

Gone to the dogs

by Blair Dwyer, CKDU News and Public Affairs

As this is being written, Dalhousie students are deep in the midst of one of the most lacklustre Student Union Election campaigns that has ever not taken place on this campus—although of course you would hardly notice it, and in fact a lot of students haven't. It's been that kind of a campaign.

Not that I'm blaming the candidates. In fact, the candidates, few though their number may be, should be commended for having at least shown enough interest to throw their hats into the ring. It is indeed unfortunate that in order to have elections, candidates must come forward in some manner, shape, or form; but that, alas! is one of the evils of democracy. Those daring few who have recognized this and have provided their names (although not much else) for the democratic right to be exercised upon (lest it become so weak from inactivity that it wither away without ever being noticed) should be thanked. Certainly, the campaign has not been terribly titillating, but you must admit that it is rather difficult for so few to do a hell of a lot for so many when never before in the history of human political conflict have so many cared so little about what so few were doing.

Enlarging upon a pattern that developed last year, a disturbingly large number of Council representatives for next year have been acclaimed. Not that anybody has acclaimed their abilities, mind you—you have to have elections for that. In this case, "acclaimed" means that nobody else has offered to contest these candidates in the run for Council positions.

In fact, the tendency this year has been to run from Council positions. As nominations closed at 5:00 p.m. on March 6 (for the second time, as you may recall), no students had come forth to offer for the Nursing and Medicine Council positions. The Board of Governors had recruited one student hopeful, but saw its hopes for another student to fill the second seat dashed. (Actually, I shouldn't say the Board of Governors were hoping for a second student; they may full well appreciate the lack of student input next year. And students wonder why their tuition is so high!

With all the acclamations this year, the question also arises as to what effect this will have on democratic theory. If elected representatives are in some way responsible to the voters, what happens when there are no voters to be responsible to? Does this give the acclaimed candidate the right to

take the glory of the position held and bask in the sun with it? Council meetings are already suffering in attendance this year; will anybody feel obliged to attend next year?

In total, 15 positions were filled by acclamation, and three were not filled by anyone or anything. Perhaps a dictator could remedy this last situation; rumours persist that a fellow named Adolf is still around and would like another chance at politics. In fact, one of his stronger points was finding people to fill government positions.

But let's not get off on a tangent. Why all the acclamations this year? No cases of candidates stealing nomination forms have been discovered; in fact, interest has been running so low in these elections (if that is a term that can still be used) that the possibility of candidates stealing nomination forms to prevent other students from contesting their seats has not even been rumoured. The difficulties of having a lively scandal to instill life into an apathetic university!

Indeed, apathy, as everybody knows, is the problem. On Wednesday, March 8, just one week before the date of elections (I've decided that the term can be used in a *limited* sense, since two teams are running for president / vice-president, and elections are being held for Science, Pharmacy, Commerce and Engineering students), the CKDU News and Public Affairs Department conducted a mini-poll of student attitudes towards the elections. Of fourteen students interviewed (at noon in the SUB Lobby), none said they were following events closely (and admittedly, there had been few campaign events to follow up to that point), but six stated bluntly that they did not really care, since Council did not appear that relevant to them (not only a case of not fighting on the beachheads, etc., but a case of surrendering upon hearing vague rumors of a gathering storm). As one person put it, "Students are here to get their degree and have a good time. Who really cares?" As Twain would say, Dal students are letting their studies interfere with their education.

Admittedly, this was not a Gallup poll. However, in one disturbing respect it was a "gallop poll"—a fair number of comments were recorded "on the gallop", to the cafeteria, so to speak. I guess fried chicken, no matter how greasy, sounds better than student politics, AFS, or the plebiscite on the Drug Plan. At noontime, anyway.

So what is to be done? Perhaps it would be best to abolish elections,

Mr. Evans suggested that I wanted to dispense with the constitution, "circumventing the document", implying that I regard the constitution as insignificant. If Mr.

Evans had read my letter closely, he would have found that I acknowledge the constitution as a "vital guide", in fact the only guide. However, I questioned when council becomes too preoccupied with the constitution, (those more than rare occasions), inevitably affecting proper consideration of student issues. I questioned the needless bickering regarding constitutional matters. There are those who feel the constitution should be followed

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since democracies can be run well only if the electorate is interested and informed. Let the activities of the Student Union be run by a good (or bad) oligarchy. But on second thought, that's just what the next Council will be—an acclaimed oligarchy. Therefore, we don't really have to abolish elections—merely change the name from "elections day" to "acclamations day", to bring everything into conformity

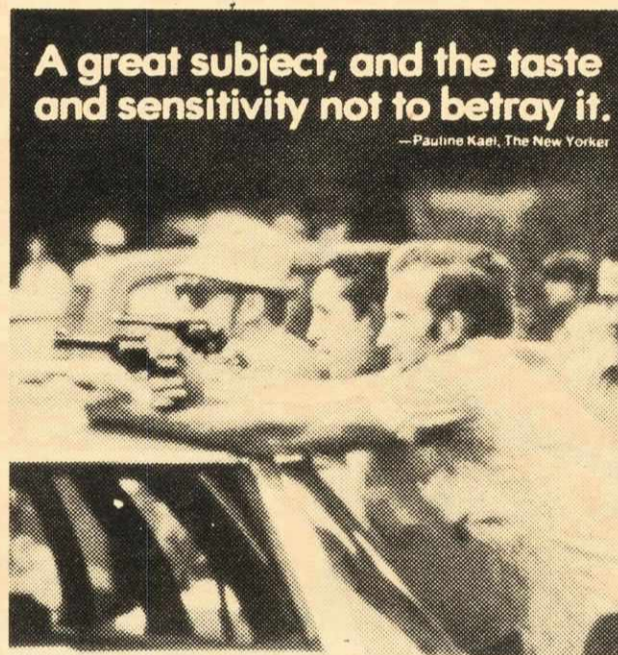
with reality. Better still, let's keep the name "election day" and fool everybody—then next year, we can get a group of dogs together, put their names on the nomination forms, and since in all likelihood nobody else will bother contesting the seats, we could send the whole Dalhousie Student Union to the dogs without a single ballot ever having been cast!

Here Rover, Fido, Spot . . .

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remarks, however I felt the need to set a few facts straight.

It is rather interesting how he suggests that lawyers are the and-all and be-all as far as passing comment on the constitution. Certainly, the right to read the constitution and constitutional decision is not reserved to just lawyers. And I'm sure one doesn't require a special "authority" to express an opinion.

First of all, he has neatly sidetracked most of my article and has attempted to pigeonhole me on two paragraphs. I would assume, then, that Mr. Evans is in agreement with the rest of my article.