

Student politics self-destructs in Ottawa

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interrupt, shout or personally attack or abuse each other. But unfortunately, none of the right-wing bigwigs from Alberta, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick attend. Few right-leaning delegates bother to return after the supper break and the wrap-up session turns into a warm, fuzzy love-in for the left: CFS is beautiful, we can compromise a little and overcome our differences.

Nov. 9, 2 P.M., Palais de Congres, Hull, Que. The two delegates sleeping behind a curtain have long since cleared off. The bubble is about to burst.

"They're going to be at each others' throat this afternoon," says Duncan McCue, an aboriginal students' commissioner.

Sure enough, the right moves an emergency motion to impeach the treasurer, and the left proposes an amendment to include the chair and deputy chair as well.

John-Paul Boyd, representing the Guelph undergrads, steps to the mike to support the amendment.

"This motion doesn't go far enough, in fact, seeing as how we are all responsible for their election, I think CFS should dissolve," he says.

Now there's a thought. But the amendment is defeated 34-30 and soon afterward, the right tries to withdraw its motion, which is simply too much for Lyndon Surjik.

"Point of personal privilege: This is absurd, if you want a response to the charges, you will let the motion stand so I can speak to it," says Surjik. "This is cowardice. I am not a coward."

The soap opera goes on. At one point the chair, who by this time was handling things with greater aplomb, has his head in his hands.

"Oh god, why do you people do this?" asks Marc Molgat.

The impeachment motion is defeated handily 35 to 15 after Surjik brings the mike to the front of the room and gives his side of the story.

"Debate should be based on fact and there has been little fact circulating at this meeting. This is not a game, we have a huge responsibility and I don't think we realize it sometimes."

Surjik later says he was targeted because he is gay and some delegates wanted a scapegoat for the budget shortfall.

To finish the afternoon off with a healthy dose of acrimony, the left calls for a roll call vote on the ratification of Kelly Lamrock's re-election as CFS chair. Traditionally a rubber-stamp procedure, 14 schools use the procedural move to register their disapproval of the right's candidate in the minutes.

The clock effectively used up, controversial motions to abolish constituency groups and narrowly define "student issues" never make it to the plenary floor.

Nov. 9, 6:30 P.M., Ottawa Congress Centre. The 10th anniversary banquet is in full death knell. There is a tuxedo-clad wait staff, a cash bar charging \$3.75 for a glass of Molson swill and... no one here yet.

7:00. My dinner companions hail from Manitoba, Nova Scotia and British Columbia. Jim Hiebert, from the University of Winnipeg, doesn't know the agenda of the evening's entertainment — and doesn't care.

"I'm eating and leaving. I've spent an entire week with these people and I'm sick of them. Not these people," he says, gesturing at our group. "That table over there," he arches his finger and is characteristically blunt. "They're racist homophobic pigs."

7:30. Our dinner is served. There aren't many takers from the wine list, which starts at \$23.95 a bottle and moonlaunches to Dom Perignon Cuvee for a stellar \$179.60. I attack my \$30 meal, methodically devouring my one piece of withered chicken, my small roast potato, my three mushroom slivers in foul brown gravy and all 33 of my green beans.

Our tummies tamed, the speeches begin. Lamrock is greeted with "Kel-ly, Kel-ly, Kel-ly" from the right-wing side of the room and silence from the left, still smarting that its candidate (Manitoba executive rep Kevin Dearing) had lost.

Speeches and more speeches, topped off with an earsplitting rendition of — will wonders never cease — Solidarity Forever. The organizers send the D.J. home, and this 10th anniversary shindig is clinically dead by 11:30 p.m.

Nov. 10., 8:30 P.M. Back at the post-mortem. PEI rep Bruce Davison is on his hands and knees under the meeting table, retrieving his giant paper airplane. Ken Wood and Robin Major, the Newfoundland rep, are gleefully covering a dry-erase board with happy faces.

Richard Bruce, the Saskatchewan rep, and Alberta rep Sandeep Dhir have finally shown up. They aren't keen on staying.

"I want to have some fun, I haven't had any fun all week," says Bruce.

The two get up to leave, but Lamrock asks them to stay and they reluctantly comply. Minutes later, Ontario rep

Nicole Seguin reads out a long petition signed by 40 delegates at the conference. It accuses Sandeep Dhir of circulating material in secret and spearheading the movement against the treasurer, and asks the national executive to censure Dhir.

"I have no intention of resigning from the national executive, I have no intention of giving these people that kind of satisfaction," responds Dhir. "I'm going to continue doing the things I have done because that's what my delegation wants."

The round table discussion of the conference goes on, until Dhir announces he is leaving.

"I have the feeling this meeting is just going to be the same people raising the same points. I'm not going to stay any longer, I'll see you all in January," he says.

Lamrock cuts short an exchange between Surjik and Dhir, who walks out. Richard Bruce follows him out wordlessly.

The round table continues, and Robin Major, who has looked distinctly unwell — almost reptilian — all day, has the last word.

"Everywhere in the air — hate, hate, hate. That bothered me a lot," he says with a spurt of coherence.

"So much division, so much polarization. So much hate."

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