

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's mandate not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

It's time to rewrite history

The comments made by Dal history professor Greg Hanlon down-playing the witch craze as the extrapolations of crazed feminists is inexcusable. (Dal Gazette Nov 5)

Hanlon's logic (such as it is) goes like this: there were witches — people were afraid — witches were tortured and burnt — this was justified since they were acting in good faith about something that concerned them.

As if that is not incredulous enough he goes on to say "we should not throw stones" at the antagonists in this brutal drama. By this I take it to mean the "witch craze" is not open to debate. The book's closed. History has been written. We must excuse the systematic, institutional eradication, by the most conservative estimates, of hundreds of thousands of women.

I laugh in your face. Hanlon, explain yourself. What did you do for Women's History Month aside from your sexist comments? I gave a lecture on the women's holocaust for 35 people at the SUB. Most had never heard of that most evil of books, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, though it was as widely distributed as the bible. They seemed very interested however. You, on the other hand, seem prepared to dismiss the witch craze by looking at it from the establishment point of view. To excuse this important episode in history with lame platitudes like "they were acting in good faith" is not good enough. There is obviously much more to it. It is rich with possibilities for active minded historians. But you?

You state that there were witches, like that justifies everything. We all know midwives, healers, widows, the elderly,

gypsies and misfits in general took the brunt of the witch hunts. Who are the witches you refer to? Were they people who innocently practiced folk traditions or do you actually buy into the *Malleus* version of witches as agents of Satan, who melted babies to make flying ointment? Do you attribute shrinkage of the penis to witchcraft too?

The meat of my seminar was the extreme nature of the torture used on suspects to attain confessions. Consider the effort, the resources and thought that went into the spectacle of witch hunting and execution of these people and tell me again the authorities were "acting in good faith about something that concerned them". We are talking institutional sadism here. We are talking sexual terrorism. The end result of the centuries of witch hunting was that

women were subdued and domesticated as never before. Women are still recovering from that slide.

As a feminist, mother and witch, I try to open people's eyes to the true nature of history. The fact that a history professor can dismiss some of history's worst atrocities so flippantly is disturbing. If you don't like the fact that women are revising history that took you years to learn and that you had grown comfortable with, then I suggest you assess your



future as a historian.

SUZANNE ADAMS

Standing up for students rights everywhere

On November 25, 1997, approximately 3000 students and non-students took part in a rally at the APEC Summit at UBC in Vancouver. During the course of the demonstrations the RCMP pepper-sprayed large numbers of demonstrators. They arrested a total of 49 students, directly targeting the leaders and organizers — none were charged. The RCMP Public Complaints Commission (PCC) is hearing complaints by many of these students regarding brutality and suppression of the freedoms: to expression, to assembly and association, to liberty, and to not be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned. These students are unable to afford legal representation, and the federal government has refused to provide it for them.

The Alma Mater Society of UBC, on September 24, 1998, asked student unions across Canada if they could donate money to help support the students in their fight to get a fair hearing. The Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) received the request for support, and read it to council, but subsequently made no motion. The DSU should, on behalf of students and in the spirit of solidarity, be showing definitive and strong support for our collective rights.

Prior to the summit, demonstrators were camped out in tents, performing theatre, conducting workshops, and engaging in non-violent forms of protest. On the day of the summit students pulled down a security fence and the RCMP moved into the crowd and began pepper-spraying protesters. Later, near the end of the summit, others attempted to form human roadblocks on the motorcade routes and were again pepper-sprayed.

One of the students arrested, Craig Jones, was not directly involved in the human barricades or pulling down the fence. Set up on the lawn, overlooking the motorcade route, he hung two signs on large metal garbage racks. Another, made of papers placed in

plastic sheaths, he placed on the grass. The signs read "Democracy", "Free Speech", and "Human Rights". He was arrested for refusing to remove the garment racks that the RCMP said could be used to construct roadblocks. The RCMP also removed his paper signs that obviously had no capacity to block roads or cause injury.

A primary motive of the demonstrators was to draw attention to the history of Suharto's rule in Indonesia. In the four years following Indonesia's 1975 invasion of East Timor, an estimated 200,000 East Timorese, one third of the pre-invasion population, were killed through massacres and war-related starvation. Again in 1991, the Indonesian military murdered 200 protesters and 328 subsequently 'disappeared' in Dili, East Timor's capital. By 1993, the United Nations had passed ten resolutions condemning Indonesia and calling for their withdrawal from East Timor.

Our approval of Suharto is implicit in our financial support to his regime and in suppressing the dissent of our own people to prevent his embarrassment. Robert Vanderloo, a summit organizer, in a note to his staff, reflected the government's priorities: "PMO had expressed concerns about the security perimeter at UBC, not so much from a security point of view but to avoid embarrassments to APEC leaders".

The students in the inquiry cannot obtain a fair hearing without proper funding. The Federal Court of Canada agrees and on July 20, 1998, ruled that, "without state-funded legal representation the complainants/applicants will be at a great disadvantage — there will not be a level playing field".

As students at Dalhousie University one of our most effective lobbying and organizing tools is the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU). One of the objects of the student union, as stated in the preamble to the constitution is, "to encourage in

the students of the university an awareness of their responsibilities in the local, provincial, national and international community". Student unions also have a history of lobbying governments for positive action on issues that concern them. In not acknowledging the AMS' request for support, the DSU has said that the matter is unimportant to Dalhousie students. Credit must be given to DSU president Ted Chiasson for writing to Solicitor

General Andy Scott and asking him to pay the students' legal bills, but surely, we can do more. Advocacy requires more than one letter and perhaps in these fiscally-obsessed times we need to put our money where our mouth is.

Whether or not all Dalhousie students agree with the methods of the protesters, their desire to protest Suharto, and Canada's endorsement of him, is sound. The behaviour of the federal government, the prime

minister and the RCMP should be disturbing to all students who value freedom and democracy. Lack of funding for the students' legal counsel is restricting their ability to obtain a fair hearing. The DSU should be acting on behalf of their constituents, advocating and providing support for those students appearing before the RCMP Public Complaints Commission.

BEN HIRTLE

Providing a checkpoint

The weeks continue to roll past as more and more people speak their minds about anything and everything that has evolved from the infamous "Take Back the Bullshit" article. A lot of issues have arisen from it, whether it was the original intent or not, and a lot of different people have been involved in it as well. The complainers complain, the rational argue and the skewed spew. Those are three good categories to put any article in to help you decide whether to accept it as helpful, or to refute it because it doesn't help anything. Where are we going here? That is the question only you can answer as you make your best attempt to do so by reading what is written in the paper this week. The focus here is to try to provide a checkpoint that may help to show which end of the scale we are headed towards.

Now last week there was an article in the Gazette that asked the reader to assess past articles and find explicit or implicit solutions if there were any. Keep in mind that not every article is designed to do that. It was my opinion that where the issue has been beaten so much it wouldn't be a bad idea to suggest something. The article then went on to illustrate what it was trying to show in self-contradictory form. This piece was very pro-active in parts and I apologize for it directly to the people involved and I will again do it now, I'm sorry. However, the sense of goodness hopefully wasn't lost in being bitter for a few sentences. In the end, the article attempted a couple of

solutions even if they were difficult to attain because that was the point, try to propose solutions instead of venting frustration.

This week there are probably rebuttals to that article which was not free of error in any sense of the word. Whenever you form an opinion and rest argument on the basis of it, your point is, at best, weak. My mistakes will provide learning for both myself and others if someone can objectively show, in their opinion-based argument, where I went wrong.

So what does that have to do with this piece? I think somebody will possibly show the main point again this week, if there are indeed countering letters. (If not, now you don't have to read that long winded article to get the gist).

Now if we have countering letters, ask yourself what they address? Are the main points of the other article challenged or are smaller side tracking issues discussed? Do they take pot shots back? Do they show in good form that an honest error was made or that the limits of assumption were pushed? Has it been shown that the article doesn't help at all? Are they hung up on showing how the article was hypocritical not realizing it was designed that way to illustrate itself? How about the proposed solutions, are they assessed for merit or merely attacked? Or was any of it reassured by a piece that agreed with it? Consider any of these questions when reading and see just what the central idea seems to be. Was the assumption that we

are surrounded in a lot of hot air true, or are people honestly trying to bring things out into the open and not put anyone down in the process?

On a closing note, all that anyone asks for when you read their pieces is that you remain objective. Even a hot headed letter that can piss you off when you read it may contain a good lesson if you are objective about it. The questions that were proposed a few moments ago can be used to examine the intents of any article. Even if there are no rebuttals to the piece last week, we still have a bit of a reference or checkpoint to examine the merits of current or future pieces of writing.

But if there are rebuttals, have they been caught in the trap that was warned of? That pitfall is that some people are on the attack for personal reasons instead of progressive or collective ones. If this is the case, then some of the many articles we have been faced with are in pursuit of who has a sharper tongue and their own words and attitude have condemned them to prove that statement. If not, then there is an attempt to politely show how someone else has honestly made a mistake and how everyone else can learn from it, the best form of writing we have.

Either way this is a checkpoint to see if this paper is being used for personal gain or for an honest to goodness attempt to educate people based on your own knowledge and opinions.

MIKE ALLEN