

Letter to the dead

Somewhere, far away, it is morning in the middle of my night. I am asleep, having nightmares about broken teeth, yet I cannot say that I felt it. I cannot say that I knew. A bomb went off in the middle of my night. I did not feel it, I did not hear it in my dreams.

I did not wake up knowing the world had changed.

I wake up, and someone tells me the news, nineteen dead, more wounded. Mostly soldiers in uniform, soldiers, many of them wearing the same green beret I once wore proudly. Soldiers going back to their bases after a weekend at home, with their families, their friends, their lovers. Like any other Sunday morning in Israel, when every bus and every train is crowded with soldiers. Bodies explode, sirens go crazy, screams and tears and pain and fear.

Yet I hear nothing. I feel nothing. Nothing but my own numb horror.

Is it one of my friends? One of my lovers? And really, should it hurt any less if it wasn't? If they are all strangers to me, should it hurt any less?

I wait desperately for the names of the dead, remembering the fear I had when I was there that each day's newspaper might have the picture of my best friend on the front page. I wait fearfully, praying it's no one I know.

This has happened so many times. Why is it this time I'm crying? This time I feel it in every cell of my being. A bomb at a bus stop I've waited at a dozen times. This time it hurts, when I'm farther away than I was before. It could be anyone, and I still don't know if it was you.

I pass the day as planned, filling in time with small distractions until the names of the dead are released. A movie on a big screen, with no connection to the bombing in the middle of my night. A tortured prisoner on a screen, an actor with a make-up artist's wounds. All I see is real wounds, real blood, real torture. Nineteen bodies blown away. Nineteen people who are no longer people, just mutilated corpses, bombed while I was sleeping, far away.

All I can do is wait for the names, and pray it wasn't you, and pray for the dead. And pray that it will stop, this so-called 'peace' that has killed more than if we were at war. And never forget those precious names.

We have it so easy here. We can tune out the horrors on CNN. But today I can't. I write this in the hope that any reader will think, for one second, how blessed we are to live in peace, for one second to remember that those corpses, people killed in violence around the world, were people like you and me.

Most of the time I tune it out too, I ignore it, and live my life.

But Sunday morning a chill passed through me, so cold, it will take a while for me to be warm again.

Sivan Orev

Sivan Orev is an honours student at Dalhousie. She served in the Israeli Defence Force as a medic, and was released seven months ago.

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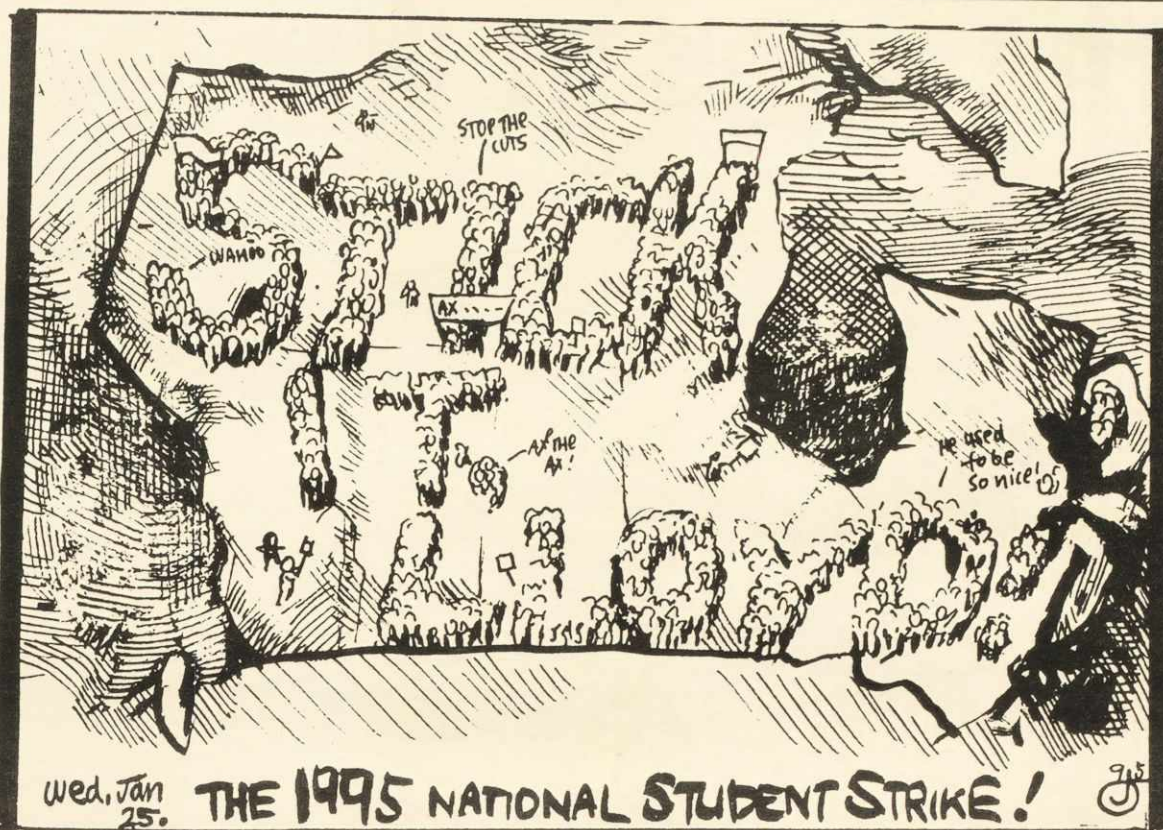
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contributors
Milton Bukharin
Sivan Orev
Jen Horsey
Tim Richard
Brent Knightley
Bill Jensen
James Quinn
Wayne Groszko
Lisa Lachance
James Beddington
Katharine Dunn
Danny MacLeod
Tim Covert
Joanna Mirsky
Jeffrey Barton
Jefferson Rappell
copy editor
Lilli Ju
managing editor
Judy Reid
news editor
Milton Howe
arts editor
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science editors
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focus on dal editor
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CUP editors
Katrina Hurley, Sean Rooney
women's liaison
Heather Gibson
production manager
Mark Farmer
distributor
Tara Hoag
typesetter
Robert Currie
ad/business manager
Jan Del Mar, 494-6532 phone

Student Union Building, Dalhousie University
6136 University Ave., Halifax, N.S., B3H 4J2
(902) 494-2507; fax: (902) 494-1280; email: GAZETTE@ac.dal.ca



Student debt blues

As all of you know the federal government is planning to cut funding of universities in Canada while increasing the amount of funds to the student loan program. There are two fundamental implications of this: (1) universities will be forced to make up for the money that usually comes their way from the government by increasing tuition; roughly doubling it in fact; (2) Students will double their debt load. Tuition has already doubled in the last five years and has risen faster than the annual inflation rate. Of course the quality of education has risen accordingly.

While this has been going on, universities have started rationalization programs, programs that in the grand scheme of things have been designed to reduce the numbers of faculty members in all departments and to cut some departments entirely because they are available at another university. At the same time, however, there have not to my admittedly limited knowledge been any reductions in administration.

It seems to me that the people who are in charge of post-secondary education in this country in general seem to be financial and social conservatives. The very same ones who were responsible for electing and then continuing to support a conservative government in the 1980s that increased the national debt prodigiously and have brought the country to the brink of financial ruin. The same ones who went to school when tuitions seem to me to be much more reasonable.

So many people I know say to me: "at least our tuition isn't as high as in the states."

That's not exactly true. Students who attend their own state's public universities generally pay much less than we do and have been paying less for some time. Only private colleges and universities are prohibitively expensive. There are no strictly private universities in this country.

So why on earth do we pay so much for a mediocre education. So that we'll at least be able to get a good, high paying job afterwards? I'm afraid not. You, me, we all belong to the first generation of Canadians who, as a whole, can expect a lower standard of living than our parents. Well at least we have socialized health care. Yes, we do — but for how much longer will it last? More importantly, it doesn't seem that important when you're a student and are eating Kraft Dinner every night and can't afford to pay all of your bills just so that you can get a university education that still doesn't guarantee a good job after graduation.

I'm married. My wife is now a medical student and that means that next year we can look forward to doubling our debt load since her tuition will come very close to \$9,000 a year. That doesn't include books or equipment of course. I'm honestly not sure we'll be able to make it without crawling to our parents for help. This year it took five months for us to get her loan because I work part-time. Financial aid needed to know how much I made last summer and would make during the school term from a part-time job so that they could deduct the correct amount from her student loan. She's unemployed since her education is her job. My point is that it isn't getting any easier to get a student loan and make no mistake, it is about to get much more difficult.

the McDonald's-ization of education

In a world that is becoming increasingly more complex and dependent upon high technology, universities are failing to adequately prepare enough students to cope with the new realities. But that's not all. Liberal arts programs are being slashed in an effort to save more money.

Finally, I'd like to say a little something about Dalhousie in general and the revulsion I feel about the way this institution works. As I understand it, Dalhousie wants to amalgamate all food services on campus in an effort to make money. Since Beaver Foods has an exclusive food contract with the university, it seems to me that the plan is to give Beaver carte blanche. I also happen to know that in the past Beaver has catered parties with something like a hip of beef and then resold what wasn't eaten at the party or function to students at the Courtyard for lunch. A highly illegal practice on two counts.

It's all something I like to call the McDonald's-ization of education at Dal. You get through the door only to look at a menu that may look nice with all those perfect hamburgers, those golden fries, but ultimately leaves you with very little of substance (or nutrition) and very little money in your pocket. It seem to me that universities should not be in the business of selling food or even making money. They are investments in the future, all of them and should not be looked at as many other institutions are. They shouldn't have to turn a financial profit to be deemed successful. All they have to do is educate their students and help to prepare them for a life in the real world, where people pay their taxes, pay back their student loans and raise their own children. Instead, they seem to want to be in the business of making money, something clearly not part of their mandate.

Maybe, if we're lucky, in a few years we'll get a McD's at Dal, between the Registrar and Student Accounts! One stop shopping.

Name Withheld

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