

STU wants more government information

Saint Thomas University students say the general public should have greater access to government information.

They formed themselves into an ad hoc committee and prepared a paper to present to the provincial legislature's Law Amendments Committee's hearings into the provincial governments White Paper on Freedom of Information.

The paper is divided into five parts, with one of the students writing one part. They all agreed that government was too secretive with information that the public needed to form opinions on public issues, although they disagreed on some particulars.

Zeta DeCoursey Baxter said in her part of the paper "except in a very few incidences, all information should be readily available on request."

She conceded the government needs "a limited amount of freedom in order to properly

conduct its business, especially where premature disclosure might adversely affect negotiations."

But, she said, "This is not to say however, that it should be given a free hand to make available to the public and what to withhold."

Any information which might "adversely affect the private individual" should be kept under wraps, she said, except "when it directly affects the common good."

Outside of these two areas, she said, all government information should be available on request.

"There can be no question," she said, where information dealing with "the public as a collective body," that "the public has a right to such information".

Phillip M. Dempsey said in his part of the paper that access to government information was a right which in principle could not be violated.

He said the Canadian system of

government provided information to the people in theory, but the fact that the government needed a white paper and legislation on the subject was an admittal that in practice, information was not generally available.

"Why should there be freedom of information?" shouldn't have to be asked, he said. "Rather we should ask why there is not freedom of information and why is it that this government in power have deemed it necessary to withhold from the collective the very facets of information that directly affect their future."

"For if why not goes unanswered or meets a limited response, then we are encountering blockage or stonewalling to what may very well be something more we should expect to find," he said further on in the paper.

"We have the right to ask and the right to know and no government that rests on the will of the people have (sic) the right to withhold our rights both as individuals or as a collective," he said.

"There should be no qualifications when the issues of freedom or rights are paramount. The government rests on the privileges the collective have (sic) given them, nothing more."

He said freedom of information was essential to the well-running of a democracy but "our class society, our structured hierarchy" had divided public in such a

manner that information affecting their interests was not readily available.

He recommended that there be "no qualifiers aside from invasion of privacy" on freedom of information, and that any department refusing to release information would have to defend itself before the courts.

Patricia M. Dennis took a similar stand, and said, "it is our right to have freedom of information rather than a privilege, since the word privilege connotes favor."

"The 'right to information' is as vital to our system, in my opinion, as the right to vote."

But, like others, she was willing to qualify the right where privacy of the individual was involved.

She rejected the notion that the government could make decisions about herself better than she could, and said information concerning decisions affecting the general public should be readily available.

"I must state that I cannot reach a compromise regarding this issue because I would be compromising my beliefs and also I would be trying to maintain some sort of status quo as so many others seem prevailed upon to do," she added.

Paul Lenihan stressed the increased involvement in the individuals life, and said "the right to confront decision making apparatus of the State, with informed opinion, is the foundation of Liberal Democracy."

Exemptions should be "defined specifically and narrowly", he said since there is the danger of ambiguous loopholes being written into the exemptions, which any cautious bureaucrat could hide behind, and there could be facts contained in some documents that would embarrass the government."

Roger Moser claimed the "more important" government meetings were held behind closed doors, and that this "leads to mistrust and fear on the part of the public."

"The people cannot trust their government without the knowledge of what's being withheld. The public is only aware through what it is told by reporters and newspapers."

"I personally feel government secrets should be made public, with open door meetings, then reporters, radio, etc. cannot bend or twist, the reports of such meetings to get public interest."

Naxter, Dempsey, and Lenihan all wrote about a proposed appeal procedure, and said the appeal should be to the courts, and not to the Justice Minister as proposed in the government white paper.

Dempsey said there should be a nominal fee "for all expenses pertaining to paper use only," while Denis said people could not be charged for what was rightfully theirs.

Residence Accommodation

There are vacancies in both Men's and Women's Residences

Students interested in on campus accommodations for the remainder of this term or for second term should contact

the Dean of Men's Residence Office (453-4858)

or

the Dean of Women's Office

453-4798

for details.



Winter Carnival Executive

By SHEENAGH MURPHY

Fifth year engineer Al Thibeault is this year's winter carnival chairperson. Thibeault was on last year's executive and was elected chairperson in October.

He is optimistic about this year's carnival and said that in the two general meetings they have had, 30-40 people turned up, in addition to a large executive on the committee.

Thibeault said that the events

planned for the carnival will be much the same as last years, with one or two exceptions. He said that there would be no Steak n' Stein this year, but instead the committee will be offering bingo.

The Committee will be working on a break-even budget according to Thibeault, who said that any profit making events will be offset by those which do cost money. Ideally, the money from the profits of those events will pay for the others.

The tentative theme for the carnival will be "Cold Rush Days" and the committee is hoping that participation will be at a maximum. Thibeault felt that people were not going out to events, and by carnival time they may "want to let their hair down".

Thibeault said that they are trying to get away from alcoholic based events and want more "fun things".

He said they will be trying to keep admission and other prices down. Thibeault also said that he wanted the town to get involved this year, as he felt that there was often a lot of friction between UNB students and the townspeople.

Public Relations manager is Sandy Spares and Thibeault said that there are about forty people on the committee. Groups co-ordinator is Brenda Levisn and Thibeault said that she will be in contact with the different groups concerning carnival floats.

Tom Best is assistant chairperson and Jerry Thibeault is pubs officer. Comptroller is Jaimie Robertson and Susan Jonah is secretary. Asst. comptroller is Tim Gorman.

Thibeault is hoping for a lot of exposure this year, and students should watch the Bruns and listen to CHSR for further news on the 1978 Winter Carnival.

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