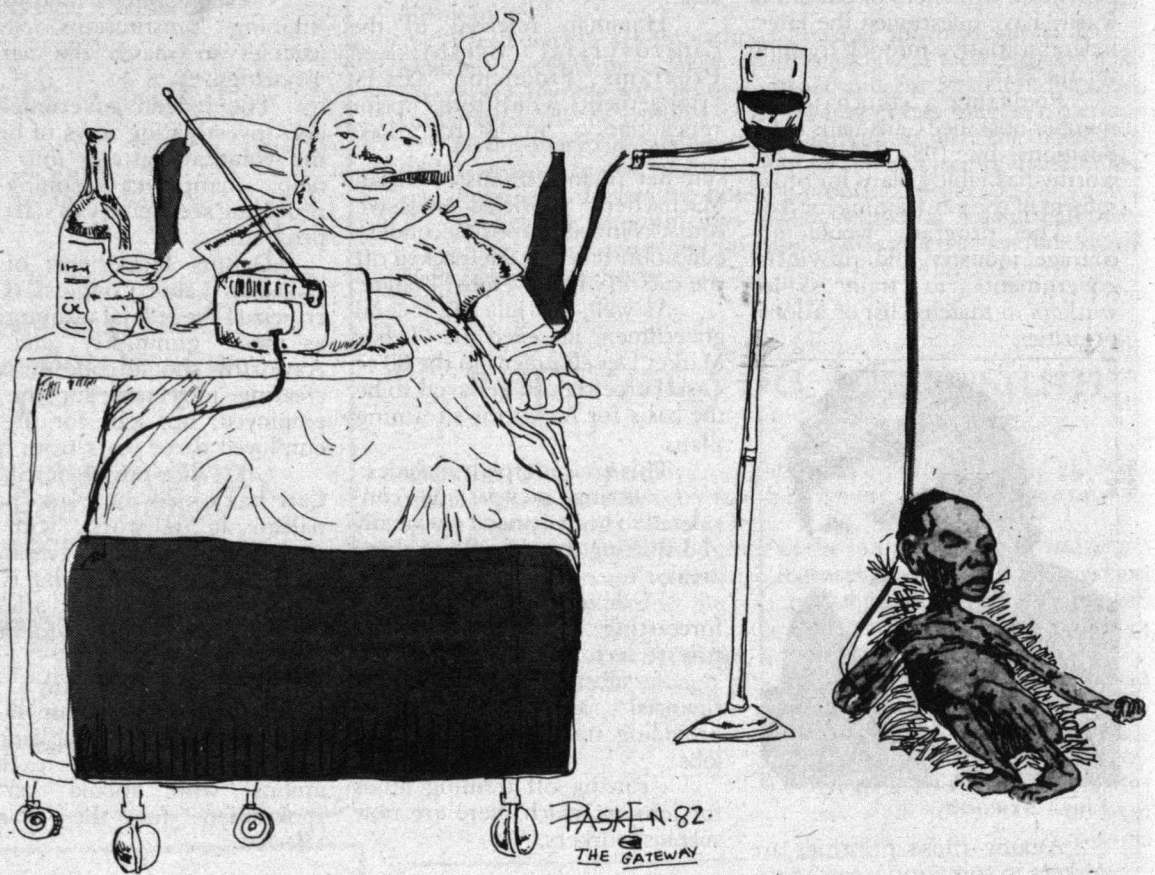


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## NORTH/SOUTH

WHICH WAY SHOULD THE FLOW GO?



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Cynics denounce Poland, Russia

Over the past few weeks cynics have portrayed Western concern about martial law in Poland as hypocrisy since many now denouncing the Polish government and the Soviet Union are not also denouncing the human rights violations and the deaths in such countries as El Salvador and Guatemala.

The accusation, though mainly leveled by inveterate Yankee haters no doubt, is most likely accurate in depicting the reaction of the Reagan administration which wishes to make as much political mileage as possible out of the situation. Nevertheless, the outrage and concern of the majority of the Western world can easily be understood by simply that - we are the Western world.

Poland, to many of us, is something we can relate to. It is a European nation with an immensely rich and ancient history that interlocks with that of the rest of Europe.

Historically, for example, France had close relations with Poland under the ancien regime: Louis XV's wife and queen, Marie Leczinska, was Polish and her father, Stanislas, ruled over the Duchy of Lorraine.

Furthermore, the last king of Poland in the 18th century (before the partitions) and a French cabinet minister of the 1970's were both of the famous Poniatowski family. Closer to home, we have been able to see what effect this tragedy has had on Canadians of Polish descent, including our Polish professors

right here on campus.

Thus, the Western world's apparent "double standard", though not intellectually justifiable, is emotionally understandable. After all, did we not

go to war in 1939 to save Poland?

If the cynics are intelligent enough to be cynical, surely they should be intelligent enough to understand this.

Nicolas Dimic  
 Arts III

### Hypocritical stance

Christina Fernandez shares the mentality of the political right to an extent that would shock her if she were capable of thinking beyond the Stalinist cant she has learned so well. The right hypocritically opposes repression

in Eastern Europe while supporting it elsewhere. Is Ms. Fernandez any less hypocritical when she plays the same tune in reverse?

Lech Walesa, she says, is an American spy. Like a true reactionary she can explain any uncomfortable reality by invoking the spectre of outside agitators.

She considers herself a true progressive. No, Ms. Fernandez, after Hungary and Czechoslovakia and Poland only true believers still worship at the Soviet altar.

Alan Rutkowski  
 Library

### Illiteracy

A suggestion:

Would you please suggest to M. W. Ekelund that he/she stop flouting the rules of common English usage, and flaunting his/her ignorance in your columns.

And you too, Mr. Editor, why don't you use your prerogative and change words that are mis-used.

If you don't, then you may find your paper competing in the illiteracy stakes with other Edmonton newspapers.

C.G. Englefield  
 Dept. of Electrical Eng.  
 Ed. note: The letter in question is from the Tuesday, January 12th edition of the Gateway, which, in part, reads: "Flaunting authority and society, but remaining acceptable means walking a fine line and accepting changes in society."

## LETTERS

Letters to the Editor should be a maximum of 250 words on any subject. Letters must be signed and include faculty, year and phone number. No anonymous letters will be published. All letters should be typed, although we will reluctantly accept them if they are very neatly written. We reserve the right to edit for libel and length. Letters do not necessarily reflect the views of the Gateway.

Staff this issue: some people pick the oddest time to teach people things. Peter Durovix began at 11 p.m. to show John Roggeveen and Alexandra Miller how to paint faces, that is, Dave Oginski's and Brett Kullman's. Apparently Diana Taschuk thought it was some deviation form of Engineering Week statue. She called Gerard Kennedy, Peter Jarvis, and Kenneth Tsai over from where Kent Blinston was preaching civic politics to stop the madness. But Geoffrey Hackson had some ideas about madness himself after reading D.H. Laurence over a few times. Sar Neige and Martin Beales were fascinated by all of this, but Beth Jacob merely turned away to Billy McKay, who was trying ever so subtly to make a point. Not to far away, Dave Finstad broke the four minute mile by typesetting faster than John Savard can sell computers.