

**LETTERS cont'd**

participate can do so is no answer at all, to glibly say that there are many intangible benefits is no answer. It is the President's job to make such benefits tangible so that the membership can see what is being done and how it will benefit them - the level of disinterest is a good indication of just how intangible some of these things are. If they are so intangible that the membership is unaware of their value then maybe, if we did not have them at all, we would not be aware that they had vanished completely, and then we could have the compulsory fee reduced (very tangible).

The questions that should be answered are:

- (i) Are the services that the Union provides truly used by most students? and
- (ii) Will the improvements which the fee increase will pay for serve to fill a need of the student body? (eg. the continuing talk of a Carleton Campus House which no one I talk to down here seems to want).

and to my mind the answer to both questions is a resounding NO.

The Union is an administrative bureaucracy, and as such is increasing in the extent of its operations and in the cost to its members at an alarming rate, meanwhile proliferating services that are not used by the majority of students. It is becoming increasingly remote from the student body, as evidenced by continuing cries of Apathy! from the administration and by voter turnout in elections, and its elected representatives are either unaware of this schism or refuse to discuss it realistically, as became apparent at the recent Union/DMSS meeting.

Finally, an invitation to Mr. Russell, representing 16% of us including me. If, as Dan says, Union membership is so valuable (i.e. fifty bucks valuable) then make membership voluntary. If Dan is right then the only person not to pay his fifty bucks will be me (if you actually do this I would pay up because we would obviously have such brilliant leadership that I could not afford not to be a member) and if I am right many people (to use Dan's phrase) will not join and Union activities will be curtailed to a point where activity is proportional to real student interest in the Union. And if you choose to retain the compulsory fee I can only assume that you too feel that fifty bucks is too much for what we get.

**Yours truly,  
Jim Cowan  
Med II**

**Defense of Union**

To the Gazette;

It is with considerable reluctance that I reply to Jim Cowan's latest letter about the Student Union. Our series of letters is beginning to resemble the controversy about radial versus steel belted tires

that raged in the National Lampoon. However, since Mr. Cowan refuses to discuss the matter in person I do not want to see his effort go unanswered. Although no longer President, I am still a member of the Board of Governors and the Students' Council, and I repeat the invitation to Jim for a personal discussion of the matter he has raised.

Regarding Jim's first point, if he will re-read my February 20 letter he will discover that I was disputing his application of the city/Union analogy to the case of people moving out of a city. If my language was imprecise, I apologize.

The second point in Jim's letter exhibits misunderstanding of "the official organs of information of the Union". Although the Union has many publications it has nothing comparable to a Pravda, or even a University News. With the exception of technical or legal information, what one reads in a Union publication is usually nothing but the expression of the individual who wrote the article in question.

Student publications are among the many student organizations who cry apathy when faced with a poor reception or few new members. Although I have learned that there is no one cause of disinterest, I hesitate to allocate the blame among inept leadership, unnecessary services, poor communication of the existence of services, physical constraints of an institution, the background of students, misguided orientation of the university and what one ate for breakfast on a particular day.

With reference to the legality of the fee, I have been misquoted. My letter stated that a referendum was the source of the fee, not that it could only be changed by referendum. The source of the compulsory fee is a 1912 referendum in which a large turnout of voters gave compulsion a 90% majority.

Since then there has been a general requirement for consultation with the students before a major change in the fee is made. Sometimes the requirement has been constitutional, sometimes it has not been. The section of the By-Laws to which you referred was passed by a Union meeting in the fall of 1973 as an expression of the minimum consultation required for a fee change. It was a response to three minor modifications in the fee that had been made without student consultation due to the time and expense required for a referendum.

Jim and I are in complete agreement on the Council privileges question. I have always regretted that the existence of a small token of appreciation for Council members has caused abuse by some members which results in a black eye for the entire Council.

Moving on to the "chief objection" portion of Jim's letter, it would take 32 pages of this newspaper to provide a partially adequate response. Common sense forces me to make but a few general comments.

Jim Cowan accuses me of being glib, yet he completely ignores the four concrete examples of "intangible" benefits that were given in my previous letter. Much of Jim's complaints are caused by the fact that the Student Union has no public relations branch, choosing to spend funds on benefits rather than on publicizing the benefits. It is up to the new Council to decide if the Union's light has been under a bush for too long.

To use a specific example, one can never know with certainty whether active student members of Senate tip the scales in favour of a programme such as a general move to improve the quality of teaching in all Faculties. If the answer is yes, it would take at least two years of lost effort to discover that answer. Experience elsewhere indicates that abandoning the compulsory fee has led to a majority of students refusing to pay, yet continuing to expect the services. When the services begin to collapse, a referendum restores the compulsory fee. It has been a wasteful exercise elsewhere and I hope that the Dalhousie Student Union members never choose that path.

I would like to discuss these questions in person with Jim because letters are a difficult vehicle for carrying on any sort of dialogue. I cannot resist pointing out that he accuses the Union of increasing size and cost, whereas the last ten years of budgets will show him a history of declining service and sharply declining cost, in real dollar terms.

Jim states that he can find no one who wants a Carleton Campus House, yet the initiative, in favour of that project has continually been with Health Sciences students, including the DMSS representatives. If the project were not desired surely the Carleton Campus Task Force would not have spent a year planning for a facility.

My apologies go to everyone for the inadequacy and imprecision of this letter. I have and will welcome discussion of the Union's role and activities, although it seems obvious that this particular discussion would benefit from face-to-face conversation.

**Daniel O'Connor**

**Occasionally honesty found**

To the Gazette:

This is just a quick note to say thank you to a Med. student - Vince Arcieri - for going to the effort to track me down to return the wallet, containing a sum of cash which I lost. It's kind of nice to be occasionally reminded that the world still has honest people; although you wouldn't accept my offered reward, Vince - at least accept these words of thanks.

**Phil Hicks.**

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