

Editorial

Real representation needed

STUDENTS' COUNCIL ELECTIONS are here again. On February 17th the students of Dalhousie University are supposed to go to the polls to choose **THEIR** representatives for the student governing body.

The great democratic procedure will be gone through beforehand. There will be campaign speeches, and some promises. There will be posters galore, money spent freely; the candidates will try to get to the "grass roots" — the students. Everyone will feel good because they met the candidates, and they will have a real voice in student government.

BUT IT IS NOT A REAL VOICE. The Students' Council, like most elected bodies in municipal, provincial, and federal politics, is not representative. Candidates come out to solicit support for themselves during the election period. But, that is about the only time during their term of office that any student will see their representatives. Council members do not, usually, hold meetings with their constituents to inform them of what Council is doing. They do not ask for the students' opinions on past and future subjects. Soon after they get in office, they forget their campaign promises, and become isolated in their bureaucratic functions. They almost always forget why they are a member of Students' Council.

This year council members have talked about representing students. Yet, some of them know only too well that the only people they represent at Council and committee meetings are themselves, and perhaps their small group of friends. Those who realize this have stuck it out, trying to make the best of the situation, and to lay the groundwork for change.

ONE CHANGE Student Union President, Andy Winstanley, talked about on the night of his victory last year was holding monthly student body meetings in the SUB lobby. He and the other members of the executive would be put on the "hot seat" by students. This was tried once, shortly after the new Council took office, but has not been tried yet during this academic year. Winstanley says it is because he and Council members have sacrificed academic reform for other problems.

But something more **has** to be done, if students are to have a real voice in this university. Students should have a say in how their lives are spent in this university, both in terms of their classes and student government. The Student Union collects \$32.75 from each full-time student, and hardly anyone hears how it is spent.

Thus, they are not responsible to the students for this. The university, likewise, is not responsible to students for the way they spend the \$615 tuition payment. If they were, situations such as 1000 students in the Sociology 100 class would not come up without a furor being raised.

One method to bring some democracy into both student and university government is to have course unions. These are formed by students getting together, normally on the basis of their major subject.

REPRESENTATIVES WOULD BE elected to sit on faculty committees, and on a form of Students' Council. These representatives would then be mandated by the union to present **THEIR** views to the respective groups. Topics for discussion at faculty and student government meetings would be brought to the membership, prior to those meetings, and a position would be agreed upon. Other grievances and ideas would also be discussed. These would then be presented to the respective bodies. Representatives would vote according to their mandate.

In addition to taking their constituents' views to student government, and faculty committees, representatives would also inform the union of positions taken by other unions, the council executive and the faculty. The Student Council executive could be called to task when they did something against the unions' wishes. Representatives could also be chastized or ousted if they did not fairly represent their constituents.

Only when this form of two-way communication is established will students have an effective voice in this university.

Perhaps in the up-coming election students will consider taking control of their lives at university, and will elect representatives committed to this type of reform. After that, it will be up to the students to work with these people, and ensure that they carry out their promises.

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