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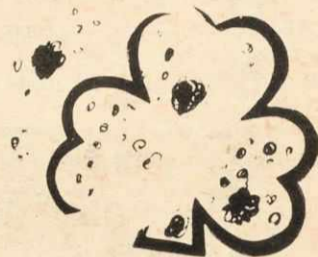
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Commerce society fees dispute

by C. Ricketts

There has been a backlash to the Commerce Society's bid to raise society fees to establish a housing fund.

Conflicting petitions began circulating March 14 after a confrontation between the Society's Housing Committee and Commerce students at the March 13 council meeting. While all agree a house is necessary for ongoing operations of the Commerce Society, there is dissonance over its financing.

Some students disagree with the hike in fees from \$10 to \$30, arguing there was a lack of communication on both the housing committee's proposal and in announcing the general meeting which drafted the motion taken to student council. They claim this prevented adequate discussion of the issue. Says Mike Hayes, a Commerce student, "We're not against the Commerce House. Our big objection is that none of the Commerce students were informed. They knew of a fee increase, but didn't know it was going to be that much."

First-year Commerce student Paul Morris says there are about 300 people who are very active in the society, which leaves another 500 who are not, and who may receive little benefit from contributing to a housing fund while studying at Dal. "Over four years that amounts to about \$40,000 into a fund some students won't use," he says.

Dave Harris, on the Commerce Society's Housing Committee, says the dollar amount was not determined until the general meeting, but anyone could have attended and suggested what the fee should be.

Advertisements for the general meeting appeared in the Dal Gazette, the Dal Dispatch, and professors were asked to make an announcement to their classes.

Hayes and Morris are spearheading opposition to the fee hike. Their petition objects to a 200 per cent increase in society fees, and says the issues of a housing fund should be decided by a Commerce society referendum.

Both Hayes and Morris hope to get between 100 and 200 signatures, a number they feel sufficient to present to student council and warrant overturning the fee hike passed at the March 13 council meeting.

Dave Harris thinks the objecting petition is misleading. "The fee increase is not 200 per cent, since society fees were raised by three dollars," he says. The 17 dollar difference will be put in a housing trust fund which eventually will be used to purchase a society house.

The Housing Committee is circulating two petitions, one for Commerce students which supports the housing fees decision, and the other for non-Commerce students who support the society's efforts to purchase a house.

Council Administration rep Mike Solway hopes over 300 signatures will be obtained, nearly equivalent to the voter turnout in the recent society elections.

The "opposition" says the housing committee should be concentrating on organizing a referendum before classes end in just over three weeks. Morris thinks results may only indicate who does the most effective petitioning. "It's peer pres-

sure, on the spot and there's no chance to talk about the issue," he says.

Harris does not think the democratic process is best served by a referendum, at this late date, since an adequate publicity campaign would be difficult to organize or be effective with exams looming. "With petitioning, you're talking to people one to one. Both sides are able to inform people on the issue," he says.

Housing committee member Chris Andrus said at the council

meeting, "if the general meeting (held a few weeks ago) had not

group is able to show they have put initial effort into the project.

"The first question a sponsor will ask is 'how much have you raised?'," says Harris. "If we say 'nothing' then they would say we don't value the project."

Because of the Commerce society's break-even policy, the Committee feels a user-pay system, such as charging memberships or increasing bar prices, is not a good idea as it would undermine the society. "If people are not willing to pay while using the facilities, why would they

pay for it through their society fees," asks Morris.

Childenose/Dal Photo



Mike Solway, newly-elected Commerce Society President, feels there isn't any need to take the fee hike to a referendum.

been so conclusive, we would have gone to a referendum." Of 43 people at the general meeting, one person voted nay, and two others abstained.

Communication among commerce students is "impressive" but Morris found it strange he didn't know of the meeting. "If I didn't know, then others didn't," he says. Hayes' position is similar.

An important resume seminar for third year students, the most active members of the society, may have been a factor why students did not go to the meeting, says Harris. "The turnout for the general meeting was respectable," he says. "It's the individual student's responsibility to be informed."

General meetings of the Student Union rarely have 40 students in attendance.

Morris and Hayes contend there are alternative ways to raise money for the fund, such as soliciting local businesses and corporations and appealing to alumni. Harris and Solway agree, but insist it is easier to solicit outside support when a

A final question is the lack of a contingency plan in the event a house is not made available in the next or following years. "There's no guarantee we'll get a house if the university is not keen on leasing. And it would be a dangerous move if there were \$40,000 in the trust fund and someone in the future moved it back into the general account," says Morris.

Harris explains there is no current contingency plan because the original idea was to establish and maintain a house fund over two years. The February notice that the society may not have a house for the coming year has moved everything up. "We want resources in order to make a contingency plan possible," says Harris.

Solway feels the society has enough support and the university enough space to see them through. "If they take the house away, everything collapses - quickly," he says. "If we show interest and concern, and show the university we know we can't ask for things for nothing, it's to our advantage."