

Ex SDI expert on software

by John D. McLennan

Dr. David Lorge Parnas, a computer expert and professor from Queen's University, addressed a gathering at the W.C. McKenzie Health Service Center on the 16th of November. His topic, the "fraud" of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) or what is more commonly known as "Star Wars".

He had been invited to join the SDI Organization (SDIO) in the summer of 1985 as a software consultant for a salary of \$1000 a day. He quit shortly after he became convinced that SDI was a fraud.

Parnas outlined numerous examples of unbridgeable gaps in the plan and of scientists corrupted by the availability of vast quantities of research money.

In the organization, he was greeted with such statements by other scientists as "we agree that it won't work but don't you want to spend this money," and "It's nonsense but it will support my research." "The research community is looking for a free ride," he said.

A major point in his talk was the fallibility of the software. Trustworthiness is based on testing; mathematical analysis, exhaustive case analysis and prolonged realistic testing. Testing the software by these criteria is impossible: the software does not have the continuity necessary for vigorous mathematical analysis; there are too many cases to exhaustively analyse; and prolonged testing would require thousands of years. "The number of real (software) systems that are trustworthy when first given to the actual users for real use is ZERO," Parnas said fallibility of the software is "destabilizing" and will "only create more uncertainty."

The system may work, said Parnas, but it "could not be trusted". However, one cannot state that it cannot work, he said, just as one cannot state that "a group of monkeys put in a room with typewriters cannot produce the Encyclopedia Britannica in five million years."

Parnas' experience with the SDIO has brought him into the belief that

there has been "a blatant attempt to mislead the population." Officials have told him that this talk of the future "impotence of nuclear weapons (if SDI worked) is just what we tell the population."

Parnas added his thoughts on Canada's role in SDI.

"Mulroney stated that it is only research," he said, adding that "SDI is a development project" and therefore violates the 1972 IBM treaty which Canada supports. Canada is part of the SDI plans, as it is the northern area for "forward basing" where systems are set up by the US in a third country. "Canada can either join with the US on this suicidal path that it has chosen to travel, or it can develop a new path by cooperating with other smaller nations," warned Parnas.

This presentation was jointly sponsored by the University Nuclear Disarmament Organization (UNDO) and the Canadian Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (CPPNW).

Gateway Staff meeting

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SU Forum: the issues

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University.
Oginski also noted that another round of the staff review has begun. "Any member of the University community can begin the process," noted Oginski. "If a student writes a letter of complaint (about a professor) to the department Chair, that chair is honour bound to follow it up."

Oginski also questioned the merits of the review process of academic staff. "There are 17 committees reviewing 3,000 staff. You wonder how comprehensive it is."

Tim Boston then spoke of the SU's upcoming court case against the University administration. "We're confident of victory," said Boston. "The Administration's argument is basically that they need the money."

The SU is taking the U of A Administration to court over the \$30 per student "library and computer" fee, imposed this year. The province has limited tuition increases to 10 percent, but the U of A has also added an extra \$30 library and computer fee. The SU contends that this fee exceeds the 10 percent limit and is thus illegal.

Boston also spoke of the Jan. 9 meeting of the Canadian Universities Student Executive Council (CUSEC), a national student organization that the U of A co-founded. The meeting will be held at the University of Western Ontario.

"A lot of big universities down East are very interested in CUSEC," said Boston as he expressed hopes that the CUSEC could attract their membership.

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