

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's mandate not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

Citizens duped by MAI

Admittedly, people may be turned off.

Protests, boycotts, strikes... who is it this time? What policy is targeted now? What's the latest corporation being blasted? What else is wrong with the environment? Get real. As if we could make a difference.

Perhaps a common response.

I mean, aren't we just making progress, forging into the twenty-first century at ever-increasing rates of economic growth? Surely this can't be bad.

But then, are these protesters out to lunch? Surely no one would want to prevent such growth, such betterment of society. Yet, what if there is merit to what these frustrated citizens are saying? How can we tell?

One recent example of such an issue is the ongoing negotiations around the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). Last Wednesday, Brian O'Neill spoke to about 65 students at Dal regarding this agreement. The MAI is a new treaty being developed under the umbrella of the Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This institution works to integrate economic policies among its member states (i.e. USA, Japan, EU, Canada, etc.). Generally speaking, the MAI is seeking to deregulate trade between nations, attempting to take the government out of the market system and let big business have more of a free reign over where they act and how they act.

At first glance, such an approach may not all be bad. Neo-classical economics teaches that liberalizing markets and promoting freer trade will naturally lead to equal opportunity — economic prosperity for all people, of all nations. The "trickle-down" phenomenon would effectively reduce poverty by positing that financial gains made by selling, trading, and investing would permeate all levels of society, mutually benefitting all people.

Well, recent years have all but shot down this theory. Rather than increasing equality, we have witnessed income differentiation; the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, leaving us with a dual society: the affluent and the more impoverished. Conditions such as these have led big multinationals to set up wherever cheap labour and favourable environmental regulations (meaning lax) are in place. While there are admittedly generalizations here, it's fair to say that a large number of corporations, such as Pepsi (plastered all over campus), have made use of these conditions.

What then will be the effect of something such as the MAI? Will further opening of this global system contribute to further exploitation or unjust practices? Judging by some

aspects of the MAI, it certainly appears so. Not surprisingly, O'Neill spoke against it. The MAI, referred to as the "Corporate Bill of Rights" forces governments to treat all investors (domestic and international) as equal. Requirements that the investors hire locally and invest in the local economy would be banned. Corporations would be permitted to move whenever they want, taking factories and money with them. Enforcement of responsible behaviour with respect to certain social and environmental issues may also be banned. Already, it becomes obvious that protection of domestic and local industry, jobs, environmental resources, and even culture are threatened. The fact that the Canadian government, like most other OECD governments, has decided to negotiate the treaty secretly, without consulting Parliament, suggests

the government knew citizens wouldn't be pleased or supportive.

Is democracy being challenged? Yes! Are Canadians losing authority over their own natural resources? Most definitely! Will workers be affected by lower safety standards, wages, and job security? We can count on it. We need to become informed of the MAI, and ensure that our government doesn't act against our own wishes. We can make a difference; we need to make ourselves heard. Why not exercise your mind at a panel discussion on the MAI? Sponsored by the Economic Justice Working Group at Dal, this discussion will be held next Wednesday (November 19) at 7 p.m., in the A & A building. We need to ensure that our democratic government remains accountable to us as its citizens.

MIKE BULTHUIS

Rule who, Britannia?

The sun never sets on the British empire. A popular catch phrase that once inspired pride in millions of British subjects. In the 1990s, the sun rises and sets on the British empire everyday.

Remembrance day should not only cause us to remember who was lost in the two World Wars, but also what. And without a doubt, two of the most pivotal outcomes of those periods of our history are the end of the United Kingdom as an international superpower, and the creation of the United States as one.

A thousand years from now the British Empire will be remembered much as the Roman Empire is today. A line of leadership which helped modernize the entire world, gave birth to an entire culture, and in effect, changed the world.

It is absolutely true that many of the actions of the Empire were reprehensible. They were enslavers and aggressive, but so were the Romans.

More importantly, the British redefined freedom. The Magna Carté is a model for every constitution in the last two hundred and fifty years. The Industrial Revolution which was started in England gave birth to an entirely new class of people which now includes 70 per cent of the North American population — the middle class.

As for culture, many of the greatest writers and composers of the last five hundred years have been British, including William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, George Orwell, Charles Dickens, Lord Byron, and Edward Elgart.

Today, as the British prepare to

enter the European Union, and as Hong Kong enjoys the visage of a fluttering red flag instead of the Union Jack, we say the last rights for the greatest empire in the last 1500 years.

That is not to say that the United Kingdom is still impotent and does not exert influence around the world. They are a vital member of the G-7, and still an important military power. But what once was will be no more.

This is best viewed through the eyes of the monarchy. A family which could once count on the instant service of three quarters of a billion people is now relegated to dancing with the Spice Girls and hoping to avoid another sexual scandal.

Would Canada immediately go to war to defend the Empire? Probably not. We took very little interest in the Falklands dispute. Most of us consider London to be a nice tourist trap, and not the centre of the modern world. Britain's fall as an international power can ironically be seen in a very abstract way.

For many years London's Heathrow airport was the busiest in the world. Planes ferried millions into the hearth of civilization. Today it is Chicago's O'Hare, then Atlanta, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Los Angeles. Finally, in fifth place, is London.

The world changed after World War Two. We had the Cold War, the emergence of two new superpowers, and the birth of the technology age. Somehow this impervious little island, steeped in tradition, couldn't keep up. For better? Or for worse?

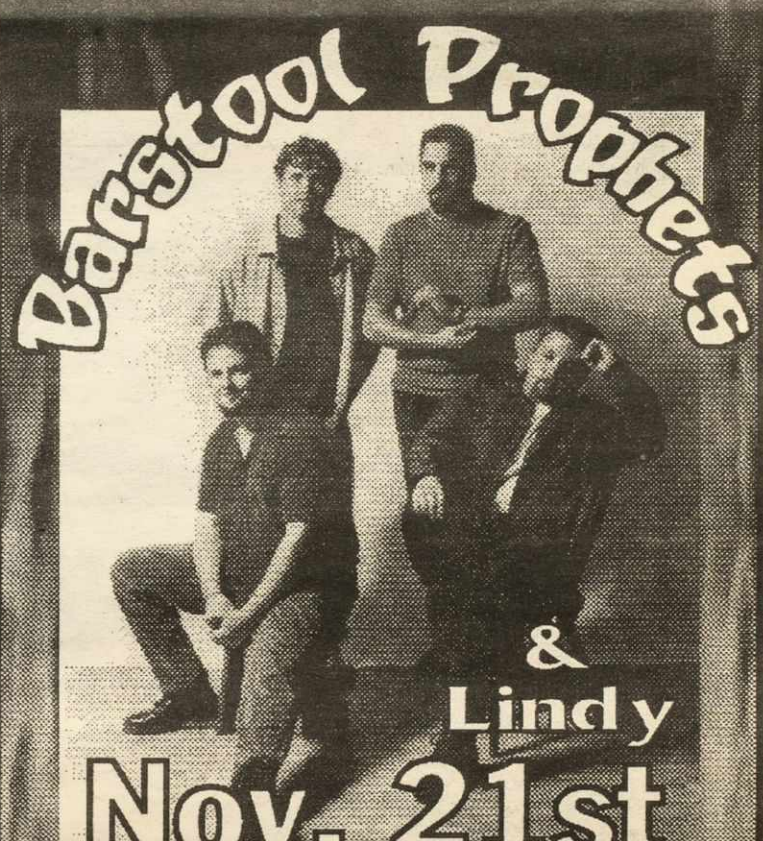
DANIEL CLARK

Interested in a behind the scenes position in a society?

The Gazette needs three students for the Board of Directors.

You do not need to be a staff member, just a student at Dalhousie.

Bring cover letter and resume to room 312 of the SUB, and start getting involved.




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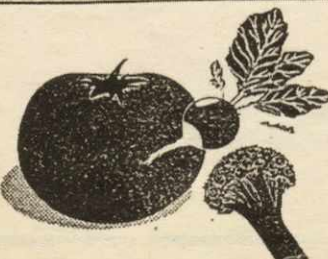
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