

Excalibur

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EDITORIAL

A Voice and A Vote!!

Professor Gauthier's article ('Here Are The Limits to Student Power' on this page) on the limits of student power in the university is a classic of contradictions which inadvertently points out precisely why students should have a say in decision making in a university.

In arguing that students should not have any vote in university policy, Professor Gauthier says that 'Nothing is more ephemeral than the student world.'

'Its temporal horizons are strictly limited--an almost absolute unawareness of the actual past life of the university, and a very hazy view of the university's future beyond graduation of the present student generation.'

Clearly, if this be so, narrow minded students are not mature enough to be involved in university policy. Indeed the student then does 'compare with...the child.'

But what sort of student child is it that Gauthier portrays? Certainly, he is no ordinary nipper for the Professor goes on to describe him as 'the leading critic of university and society.' This 'child' is, according to Gauthier, 'in the best position to cast a skeptical eye on the pretensions of educators and other decision-makers.'

Let's face it, one of the first pretensions educators might well drop is their idea of the student being a child, a mere 'trainee.'

We quite agree with Professor Gauthier that the student is a leading critic of the university and is in an excellent position to perceive many of its faults. But, unlike the Professor, we feel this entitles him to a vote in the education he receives. Only when educators realize that the student has the perception that he has and grant the student the right to a say in the education he receives, will universities truly become 'communities of scholars', capable of genuine 'dialogue', so necessary to creative dynamic education of maximum value to society.

Professor Gauthier says that 'if they are denied both a vote and a voice, then they can only return to the role of passive consumers--or become social revolutionaries.' Yet, his offer of a voice without a vote is mere tokenism that, in truth, confines them to the role of passive consumers as Gauthier's own words reveal.

Why does he want students to have a voice? Because, says he, 'it is a failure in common courtesy not to inform the student about university decisions and policies.' Oh how nice...They should tell us what's going on, at least. After all, we do attend the university. And we like sheep will 'passively consume' the courteously provided decisions. Of course, we could run about the streets and sign petitions--we could as Prof. Gauthier points out, be 'social revolutionaries.'

But why, by granting students only a voice, force them to become either passive consumers or frustrated radicals forced to resort to extremes to get public attention that might coerce educators into giving them a vote--eventually? Give students the right to a vote in the policy-making of their universities, and you give the responsibility by which they can most usefully contribute to education and society.

Dr. Gauthier concedes that students are 'the leading critic; that students are the 'The best position to cast a skeptical eye on the pretensions of educators.' Completely inconsistently, however, he says that as they compare to children, having an 'almost absolute unawareness.'

Firmly believing that the student can and must contribute to university policy-making, we hope that academics, administrators and students alike realize this and give them the vote they should have.

LETTERS

Dear Sir,

This letter is in response to several articles which appeared in Excalibur on January 20, 1967 relating to the Centennial of Confederation.

with some of the points that are raised in the articles published and would consequently like to offer the following for the consideration of all concerned.

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Dear Sir,

I enclose a copy of an article by Professor Gauthier of the University of Toronto, an article with which I find myself in complete agreement. I hope that Excalibur will, after getting permission, reprint this article in the interest of airing all points of view on the vexed question of student participation in university government.

Yours truly,
Johanna Stuckley
Assistant Professor of English

HERE ARE THE LIMITS TO STUDENT POWER

University students have discovered power. From the war until the sixties, students in North America played a largely passive role, both in education and society. They accepted an educational system designed for them by their seniors, and while they talked endlessly--as students always have--about the shortcomings of society, they did not presume to do anything.

I do not need to tell you that the outlook of students has changed markedly. This outlook is the product of a minority of opinion-makers, but this minority shows itself to be overwhelmingly activist. In civil rights, in opposition to nuclear arms and to the war in Vietnam, in American and Canadian organizations, students have become involved in the larger world.

But they have also become involved in the university. The student revolt at Berkeley has already been enshrined in history.

University administrators across the continent on both sides of the border, ask themselves if it can happen here, and sleep less well at nights.

And it can happen here and everywhere. For as educators have become increasingly concerned with graduate students, as professors have become increasingly concerned with serving as consultants to government and business, and as administrators have become increasingly concerned with the sheer mechanics of running their universities, undergraduates have become a depressed and neglected class.

There's no equality

But if past neglect of students has been inexcusable, it would be equally inexcusable to react in panic, and concede to students a share in the fundamental organs of university government. Students have no place on academic senates or on boards of governors.

The role of the student compares with that of the trainee,

the novice, or the apprentice--even the child. The successful student is brought into educational equality with his instructors, but he does not begin as an equal. It is a failure in common courtesy not to inform the student about university decisions and policies.

It is a failure in common sense not to consult the student about the effect of these policies, and his view of possible changes. But the responsibility for the policies and the changes must rest with the educators.

Campus transients

Not only are students in the position of trainees, but they are also transients. Nothing is more ephemeral than the student world. Its temporal horizons are strictly limited--an almost absolute unawareness of the actual past life of the university, and a very hazy view of the university's future beyond graduation of the present student generation. These limitations alone would make direct student participation in university government undesirable.

Many persons in the academic establishment seek to deny the students not only a vote but also a voice. Believing that students should be seen but not heard, they panic when students seek to run serious extracurricular activities, to evaluate the educational and social effect of the university, and to recommend changes in goals and in methods.

Such academic paternalism breeds and justifies the students' demands for power. Instead of this obsolete attitude, what is needed is recognition that the student is also the leading critic of university and society.

Because the student is not yet absorbed into the institutions of society and not yet fully aware of how facts compromise ideals, he is in the best position to cast a skeptical eye on the pretensions of educators and other decision-makers.

To share power is to share responsibility. If students were to receive a vote as well as a voice in the affairs of university and society, they could no longer serve as independent critics. But if they are denied both a vote and a voice, then they can only return to the role of passive consumers--or become social revolutionaries.

(Dr. Gauthier is an associate professor of philosophy, University of Toronto)

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(The Features Editor extends his gratitude to Carleton recruit Bonnie Riseley for her cooperation in coming all the way from Ottawa just to type this article!)

by David Gauthier

NEWS ITEM: Committee presently setting up constitution for S.R.C.

