

editorial

Incompetence breeds apathy

Only 22 per cent voter turnout, a resounding victory for the no side, the possible impeachment of a council member; what is all this doing? It is making the student government bodies -- the SRC and the SUB board -- look incompetent in the eyes of the students, but more importantly it is fueling the vicious circle of student apathy.

Definitely there are immature elements in student government, there are indeed such elements in just about all forms of administration. It seems perhaps that when some people have the courage to take power, they also have the courage to show forth the playfulness that is in us all, deep down.

Nevertheless, systems can be built and plans made that allow for flexibility in dealing with these elements, anticipate times when they might cause problems, and therefore allow for much smoother operation of the system.

Let us take two examples, the victory of the 'no' side in the referendum and the problems the SRC have sometimes when dealing with controversy.

The 'no' decision was not made by students because they could not afford \$15, nor was it made because they did not want renovations, the CAUSE committee wanted renovations just as much as the SUB board. Why did the students vote no then? There are only two other possibilities; either the students did not like the renovations, or else they were so totally confused by all the propaganda, accusations and differing claims that they voted no to maintain as close as possible the status quo.

Obviously a mixture of these two factors provoked the outcome. In other words, students did not really know enough themselves about the proposals, some being fearful of detrimental changes, and they did not trust the student government to make the best decision

because immature elements were seen as characteristic of the whole organisation.

How could the system have been designed then to deal with the possibility of this? Firstly, the SUB board should have gone out and actively promoted student suggestions. This should have been accomplished by an intense media campaign running over several weeks, by mail questionnaires, and by on-the-street and door to door research. From this, various possibilities should have been drawn up and the same process followed to eliminate all plans but one. This process should have been very detailed and would have involved much work. A plan, complete except for fine engineering detail would have resulted.

The next step would have been to present the proposals to both STU and UNB student councils for their endorsement. Considering the proposals would have been exactly the majority student consensus, councillors would have found them hard to oppose. Likewise, had a referendum question asking; "Do you agree to the continuation of the present annual \$15 Student Union Building allocation of my student fees to be used for the exact proposed renovations to the SUB, subject to architectural finalization" been posed, it could hardly have failed. All the arguments used by the CAUSE committee would have been impossible so there would have been less opposition and therefore much less confusion. Immature elements could not have reared their heads.

So much for the could-have-beens. The SUB board has to decide where to go from here and it can yet follow this path and even be successful and even work on the proposals they paid for as a basis. The SUB board is not incompetent, but by anticipation they could have saved a lot of money and work.

As for the SRC, it finds itself in a similar situation. The council constitution was not designed to cope with radicals (here a radical is defined as a person with strong and possibly admirable convictions, who has an element of immaturity). Many people will immediately think this is an attack on John Bosnitch. Even though he may be in this sense a radical, this is not an attack, but rather a comment on how the SRC could deal with all such situations.

The main objective should be to shut off all sources of ridicule from the student population and to make business run more smoothly.

First, more discipline should be put in meetings, the chairman should speak up more forcefully and he should know the rules perfectly. Better leadership would filter down.

Secondly, as the main problem for the SRC is with controversial motions; a three-reading system should be adopted. If there is not unanimous consent at first reading, it should be mandatory for the mover and seconder to state exactly why they have made the motion. Then two people from the opposing side should

speak followed by a second reading and vote. If unanimity is not yet reached, debate and a final binding vote should follow. Textbook models of parliamentary procedure need not be followed, they can be modified to fit the particular problems of the organization.

Finally, disciplinary procedure should be modified. The present impeachment procedure makes the council look foolish.

The lack of anticipation of immaturity is definitely the overriding cause of student government problems. These problems have been in effect for many years and student apathy has been growing. The low voter turnout is a good physical indicator of this (is the SRC really representing all students?) and the SUB and SRC problems are the main examples.

If changes are initiated to counter immature elements, it may be several years before voter turnout tops 50 per cent. But then the SRC will be really representing a student body who trust them; and the university community will be a much better place to be a much better place to be.

