

MUGWUMP JOURNAL

by Lynne Wanyeki

Mugwump time again. I get to write it this week . . . the boss is still Down Under, picking up the rays. Actually, this column has been done by almost everyone in the Brunswickan office this school year. Talking of Mugwump, I picked up the Engineering Faculty's newspaper (or should that be newsletter?) just before the Christmas break, and one student was wondering in it whether or not we at the Brunswickan knew what the word Mugwump meant. Yes (believe it or not) we do. Just to inform those who don't, the word Mugwump is a Native American word meaning "fencesitter" ie. a person who deliberately chooses not to take sides on an issue. How it relates to this column? As you can see, the people who write Mugwump simply give their opinions, valid or otherwise (it's meant to be slightly cynical, slightly satirical) on whatever issues they deem relevant. So, I presume the name was deliberately chosen as the title for this column, just to be ironical. So much for that.

Talking of the infamous *ERTW* (*Engineers Rule the World*). Nicely laid out, but two things REALLY bothered me about it. One was the blatantly sexist article at the end: "How to Pick up a Woman Engineer". A list of ten points, the last being "You don't pick them up, they pick you up . . . why else would they be in engineering?" I really couldn't believe it - I was offended, and I'm not even in engineering. I was SO offended I immediately flipped to the front, just to find out who the editor of the paper was, and guess what? Surprise, surprise, their editor is a woman!! Didn't she read the article - or didn't she care? I completely fail to understand how on earth anybody could even conceive that to be a joke, even as a joke about a long-running "joke" ie. women in engineering. No further comment. The second thing I noticed was that there were an awful lot of jokes about "those little artsies up the hill". Hey, I happen to ENJOY being an artsie, and I don't quite see where engineers get their kicks out of running us down. Personally, I don't get my thrills from avidly discussing engineering students . . . but everyone to their own, and as the esteemed *ERTW* editor says: "A little faculty rivalry can only serve to bolster school spirit!" I suppose that's true - BONUS: does this mean I can insult (sorry, I mean tease in good spirits) all "those little geeks down the hill" now?

How was everyone's Christmas break? I don't know, but it seems to me that with all the travelling, eating, familial stress (that miraculously reappears after a couple of days together), eating, travelling back again etc. that I got back here more tired than when I left. Good thing classes have started again - nothing like easing into a classroom chair (the fit's a tad tighter after all that eating) for an hour to an hour and a half of contemplative rest. I love it. Of course, this sort of scholastic rest only lasts a couple of weeks before the daily grind starts to wear me down again. It's a tough life, what with being a student . . .

For all those off-campus students (of which I've just become a member): Know the feeling of waking up with five minutes to spare for a class? And the bathroom sink's blocked and overflows in the rush because you're too cheap to buy a plunger? Yeah, the joys of home-making are slightly over-rated.

Students stand up for their rights! No, not in some obscure country in the far reaches of the earth, but here, right at this fabulous institution of our's, UNB. It seems some professor in the English department missed a good proportion of his classes, and his exams too. His students weren't too thrilled. I don't know, the situation kind of appeals to me . . . (no exams!) . . . but I can't figure out why . . .

Kim Norris, the Director of the SUB, is livid! Some jokers, or alternatively, some true-blue criminals, stole the building's signboard. By the way, Kim's the one who's imposed all these hardline no-smoking rules in the building. Could this be . . . "The Smoker's Revenge"?

Stephane Comeau, the Student Union's Entertainment man (who brought us 54-40 at the end of last year) has just resigned from the Student Union for "personal reasons". You've got to love the phrase "personal reasons". It gives just the right air of mystique to our otherwise feeble excuses ie. when explaining to a professor just exactly why a paper due last term is being handed in this term . . . Not that it fools the professor for a minute . . . What exactly is a "personal reason"? Think about it.

This early winter seems to have hit all of Canada. There was even a good deal of snow in Toronto. The Greenhouse Effect? Give me a break.

Finally, we got a card from our Managing Editor, Mel, who's still in Australia - complaining about the heat: 36 degrees Celsius . . . she's complaining!?! (AGHHH . . .) By the way, she sent a message for her Mugwump fans, (Ed.'s comment: "Which ones!?! We're the Brunswickan, we don't have fans.") so here it is:

HOLIDAYGRAM

I'm sending you a holiday rhyme
to tell you I'm having a horrible time
it hasn't stopped raining, the sun just won't shine
I thought in Australia it would always be fine
The Koalas are down at the mouth and ever so sad
and the kangaroos are miserable and all hopping mad
but wait just a minute the sun has started shining
and all of the animals have stopped all their whining
The clouds are vanishing and the sky's nice and blue
and I'm so happy I'm sending this message to you.



Have a great weekend!

OPINION...

NINETIES RE-ORIENTATION

January 1990. Not only are we faced with a new year, we are also beginning a new decade. The news media has devoted much time surveying the developments of the last ten years, all in an attempt to find the right words, thoughts or expressions that would most appropriately characterize the decade just ended. The 70's proved to be unique, and so, most would say, did the 80's, though we have not yet finished assessing it.

It's good, of course, to reminisce about yesteryear. It's even better to study it: those who fail to understand the past are doomed to repeat its failures. Considering what has taken place, it would do us well to spend some time and energy reflecting on the 80's, all the moreso since it has on more than one occasion been termed the "me" decade producing a "me" generation.

The past decade has marked a significant shift from those previous to it. We have always been concerned about "No. 1 - me" to some degree in our history, but our forefathers and mothers dared scarcely breathe that in public. That changed in the 80's. In fact, we unabashed proclaimed that "greed is good." Ivan Boesky, the former Wall Street broker who, not by his own will, exchanged his own residence for one provided by the state, declared, without hesitation, that "You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself." That "world view" was part of the Reaganomics which was to usher in the good times, defined rather narrowly in material terms. Traditional values of family, restraint and patriotism gave way to individual self-advancement. Unfortunately, it proved workable for only a few. The unrestrained pursuit of self-interest -- "What's in it for me" -- will not only be one of the characterizations of the 80's decade, but is already coming back quickly to haunt us.

If we have learned anything from our albeit brief reflections of the past decade, it is hoped that we have gained an appreciation for the fact that such unrestrained pursuit has put us on the brink of moral and spiritual bankruptcy and ecological disaster. The destruction and upheaval caused by our present lifestyles need hardly be debated. Common sense, often in short supply, would dictate that we ought to employ orderly, long-sighted and empathetic strategies to come to grips with what we have created. The majority of humans on this planet, living in what is called "absolute poverty", of both mind and body, cry out to us.

To solve the dilemmas at our national and international doorsteps will necessitate a radical turnaround in our ways of living, and not least for students. By the time we are into the first decades of the 21st Century, not that far off really, it will be they who for the most part will come to determine the direction of our society. In that vein Mordecai Richeler's comments in the *Globe and Mail* are cause for concern. "I worry most about the young. Canada's shining morning faces. For years their refusal to study hard or plan further than the next beer bash, never mind mow the lawn, has been pardoned by their poignant cry that there is no point in trying because their future was bound to be a nuclear holocaust." That holocaust appears less likely a reality now that the peace movement is in full swing. The new situation puts on us on the university to become quite conscious of the need to cultivate a global vision in the students, rather than hone their "me first" attitude. Education for the sake of learning who we are and what we are doing ought to take precedence over education for the sake of well-paid employment.

That concern, of course, has already been expressed by numerous people in numerous contexts. It is combined with a phenomena that surfaced already in the 80's and will continue to do so in the 90's. The cultural historian Theodore Rosak pointed to it when he stated that "the spiritual void in our lives . . . is the secret of our discontent." We are languishing in the arid wastelands of godless materialism. But, amidst the secular humanism that has been so uncritically accepted we find renewed concern for human spirituality, not least evidenced by the emergency of Fundamentalism on the one hand and New Age Movements on the other.

It is hoped that in the new decade we will begin to focus more on ultimate concerns and less solely on the here and now. For students, who come to university to learn and establish some future security for themselves, it may very well come down to thinking about how their learning today will prepare them for the crucial challenges of tomorrow.

Those challenges will, of course, involve employment. But what will one's orientation be towards employment, and what will one seek to do. Will work become merely a "job"; a way of making money and a living, where the self is defined by economic success, security and all that money can buy? Will work become a "career"; where one traces progress through life by achievement and advancement in an occupation, and where the self is defined by success and self-esteem in terms of social standing, prestige, competency and expanding power. Or, will work be defined as a "calling",

morally and ethically linked to one's whole life -- family, friends, community, environment and ultimate concern -- and offering life-affirming solutions to life-negating problems.

The beginning of a new year, let alone a new decade, is somewhat like starting with a blank slate. We have an opportunity to begin afresh, we have another chance as it were. What do you feel ought to be written on that slate next time we come to review it?

John Valk
Campus Ministry