

The problem with NSPIRG

Public interest groups constitute a large part of university extra-curricular activities. Some are extremely vocal at schools across the country, while some remain forever lost in the cornucopia of societies and clubs on campus. The Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group (NSPIRG) seems to be part of the latter camp; mired in obscurity.

Although the group has about 150 active members involved with a handful of projects throughout the city, their presence causes little more than the odd tremor on campus. This Public Interest Group seems to lack the public's attention.

On September 1, certain "alternative" societies on campus held a Community Connections Bar-B-Que. The Gazette, the Bisexual Gay and Lesbians At Dal (BGLAD), the Women's Centre, CKDU and NSPIRG, in conjunction with the Orientation Week Co-ordinator, were all asked to help organize the event.

At the first meeting, problems arose as to what the menu at the Bar-B-Que would include. The Women's Centre and NSPIRG are groups which promote vegetarian diets and both expressed a desire to have the event meat-free. It was the Gazette and BGLAD's position that meat should be served, on account of the large number of omnivores who would be present for the Bar-B-Que. A debate ensued, concluding in NSPIRG and the Women's Centre grudgingly agreeing to the serving

of meat at the function.

With the menu seemingly resolved, we began preliminary organization of the event. But three weeks later, NSPIRG told the Orientation Week Co-ordinator that they were pulling out of the Bar-B-Que because they did not feel that meat should be served. The event was on the verge of being cancelled, throwing the Frosh Week schedule out-of-sync.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the event, the food orders were not made until a few days prior to the date. At such short notice, we were only able to scrounge up 12 deli-trays (yes, with meat) and some pitchers of water for roughly 600 hungry Frosh. Needless to say, the whole Bar-B-Que was a sham. The food only held out for half the crowd, and even the people who got some of the diced meat, veggies and crackers were, annoyed that we had not delivered on the promise of a Bar-B-Que.

At the last possible moment (literally ten minutes prior to the start of the function), NSPIRG set up a table in the Green Room. We were happy that they made the effort to attend, even if it was at the last minute. But the whole incident makes one wonder about NSPIRG's purpose, and their relevance.

This was an isolated incident between the Gazette and NSPIRG. It is not emblematic of past relations between our two groups.

It was admirable of them to stand up for their vegetarian mandate, but they missed the point of the whole event.

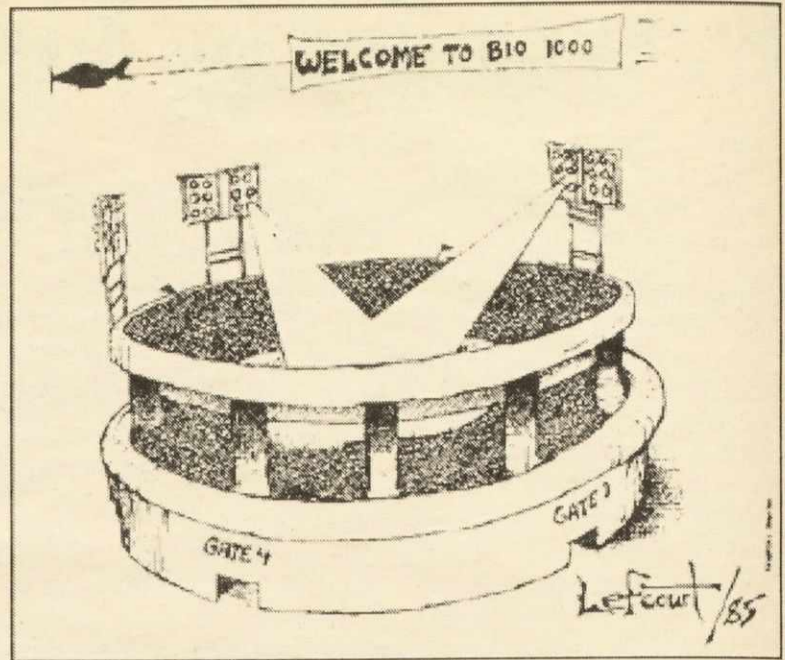
The Community Connections Bar-B-Que was not about individual groups preaching their own agendas. It was about recruitment and exposure; something of which NSPIRG seems in dire need.

In last year's NSPIRG Board of Directors election, only 75 ballots were cast out of over 10,000 eligible voters. This is a phenomenally low figure — even compared to the DSU elections. The Bar-B-Que was a perfect place to expose fresh minds to an organization. But by holding out on such an event, one is left wondering just who is NSPIRG representing? Obviously not the majority of this years frosh.

The Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group is a grandiose title, but of their nine board positions, eight are Dalhousie students and one attends King's. How can a group with such a broad mandate be guilty of such navel gazing? How can a public interest research group, that collects \$4 from each student annually, not have done any new research in the past two years?

Where is the money? Where is the research? Where is the interest? Hopefully these words will spark debate amongst NSPIRG members as to whether they are confusing public interest with special interest.

John Cullen



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