

Peter Rans, DSU Graduate Students' Representative

"A disturbing pattern on the student council"

by Peter Rans

The present Student Council Executive seems hell bent on destroying both its credibility and its effectiveness. If these appear to be harsh words, observe their actions.

In recent weeks, Messrs. Owen and Champion have shown surprising unanimity, by refusing to involve themselves, and the Student Council, in such issues as the Capitol workers' strike, and a conference on Canadian Foreign Policy. These examples — by no means exhaustive — illustrate a growing trend in the Executive to feed on its own bureaucratic entrenchments, and to limit its *raison d'être* to 'real student concerns,' which in Mr. Champion's definition means the granting of money to sub-groups. We all know that a fresh struggle with the MPHEC and the Provincial Government, over reduced funding and higher tuition, is an inevitable part of this year's curriculum. When we need a large group of organized students to support our campaign, they may not be there; the reason for their absence can be located in the Executive's attitude. There is little in sub-group funding to capture the interest or imagination of the average student.

Mr. Champion has often lamented that students do not get much community support when they protest cutbacks in education. Isn't the reason obvious? We are frequently seen to be selfish. When a section of the community (the Capitol workers) asked us to listen to their grievances, and then to take a stand, the Executive decided it was not within the 'scope' of the Student Council even to listen.

I am not questioning Mr. Owen's intelligence or his integrity. What I am perturbed by is his style of leadership. He is, as president, supposed to offer the Student Union direction in all external matters; yet, everything that does not conveniently fit within his narrow definition of student concerns (the SUB, the university administration, SUNS, the provincial government, and NUS), is dismissed until we "have the time for it." If we wish to keep our own self-respect, and earn the respect of others, we must make time. Social, political and economic injustice does not go away just because students ignore it. Only by taking stands, even if they are occasionally unpopular, can the Student Council and the Executive ever hope to reawaken the students' interest in politics on a campus, provincial, national and international level. Should they fail to do this, the turnout at next year's executive elections may only

be 5%, which it is dangerously close to already.

The Executive is failing to give the lead they should in external affairs; it is also curiously reticent to allow the activities of its 'civil servant,' John Graham, to be scrutinized publicly. I was savagely attacked by the Executive when I raised a motion concerning the various positions presently held by Mr. Graham, and the need to investigate a potential conflict of interests. The arguments used against me were that the word 'investigation' implied Mr. Graham was guilty of something — they see no contradiction in applying the words 'investigation' and 'evaluation' in various projected reports on professors and their teaching methods — and that my 'attitude' indicated that I was on a private witch hunt. My motion simply expressed the anxiety that a number of people feel. Mr. Graham is in the anomalous position of working for the Executive and the university administration simultaneously; yet, there has been no public examination of precisely what formal and informal decisions he has the power to make.

To argue, as Mr. Owen has, that Mr. Graham is a bureaucrat directly under the control of the presidential office, is simply not good enough. Anyone performing the administrative duties which Mr. Graham does is constantly making political decisions. What we need to know is who is really directing whom. The committee I proposed would have gathered information and educated the Student Council and Student Union in an area of policy-making that is only dimly perceived. The formation of this committee was temporarily prevented by the barest of margins (9 for 10 against), with all of the Executive being in opposition to it. If, as the members of the Executive claimed, they were not against my motion in 'principle,' but they were only objecting to my turn of phrase which they found 'insulting,' they were perfectly free to propose a more 'acceptable' motion themselves. None of them did, which leads one to suspect that they were simply being hypocritical.

In both internal and external policy the present Executive is confusing responsibility with a quiescence to the status quo. My object has been to describe a disturbing pattern in the student council, that is, the way in which the executive is stifling discussion and investigation of important issues on the grounds of time and administrative inconvenience. This pattern should be resisted. The executive ought rather to be offering genuine leadership within a democratic structure.

C O M M E N T

All members of the Dalhousie community are eligible to contribute commentaries to the Gazette's Op-Ed page. Submissions should be typewritten, double-spaced and not exceed 750 words in length. Commentaries express only the opinions of the individuals who write them and need not express any editorial policy of the Dalhousie Gazette.

United Church moderator's views reflect social class

by Charles Spurr

From listening to the interview with the recently-elected moderator of the United Church of Canada,* it is immediately obvious which social class her views repre-

sent. For example, she says that Christians do not lead a "simpler" or "more natural" lifestyle than most Canadians. By this she means that they "all have two boats, three cars," etc. Since the average

Canadian does not own all the boats and cars she speaks of, it is clear that when she talks about "Canadians" or "Canadian society", she is actually speaking about the rich and their society.

Seen in this light, what she has to say in the interview is valuable in that it sheds light on the social nature of the Canadian rich. When she talks about Canadian society being racist, for example, this does not mean that ordinary Canadians are racist, any more than that they own two boats, three cars, etc. each. Her example of the racist nature of "Canadian society" is turning a student from Nigeria away. It is true that this is an activity of the Canadian state, a state which is controlled by the rich minority. However, ordinary Canadians, as any African student can tell you, play no role in "turning them away".

The interview with the Moderator of the United Church of Canada is valuable in still one other way. It shows the role of the Church as a Communicator for the ideology of the rich. In Canada, and many other countries, church-going is a tradition for large numbers of people. There is a whole image of the churchgoer as a pleasant, prosperous person who does not mind donating the occasional dollar to charity. In the past, the Church

represented the sole focal point of a community, and it is by means of such institutions that ordinary people are educated to have many of the same viewpoints as the ruling class.

The way this function of the Church can be seen from the interview is that the representative of the Church is also the representative of the social conscience of the rich minority. The social conscience of the rich minority is what is preached to those ordinary people who still uphold the tradition of Church-going. Thus the ordinary person becomes duped by the weekly Church-going ritual into taking up views which are in direct opposition to his basic interests. One of these views is the belief that the Canadian state represents the ordinary people, in spite of the everyday experience of the ordinary people of police beatings and murders, promotion of racist and fascist gangs like the Klu Klux Klan, increasing taxes and cost of living, cutbacks in education and social services, promotion of the reactionary Armed Forces, etc. In other words, the role of the Church is to dupe the people into sharing the view of the rich, that the Canadian state represents them even when the experience of most Canadians brutally refutes this claim.

In the interview the Moderator talked much about "keeping up with the times" and the necessity of the Church to adapt itself to the modern world. Although the tradition of Church-going still lingers, more and more people are finding religion to be repulsive, largely because it is antiquated and divorced from people's everyday social experience. A device for duping the masses is useless, unless there are masses to dupe. Hence, the "avant garde" statements of the moderator of the United Church. These types of statements have been coming out for some time, but the lack of a great rush back to the Church doors shows that the people are not fooled easily.

Exploiters and oppressors require the functions of both the hangman and of the priest. The role of the hangman is to tie the noose; the role of the priest is to persuade the victim to cooperate.

* See centrespread of this week's Gazette.

[Charles Spurr is a "worker politician" in the Halifax area who was the candidate of the Canadian Communist Party [Marxist-Leninist], CPC [M-L], in last February's federal election.]

