

## Whoops!

To the editors,

It was with great interest that I read your article "CFS on Parliament Hill" (Nov. 15, 1984, p. 3). Imagine my surprise when I learned that I had been in Ottawa the week before. I seem to remember having been in Halifax, N.S. for the entire duration of the CFS conference.

If the *Gazette* wishes to "send" me away again, might I suggest that I be sent to Toronto for the Vanier Cup this weekend? Go Mounties!

Accurately Yours,  
Neil Ferguson, DSU  
"Chancellor of the Exchequer"

## Gazette looking up

To the editors,

Ever since I arrived back in Halifax in October and began seeing copies of the *Gazette* again, I've been meaning to write and compliment you on the enormous improvement in the paper over the versions of previous years.

This improvement is most obvious in layout and design—wherever the sloppiness of bygone years has gone, I hope it stays there—but certainly isn't limited to appearance. This year most of your copy is written at a level of competence that only a few *Gazette* writers came up to last year. I presume that this is as much an indication of improved editing as it is of better writers.

The true test of any newspaper, however, is not how slick it looks or how good its syntax is, but what it chooses to cover. This year the *Gazette* has shown enough judgement in choosing issues and enough courage in covering them that it

has itself become an issue! That is something any newspaper can be proud of, and is particularly laudable for a student newspaper, most of which are grateful not to end up unread in the trash cans.

Keep going, and don't let the reactionary reactions get to you.

Yours,  
George Peabody

## And up

To the editors,

May I echo the accolades of others giving support for the new improved version of Canada's oldest college newspaper.

The *Gazette* is a fine read this year.

Dick Bowman

## Accusations unfair

To the editors,

This letter is in reaction to the false impression given by the headline of an article on p. 3 of the Nov. 8 *Gazette*, namely: "Students Say Spanish Text is Sexist." On reading the article, it seems like the headline should have been, "The Vast Majority of Spanish Students Think Text is Great"—but then nobody would have read the headline as there is no market for the unsensational truth.

As if that weren't enough, the following week (Nov. 15), an even more misleading and unfair title on the editorial page read, "Text is Sexist," certainly a serious accusation to make, especially when unsubstantiated.

These accusations were based on a dialogue in the textbook wherein one of the characters, Javier, makes a sexist remark. Javier is consistently made to look like a fool. He is obviously a caricature and not to be taken seriously. If the editors of the *Gazette* feel that this parody is

not made obvious enough throughout the text, they are grossly underestimating the basic intelligence of the average student.

The award-winning TV series *All in the Family* cannot be construed as racist because Archie Bunker is portrayed as a bigot—quite the contrary. The same principle applies here. They are both satires.

In upsetting the student, the text motivates him/her to express him/herself, to creatively use the newly-acquired grammar and vocabulary. If a student completely disagrees with Javier, fantastic! Use Spanish to explain to the teacher and the rest of the class why—don't drop the course. In successfully getting the student interested enough to communicate, Javier serves his purpose.

In addition to teaching language, the mandate of any second-language course is to familiarize the student with the culture(s) of the country(-ies) where that language is spoken. Javier and his comments are thus necessary. Like it or not, Spain and Latin America, although changing, still tend to have sexist attitudes.

Repeating sentences from the dialogue will enhance sentence structure and vocabulary acquisition. It will NOT make us all think the way Javier does, as the *Gazette* editors fear. This may surprise you, but Spanish students are not mindless robots who will be brainwashed by language drills.

I have had the opportunity of studying Spanish with a large variety of textbooks. I am presently studying methods of teaching second languages. This in no way makes me an expert, but I feel that it does allow me to critically view the text used at Dalhousie. *Spanish One, second edition* by Dalhousie professors Sonia Jones and Antonio Ruiz Salvador is the best Spanish textbook I have ever seen. It helps students achieve written and

spoken proficiency by dealing with controversial topics.

In conclusion, the sexist comments of a stereotypical character cannot be taken to mean that the textbook, and by implication the Dal. Spanish Dept. faculty, are themselves sexist. A public apology for these unfounded accusations would be appropriate.

Respectfully,  
Stuart Reznitzer  
and other concerned individuals:

John Weeren, President  
Spanish Society—Dalhousie U.  
Alison Fletcher  
Douglas M. Wilson  
Gina M. Yarr  
Veronica Kleinn  
Gary Clark  
Michelle Burke  
Matthew Stuckless  
Mark Morrison  
Margaret Mastings-James  
David Harper  
Olivia Leroyer  
and others

## "Swell Guys" have got to go

Dear *Gazette*:

Who is responsible for the selection of bands that play in the Grawood? Specifically, who chose "The Swell Guys" to play there on Friday afternoons?

I can't help but notice how few people can stomach this group for more than a few sets. And of those who can sit through their music (Dolly Parton's Tits being a favorite) very few actually enjoy it. The rest of us just try and ignore their tasteless songs and pathetic attempts at wit, hoping they will stop soon.

I realize the Grawood should employ student musicians. But I know there's talents out there—the people who play at the coffeehouse are usually very good. Why not give them a chance and put the

Swell Guys to work at something more suited to their musical abilities—like collecting garbage.

Sincerely,  
Joan Sullivan

## In support of DSU, SUNS neutrality

To the editors,

Two weeks ago you printed an editorial criticizing the student union and SUNS for failing to provide my campaign with financial and material support. I would briefly like to respond in defence of the student "leaders" involved in making that decision, one in which I concurred both then and now.

SUNS and our student unions are, in part, lobby groups. It is their task as such to undertake to inform political parties of the needs and concerns of the various student bodies. This task would be made difficult, if not impossible, if a student union were to be associated with supporting openly a particular political party. What student unions can do in the context of an election campaign is inform its membership of the need to participate and carefully consider the issues of the day. This the student unions and SUNS did at various levels of intensity and success.

Therefore I would like to thank all those who participated in the effort to raise student political consciousness during the campaign. I would particularly like to thank all those students who either worked with me on the campaign or supported me at the ballot box.

Next time we will win.

Sincerely,  
Tim Hill

## Atlantic Canada snubbed

To the editors:

I am somewhat concerned that Rick Janson's coverage (*The Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1984) of the conference "Rethinking Development in the 1980s: Perspectives From the Caribbean and Atlantic Canada" concentrated on only a portion of the conference. As the conference title implies, perspectives from both the Caribbean and Atlantic Canada were presented. I do acknowledge the importance and established position of those speakers mentioned in Janson's article (Dale Bisnauth, Robert Moore, Kari Levitt, Cheddi Jagan and Jim Petras), but I rise in defense of our own established development researchers in the Atlantic region.

The research and presentations made by Jim Sacouman (Acadia), Dan MacInnes (St. F.X.U.), Rick Williams (Dalhousie), Gary Webster (U.P.E.I.), Pinar Bulca (T.U.N.S.), Tony Wilson (S.M.U.), Robert Hill (Memorial), Gail Pool (U.N.B.) and a host of others are significant contributions to an analysis of Atlantic Canada's development, and thus to a critique of other similar underdeveloped regions. Although Janson was clearly covering only one aspect of the conference (the title of his article was "Rethinking Development: Picking Up the Pieces in the Caribbean"), I feel he has implied a serious snub to our own researchers and analysts by omitting them from coverage of a conference where considerable significance was placed upon the exchange of

# Advocating advocacy journalism

By DAVID OLIE

Lately, we *Gazette* types have been hearing from certain readers that they consider our coverage of issues to be biased. We must say that we are shocked by these accusations.

We are shocked because we thought that for most reasonably astute readers our biases were no big secret. Yes, we are biased. That any regular reader does not realize this is, frankly, quite surprising.

Now, in making this open admission we know we are running directly counter to the most exalted tenets of "modern journalism". We media people aren't supposed to be slanted one way or the other any more, and most of the commercial press types make a great show of their supposed neutrality. Consequently, an open admission of bias by the press is as shocking to most readers as Mary Daly's opinions in last week's issue were to most of our male readers. So let's make two main points in support and explanation of our practice of advocacy journalism.

First, as a member of Canadian University Press, the *Gazette* voted to work as an agent of social change. We take this mandate, this obligation, very seriously. It stems from our realization that we don't live in a perfect society, but rather

one in which women don't have equality with men, in which students have to struggle unreasonably to get an education, in which our money and yours is used by Canadian banks to allow the racists of South Africa to stay in business, et cetera, et cetera.

It would be nice if we could help make progress towards a more perfect society by producing a perfect newspaper. This perfect paper would have perfectly balanced coverage between women's issues and men's issues, gay issues and straight issues, students' issues and administration's issues, and so on. Frankly, we'd love to do that.

The reality is, though, that half the issues mentioned above (and you know which half) are given virtually no coverage at all in the mainstream commercial press. As a result, we consciously and deliberately weigh our coverage in favour of the overlooked half. We give extensive coverage to women's issues because that information is rarely, if ever, available in the *Herald* or *Maclean's*. We are overcompensating on our side to try as best we can to counterbalance the unstated and hypocritical slant of the "unbiased" commercial press, and in so doing we hope we are dragging the "happy medium" towards a fair balance. The point is that we are,

we want to be and we ought to be an alternative press.

Second, the reasons for the "unbiased" attitude of the commercial press should be pointed out. Despite their pretensions, they are not engaged in a holy crusade for truth and fairness. Rather, their motive is the profit motive. Over the last 50 years the goal of every commercial newspaper, magazine and TV news show has been to pull in the largest audience possible, in order to charge as much as possible for advertising space. To do this it is necessary to offend as few people as possible.

As a result we have newspapers today which are essentially like McDonald's hamburgers, the lowest common denominator of taste, which few people really like but few really dislike either. All that matters is that you buy it, whether you read it or whether it puts you to sleep.

In fact, though, it does matter. We wonder why apathy is so rampant around us today, why people don't seem to give a shit about what happens, why only 53 per cent of American voters could bother to go out and vote for President. Surely a large part of the reason is that our bland media do nothing to stimulate the public into concern about any issue. The lack of concern on the part of the mass

media must be rubbing off on the people because, after all, it is intended to.

It hasn't always been this way. In the previous century, the "golden age of newspapers," all editors practiced unabashed advocacy in print. Everyone in Nova Scotia in the 1840's - '60's knew that Joseph Howe was a reformer, making vicious attacks on the established elites and standing for the principle of responsible government. If a reader wanted unbiased coverage of an issue he would buy Howe's paper and another paper from the other side of the fence, read both and balance their views in his own mind. Meanwhile, Howe led the fight for what he knew was right, leading public opinion rather than following it, stimulating the readership into action and, as a result, giving us representative democracy. Could the mass media do the same today?

We at the *Gazette* make no claim to be all things to all people. We sincerely hope that anyone seriously considering the issues of the day will consider opinions other than our own; we are confident that, after due consideration, our views will prevail. Meanwhile we will continue to be biased. We have a job to do, and we feel this to be the most effective way of doing it. □