

# Residence: Student in an authoritarian regime

Sitting in the Bridges House lounge. The TV is showing a nineteen-forties film about the Nazi occupation of Norway. Somebody wanders in. "What's on?" "Nothing much," comes a reply from the corner, "Just a show about the residence system."

That kind of pessimistic comment is fairly common among the "men" in UNB's eight dormitories for male students. When Jerry Farber wrote STUDENT AS NIGGER he obviously wasn't talking about residence-dwellers. If the average student in a UNB residence had the rights of an American black, he could count himself lucky.

Not only is he ghettoized in an atmosphere that adds very little to his "University Experience", but he is also subject to an arbitrary and authoritarian regimentation. And the second act has much to do with the first.

Residence was intended to be an integral part of the student's education when it was conceived by the founding fathers, sometime in the hazy past. But like so many other things in the modern multiversity, the dictates of boards of deans and governors and constant demands for administrative efficiency allowed the goal to be distorted or forgotten, except in the rhetoric of calendars and dinner speeches by house dons.

The dons are the real authority in the residence system. They were originally intended as professors in residence who would offer students a friendly link with the "community of scholars". They were to be more counsellors than disciplinarians. It has never been that way in more than a few isolated cases, and this year the administration tacitly admitted that it has abandoned the idea of don as scholar by appointing one of their own, awards officer, Gordon Meyers, as don of Bridges House.

The little grey regulations booklet published by the dean's office and dutifully given to every freshman entering residence states that discipline will be doled out by House Committees elected by the students in each House, adding that "We are proud of the traditions of student government at UNB". There is not really much to be proud of. Dons, aided by graduate students paid by the administration, effectively control all important matters of discipline. Usually the House Committee will be consulted and asked for an opinion before action is taken, but dons regularly over-ride student decisions. When Bridges House residents contested the Don's right to force his will on the committee as a violation of the house constitution, Meyers pointedly replied that the constitution has no actual authority. Maybe that's why the administration likes the student government tradition?

The usual answer to residents' protestations that they can handle their own affairs is a promise that Jerusalem will be theirs when they show the maturity to accept responsibility. No one seems to notice that students are never given a chance to show their ability to govern themselves.

The doctrine of 'in loco parentis' is still very much in evidence in UNB's men's residences, although the father figure now tries to pose as a liberal parent. The boys are allowed to drink at home, as long as no "commercial containers" are carried out of individual rooms, and now they are even allowed to visit with members of the opposite sex until midnight two days a week. But the doors must remain open and the lights on while ladies are in the rooms.

The whole open rooms controversy that rocked the campus last year is a good

example of the fatherly concern for the morals of residents. The board of governors was shocked at the prospect of fraternization between boy and girl in the bedrooms of the university, and visions of a vast red-light district on campus must have swum through their Victorian minds. But the children were very insistent and other universities seemed to think it was alright, so they made a small concession.

Poor students in apartments down town. They have no one to look after them.

The effect of regimentation on the students seems to create an atmosphere that contradicts the officially-proclaimed goal. The dons are cold and distant officials in many houses, and there is often less contact between them and their charges than between students and their course instructors. Residents often feel alienated from authority in the university as a whole, and fall into a sub-culture of weekly drunks, an inability to communicate without using anglo-saxon expletives, dirty clothes, and a level of culture represented by the twice-yearly stag movies.

This is, perhaps, the worst aspect of the residence system. Within the confines of the square brick buildings with identical square rooms, and even more confining regulations, students live out as many as five years in an unreal world that is neither intellectually stimulating nor a good preparation for life on the "outside". Some manage to get out before they are swallowed up, but for most there is no easy escape. Housing is scarce in Fredericton, and residence has one thing in its favour - convenience. Meals are supplied on schedule, beds are changed weekly, and class is only two minutes away. The price for convenience is high, and a continuing dream of

most residence students is the little apartment in walking distance from campus.

There are, of course, a few oases in the residences. With luck a student dissatisfied with the general quality of residence life can find a few like-minded friends with the guts to break the mould. Some of the dons care enough to attempt to salvage a bit of their role as friend and academic counsellor. In MacKenzie House lounge and philosophy professor Neil MacGill's apartment in Bridges there are weekly coffee and discussion sessions with representatives from various faculties.

This leads us to the final tragedy of the system. Like the students, many of the dons and other functionaries are often better people than they appear to be. They too are trapped by the structure. There is, in effect, a vicious circle - the dons can't function as they should if the atmosphere in the residences doesn't improve, but it can't improve as long as they act as iron-handed disciplinarians. The best dons have a tendency to leave after a short tenure, and Neill MacGill as don was forced to resign after siding with the students on the open rooms issue in his urbane and philosophical manner.

Even the acting dean of men, Brent McKeown, is a liberal-minded academic who seems to be in favour of change. But he is essentially tied to a system he did not create, and he is only a caretaker administrator. Next year Dick Grant, the official dean, returns from his sabbatical and will probably resume his old role. The students, in an unusual fit of organized dissent, petitioned the administration for Grant's removal. But the residences are his baby. He wrote the little grey rule book.

## VIEWPOINT

### what do you think of the gleaner?

david macneil



john mckee arts 3  
"I only read it once and then the wind blew it into my hands, while I was sitting on the front porch."



donna mcrear arts 1  
"I don't know anything about it."



pat sharpe arts 1  
"I like dear Abby, I live by it every day."



bob goodine arts 3  
"Love it. Cover to cover comics."

lennie roach transfer from dorchester  
"Too much advertising."



russel henry arts 1  
"Are there any job ads in it?"



carol danson 1

"I would rather the S.J. paper any day."



ken hadley post grad 1

"Amateurish."



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Gary Zatsman, Arts 4

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G. F. Fredericton

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Ronald Grant

for publicity

Fredericton branch of dian Red Cross wishes the staff of the Bruns- for their excellent cov- the recent blood donor certainly helped draw ention of the students eed for blood donors. e same time, the Freder- ranch wishes to thank rsing students, the pre- ociety, Radio UNB for art in helping us achieve good result.

Mrs. Leonard C. Smith