

# Soc union won't sell out

by Social Course Union  
Members

The Sociology department has had a tradition of student involvement in its decision-making bodies. Over the last few years, the faculty has probably done more to encourage, and permit, a student input in its internal government structure than any other department at Dalhousie.

Through the joint effort of interested graduate and undergraduate Sociology students, and a liberal-minded faculty this tradition of participatory democracy reached its peak in the fall of 1970.

At that time, the Sociology Students' Union and the Sociology faculty reached an agreement which allowed student parity in almost all areas of departmental jurisdiction. This agreement was not the result of force or the threat of force by students, but rather, was characterized by good will on both sides.

The spirit of trust present at this time was so good that it was not thought necessary to draw up a formal contract or constitution binding both parties to the agreement. Instead, the terms of reference for the new group were simply drawn up and business commenced from that point.

The terms of reference were quite simple. Departmental decisions were to be made at departmental meetings, where voting privileges would be exercised by ten faculty members and ten students with the chairman of the department having a vote in the case of ties.

On most departmental committees, there would be an equal number of student and faculty members. Faculty only exclusively dealt with decisions of hiring and firing of professors, evaluation of student performance and selection of graduate students. Even in some of these areas, students were permitted and encouraged to give opinions.

For instance, in the case of potential new faculty, students were given the opportunity to meet these people and later to inform faculty as to whether or not students felt they should be hired.

On the whole, the system worked fairly well. Working together, students and faculty redesigned the requirements for M.A. students. As a result of student impetus and concern, the teaching of introductory Sociology was considerably modified.

Faculty and students discussed together the areas in which new courses should be offered and possible improvements in the existing courses. Student-faculty co-operation helped to insure that the move to the new quarters in the Forrest Building could be accomplished with the maximum satisfaction possible to all concerned.

Of course, many problems arose. At one point some faculty even wished to terminate the agreement.

However, this move was not supported by most faculty who rightly felt that despite difficulties they had a commitment to honor. Honorable people simply do not void an agreement because it is not working out to their complete satisfaction.

On the understanding that faculty would continue to honor their commitments, the Sociology Student Union was reconstituted this fall.

However, before the students had readied themselves for participation in the department, faculty informed them they wanted a new government structure.

This might have been reasonable had faculty decided to use the old department structure to try to work out the new one. But this was not the case. Students were simply informed that they were no longer part of the department government structure. Nor was the new agreement reached by joint student-faculty deliberation. Students were merely presented with a new department format and urged to accept it with "dispatch".

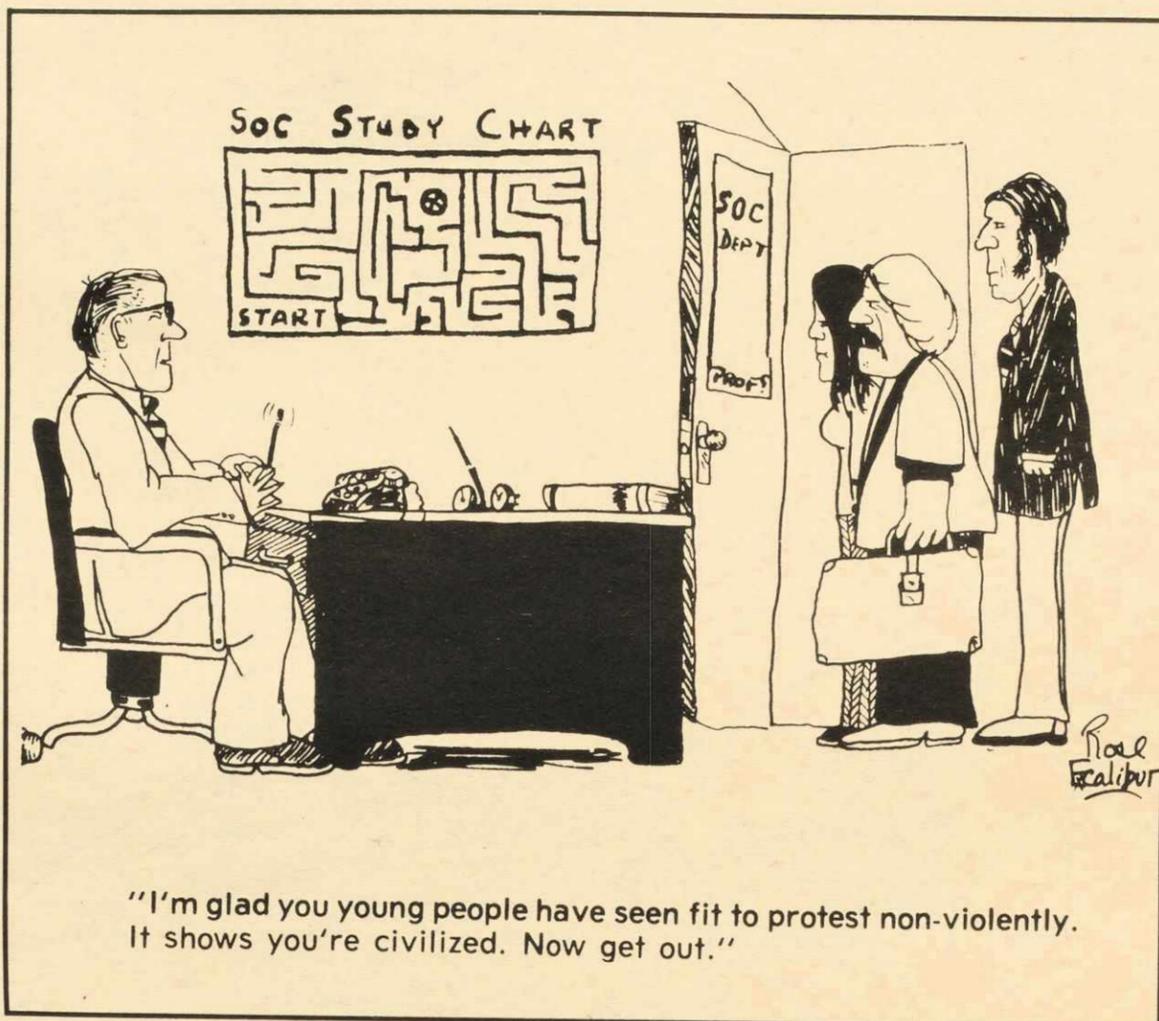
## FACULTY'S PRESENT POSITION

The present structure consists of an executive and various committees. The Executive composed of Chairman, Don Clairmont, three faculty and two students, makes decisions while the committees, composed of an equal number of faculty and students makes recommendations to the Executive. In addition, there are regular open departmental meetings for information and discussion purposes.

At a meeting Wednesday, November 17, faculty made its present position clear. It was felt students should not have equal power in making decisions which did not affect them as extensively the faculty was affected.

An example often used was the selection of faculty for the following year. Here, it was emphasized that students had only three and a half months left and that they would leave, not to be affected by the decisions they had helped to make.

The faculty have vested interests in maintaining their power; they feel they are the ones who must



"I'm glad you young people have seen fit to protest non-violently. It shows you're civilized. Now get out."

develop personal attachments to the faculty, and they are hired in order to have a good running ship and good inter-faculty relationships.

There are 15 faculty members, three of whom are chosen to be on the Executive, supposedly representative of the majority of faculty.

However, the balance of power is conservative since the right-wing's loud voice is affecting the liberals so that chances are conservatives will be elected. This type of faculty will more than likely oppose the students on any issue which is crucial to departmental change.

Faculty's belief that students have no vested interest is totally false. Even if an individual student may be graduating in a certain year, this student will make decisions which he regards as having a positive effect for the student after him.

If parity is not achieved, students can be out-voted on any issue of student concern.

## THE SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS UNION STAND

The student's viewpoint of course, hinges on the principle of democracy — and the university, no less than any other institution, will not function properly, (i.e., in the general interest, but predominantly in the corporate interests), unless it allows for, and encourages valuable input (in this case, student input) into the decision-making process.

In the light of this basis, the recent faculty proposal is objectionable on a number of counts. Because faculty has formal power, and because the parity proposal has not even been specified as unilateral, faculty has the option at any time of rescinding the proposal, if it is seen as a danger to their interest.

Considering that faculty is vocally dominated by the right, that they have manifested a willingness to rescind former structures purely on their own initiative, it is little wonder that the range of trust that does exist is strictly limited.

Also, considering the manner in which the proposal originated, that the Students' Union was not consulted, that the proposal was exclusively of faculty origin, and would be utilized whether students participated or not, that the decision-making body is quite effective in limiting not only student power, but possibly faculty support as well, that it is a regression from last year's structure, we of the Sociology Students' Union, cannot and will not endorse the proposed structure.

Our decision to engage in only parity-structured committees, and not the partisan Executive, is a manifestation of our unwillingness to legitimate the decision-making structure and the manner in which it was imposed.

On the other hand, involvement in the committees for a provisional period attests to our belief and the fact that without effective student impetus, the func-

tioning of these committees would be exceedingly impaired.

## NEW DEVELOPMENT

After this article was completed, a new development has emerged.

A departmental memo (in other words, an ultimatum) was received by the Sociology Students' Union, requiring that those various student members appointed or selected to serve on the committees be elected on a class basis.

Faculty are well aware of the Union's continued attempts at mobilizing student support (via posters, Dal Radio and other public announcements) and their comparative failure to gain that support. By requiring such a representative basis, faculty again is not only dictating the frames of reference, but its strategy is manifestly quite obvious.

Such an action on faculty's part is designed to contain the more radical student elements, who are by and large graduates in the M.A. program.

Such a conclusion is even more obvious, considering that last year's decision-making structure merely required election on a union, not a class basis. Faculty's justification that such a procedure would be more representative, is in fact, an attempt at co-opting an acquiescent student body.

With such a basis, the decision-making structure would inevitably behave like all reformist bodies, playing the electoral game, adopting the practices of bourgeois democracy, involving itself deeply within the system, making compromises and concessions, but achieving no significant change.

However, though quite unlikely, if these student reps do take a definite stand and demand more effective student participation, it is highly probable that faculty, having the formal power to do so, would opt out.

What does seem quite apparent, in any instance, therefore, is a reassessment of the union's former decision to engage in the present structure at the committee level. No matter from what perspective you view the situation, the department's power structure is designed to maintain equilibrium and ensure that dissenting elements, both students and faculty, will be effectively contained.

Like the vast majority of academics, the Sociology and Anthropology faculty seems to be one of those power structures which is dried up and impoverished by too much institutionalization. It needs to be consistently enriched by new impulses from the outside.

If Sociology is oriented towards significant social change, if it is to be a "progressive" discipline, then it must be an instrument of liberation and not a mode of domination. The Sociology Students' Union will not acquiesce, nor remain under the yoke of repression. The SSU will not be sold out!