

Concerns from the 'converted'

Personally, I'm getting tired of mourning. And I don't think I'm alone.

"Why do you have to keep bringing it up?"

"Would the media have made such a big deal if the victims weren't white, upper-middle class women?"

"You're not helping anyone, you know. You're just putting men on the defensive."

"Aren't you preaching to the converted?"

"Enough already. Okay, women die in violence, so what do you want me to do about it?"

"We're forgetting about the other women who have been killed and the women who are being abused right now."

"Is this supposed to be a guilt trip?"

"I'm sick of reading this wishy washy 'I feel this' and 'I feel that' stuff. I want to see something concrete. Something that says, 'Here's the problem and this is what we can do about it.'"

For four years now, a few women on campus have organized Week of Reflection. This has been my second. The week is supposed to be a reminder of the fourteen female students killed on December 6, 1989, and all women who have lived and died in violence.

A couple of days ago I sat down to lunch with Suzanne Laplante-Edward. Her daughter was one of the students killed at l'école polytechnique.

"You know, Anne-Marie was killed in a cafeteria like this."

My friends and I were silent while Suzanne told the story of how a man tracked down Anne-Marie and her friend Geneviève as they fled to the far end of the cafeteria and hid behind a couple of props.

"I feel very close to Geneviève," said Suzanne, explaining that Anne-Marie and Geneviève died holding each other.

I looked around the crowded SUB cafeteria while I tried not to cry.

I'm not sure how other students feel, but by the end of Week of Reflection I will be frustrated, tired and depressed.

And yet, I'll probably do it again next year.

You see, it could have been here. It could have happened at Dalhousie, here in our classrooms, or our cafeteria.

It's not just about fourteen women who were killed. This week I'll be thinking of friends and family who have lived with abuse and survived. Nor is it about laying blame on men. The discussions, readings, films and vigils are supposed to make students aware that this violence exists, it's killing women and to end it, we must all work together.

After Suzanne gave a presentation to students in Truro, a reporter questioned whether she was preaching to the converted.

"Good question," I thought. After all, who would show up to see slides of the women killed at l'école polytechnique unless they were already convinced it symbolized a much bigger problem? Haven't we mourned enough?

"How many people here have written a letter to their government about enforcing gun control?" asked Suzanne.

Seven people raised their hands.

Oh.

And so I am tired of crying, feeling frustrated and wondering if anybody benefits from Week of Reflection. I guess that's what they meant by "First mourn... then work for change."

I think I'm ready.

Judy Reid

Better loans? Not really

Over the past few years there has been much debate about the concept of income-contingent loan plans. Often portrayed as a mechanism to save public postsecondary education in Canada, such a system would lead to the privatization of higher education in our country.

There are really two concepts involved with income contingency: a repayment scheme and a funding mechanism. It is the repayment schedule that has often been presented as the positive side of the program, while the changes in the funding mechanism have been carefully left as far from the debate as possible.

Presently, graduates pay back their student loan on a fixed schedule that is only dependent on the terms 'negotiated' with an individual's bank on interest rates. Under income contingency, it is suggested that students should have to pay back their assistance as a function of their income level.

It is this principle that has appealed to many individuals who are pursuing a postsecondary education and to those recently graduated. It appears, on the surface, to be fair condition for repayment: the more you make the more you pay. But there are some very important details that must accompany this schedule of repayment if it is actually to result in the equity it initially promises.

One of these details would be an income threshold. This is the income level beyond which loan repayment would begin. This ensures that it is only those individuals who can already meet the basic requirements of life (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) who will contribute back to the system.

Also of prime importance is a 'forgiveness' clause. This would be an amount of time after which an individual borrower would no longer be

expected to pay back any outstanding loan. Without this clause, it is conceivable that a person could end up paying their student loan into their retirement! With these and other practical issues addressed, there may be room to argue that an income contingent repayment schedule could be a suitable alternative to the present system.

However, it is not the repayment schedule component of income contingency which has caused the violent reactions of the student community in Canada. It is income contingency as a funding mechanism.

Many who have recommended that an income contingency loan repayment program be instituted in Canada assume that it will become the primary source of funding for postsecondary education. They see it as a necessary and suitable alternative to the system of block funding in place now.

Without getting into a major discussion about the funding of post secondary education in Canada, it might be important to review the principle funding relationship for higher education. The federal government transfers funds (EPF) to the provincial government, which in turn allocates grants to individual post secondary institutions. These grants make up the lion's share of our schools' operating budgets (with exorbitant tuition fees a close second).

Proponents of the income-contingent model suggest that these block grants from the provinces should (or will) be reduced significantly over the next decade. Obviously this is an issue that has not yet been resolved and is entirely open for discussion. Regardless, they propose that in order to maintain a quality education, a new stream of funding should replace the old. The new stream proposed is, in fact, an old stream: tuition fees.

It is suggested that tuition fees increase substantially to replace the former system of grants to institutions. The corresponding piece of this plan is to increase the amount of student aid (loan) that a student receives in order to provide students the resources necessary to finance these hefty tuition fees. Thus, student debt is the replacement for government funding.

The amount of that debt could crush the people who are expected to carry it. With tuition fees possibly towering at levels over \$7,000 a year and graduating debt loads in excess of \$40,000 (for an undergraduate degree), this does not present an inviting option for potential students in Canada.

This does not paint the same rosy picture initially drawn by such organizations as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, supposedly an advocate for public postsecondary education. In addition, it clearly does not uphold the principle of equity. All it does is shift the burden of responsibility for postsecondary education from society to the individual—a concept which does not speak to the societal value accrued from a well-educated populace.

The individual does have a responsibility to contribute to his or her education, but society as the principal benefactor should be the main source of funding. The federal government must maintain a strong commitment to postsecondary education and be willing to support that commitment with resources. Only through a nationally planned, fully accessible, high-quality postsecondary education system will Canada be able to have a populace that is an active and productive participant in the 21st century.

Mark Frison
Deputy Chair
Students' Union of Nova Scotia



LETTERS

The *Dalhousie Gazette* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday noon before publication. Letters may be submitted on Macintosh or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

the Gazette

Vol 126 No 12

November 25, 1993

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Battle of the bags

To the editor:

I am writing regarding the letter by Garth Sweet in the November 4 issue. His letter was about a shopping bag which broke open, spilling his purchase on the ground. There are several ways the situation could have been better for the environment.

Firstly, Mr. Sweet was buying motor oil for his car. If a person believes that environmental issues are important, one of the first things that can be done is to re-evaluate whether the private car is the best means of transportation. For people who live in a place like Halifax there are other transportation options like bicycles and public transit, which are both economically and environmentally superior. Car insurance alone costs more annually than operating a bicycle and buying transit passes.

I made my choice to sell my car two years ago, and I've never looked back. I'm not saying Mr. Sweet shouldn't drive, because that's his choice. I only want to point out that environmental

decisions run deeper than just recycling.

Secondly, Mr. Sweet bought recycled oil, which shows admirable environmental awareness, but allowed the clerk to put that small item into a throw-away plastic bag. Recycled or not, these bags are unnecessary waste right from the start. If Mr. Sweet had simply carried the oil to the car in his hand, it probably would not have fallen. I would like to let people know that if they are concerned about waste, they can carry a back-pack or a reusable shopping bag, and eliminate this waste entirely.

I've been using the same cotton grocery bag for four years. It has replaced approximately 400 of those disposable bags, and looks like it will last another four years. At first I was nervous about telling the clerk I didn't need a bag, but most of them thought it was a great idea. Only once in those years has a clerk told me she had to give me a bag because of store policy. In response, I quietly reminded her how important customers are to her company. I've never had another problem.

From an environmental point of view, any disposable bag, whether pa-

per or plastic, recycled or not, fails the test compared to a good, strong, reusable bag.

Wayne Groszko
Department of Oceanography

Washroom warning

To the editor:

I would like to thank the woman/en who wrote the names of rapists on the wall of a campus washroom. (I don't know how to reach her so I hoped that maybe she will read this letter.) For those of you who haven't seen it, keep looking, it's worth seeing. I don't want it to be erased so I won't put where it is.

As you walk into the stall you can see writing, "Bob is a rapist", "Peter" is a rapist. In all there are 20 men's names on the walls. On the back of the door it says, "IF THE LAW WON'T SAY HE IS, WE WILL WE HAVE TO."

This is the best thing I have ever seen on this campus, maybe even in my whole life. It is empowering just seeing it. Finally, a way in which we can share our experiences, honestly. Thank you, thank you, thank you...

Julie Sims

Founded in 1869 at Dalhousie College, *the Gazette* is Canada's oldest student newspaper. With a circulation of 10,000, *the Gazette* is published weekly through the Dalhousie Student Union by the Dalhousie Gazette Publishing Society, of which all Dalhousie University students are members. • *The Gazette* exercises full editorial autonomy and reserves the right to refuse or edit any material submitted. Editorial decisions are made by staff collectively. Individuals who contribute to three issues consecutively become voting staff members. • Deadline for commentary, letters to the editor, and announcements is 4:00 pm on Monday before publication (Thursday of each week). Commentary should not exceed 800 words. Letters should not exceed 300 words. No unsigned material will be accepted, but anonymity may be requested upon request. Submissions may be left at the SUB Enquiry Desk c/o *the Gazette*. • Advertising copy deadline is noon on Monday before publication. • *The Gazette* offices are located on the third floor of the SUB, Room 312. • The views expressed in *the Gazette* are not necessarily those of the Dalhousie Student Union, the editors or the collective staff.