

Gazette interview

Cheyne and Russell talk money!

By D. Munkittrick

In hopes of making the issues involved a little more clear, the Gazette went to the president of the Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students, John Cheyne, and the president of the Student Union, Bruce Russell, to ask a few questions. Although politicians are notorious for making things more complicated when they are trying to clarify them, it is hoped that the following statements will aid the average student in following the developments and consequences to this conflict of ideals.

First, Mr. John Cheyne:

Q. What exactly is the basic issue involved here?

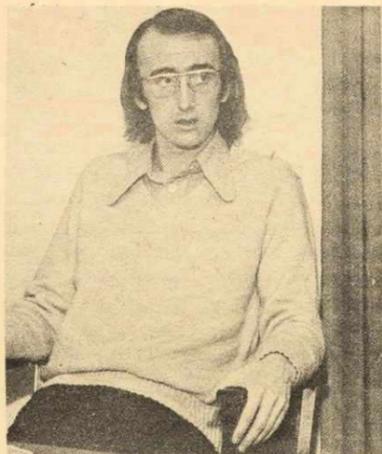
A. "A graduate student pays \$50 to the Student Union and on top of that they pay an extra \$10 in society fees. The problem is that DAGS, and perhaps other societies that have developed to the scale that we have, ought to get a slice of that \$50 pie. Now, we receive nothing from it and we can go through the Grants Committee and get what amounts to token support. Our argument is that DAGS has developed considerably in the last three years to the level where we are no longer just a society putting on social functions. We're also representing graduate students through our Academics Affairs Committee, and putting out a newsletter every month depending on how much money we have. The problem right now is that we don't have very much money. We are operating on a \$10,000 budget, which is for a twelve, not an eight month year and this money comes solely from the \$10 society fee. Our belief is that societies which have shown themselves capable of representing their members on a range of issues and provide a range of services, should get a slice of the \$50 pie.

Q. So you receive nothing from the Student Union in the way of funds?

A. No, all we get from the Student Union were loans to help set-up this house. DAGS hasn't received anything in the way of grants from the Student Union as long as anyone can remember. In any case, the \$1,000 grant which was offered to us this year, was the largest grant ever given out by the Student Union. That just suggests the character of the Grants Committee and the character of its operations. It's not there to give substantial increases to the budgets of major societies.

Q. Would you have been satisfied had you been given the \$5,000 grant you asked for?

A. No, that was an interim measure; out of this last meeting in July we came away with the impression that our proposals were going to receive pretty decent consideration. The Student Union suggested that while they were considering our proposal, we should go and apply for a grant that would get us through the year. The \$5,000 would not have satisfied us forever; I mean we would not have dropped the main issue. There's no denying the fact that the act of cutting our \$5,000 request to \$1,000 made us pretty angry and convinced us that the executives of the Student Union were just not considering us in good faith. The second result of that last meeting in July was that the student union would set up a committee to look into our proposals. In September, we went to the Grants Committee and asked for a \$5,000 grant - they did not make a recommendation, the reason being that they felt it was a policy issue, not just a grant



John Cheyne Kerry Delorey / Dal Photo

and that it would have to go to the Student Union Council. At the Council meeting at the end of September our proposal was made and I was unimpressed with the behaviour of the Student Council to say the least. Our arguments were just not considered. We were told that what we were asking was for the Student Union to finance our secession. All we wanted was a grant to increase our budget, we were granted \$1,000 but we had to turn it down right there. We were unanimous in the feeling that we just couldn't accept that on the grounds that it would have implied our agreement to the present set-up. Our main aim is to decentralize the Student Union so that DAGS receives a significant piece of the \$50 Student Union fee. The argument being that since we provide a large number of services, even with our limited budget, if the \$10 put in by each graduate student could be matched by \$10 from their Student Union fee, then we could expand all the more. At the University of New Brunswick, for example, a graduate student pays \$44 to the Student Union, the graduate students' association gets \$10.50 back. In Manitoba, a graduate student pays \$37.50 and the graduate's student society receives \$14 back. Now, this sort of arrangement is paralleled by a number of universities throughout Canada. What we're asking for is parity with U.N.B. Our position is that we are not going to wait for a hell-of-a long time...I mean, we've waited...this issue was first mentioned in April, meetings took place in June and July and it is now November. Now, this issue is going to be decided this academic year. Our position now is that we are waiting on the Student Support Committee set up by the Student Union to look into our proposal. We want that decision on November 17, and if we don't have something positive by then we'll move to a referendum. We have legal advice from a pretty good lawyer that there are two routes we can go, given a successful referendum; one is to the courts arguing freedom of association, and the other is to the legislature and ask for an amendment to the Act of Incorporation of the Student Union. I'm not looking forward to this action, I don't want to go that route, and council doesn't want to go that route. I want a reasonable solution to this... soon!

Q. Is this referendum you refer to more or less an ultimatum?

A. Well yes, and if they think it is going to be unsuccessful, that we're only going to get, say, 75 people out, they better think again. The graduate student body is pretty cohesive and there is very little doubt in my mind that a referendum will be successful. If there has been

no decision by the 17th of November, then we will prepare for our referendum before Christmas. It is in everybody's interest to have a society taking care of the particular needs of its members. On top of that we think the graduate students are a distinct community. They have academic interests of an intensity that is different than other students, they are obviously older, an incredible amount are married, a large percentage are foreign students, and they are to a very significant degree, already professionals in a way that other students aren't.

Q. Nevertheless, graduate students are still a part of the student body in general, are they not?

A. Sure, to some extent they are still members of the student body.

Q. You don't feel that this is rather an elitist position?

A. I don't think it is elitist. What's so elitist about recognizing that there are differences? Elitism, to me, suggests some kind of false notion that is carried around in your head and on that basis you behave in a certain way, you try to mark yourself out from the rest. And we are not suggesting that we are completely different...our original proposal is for decentralization, we're not not asking for a hell of a lot.



Mr. Bruce Russell:

Q. What is the basic issue at hand here?

A. What happened was that the graduate students made a representation to the Student Union last summer recommending quite strongly that \$10 off the \$50 student fee be turned over to DAGS for their explicit use. The Student Union representatives, myself, the vice-president, and the treasurer were

reluctant to agree to this, and we did not agree to it. We felt that their arguments were neither strong, nor correct. Basically, I think they were arguing that since DAGS appears to be more successful than other societies, they should gain recognition for this. We objected to this because there are different ways of measuring success, for instance; The Law Society brings in very good speakers and this is done completely on their own. Sure the Law Society doesn't have a house, but DAGS doesn't bring in the excellent speakers that the Law Society does. The idea was simply that we could no accept the premise that the graduate students' society was better than other societies on campus. What we did agree to was to form a Society Support Committee to study the whole question of Student Union support for societies. The graduate students are suggesting that there is a need for decentralization, I think that's one of DAGS main arguments. Basically, I have to take the position, on behalf of the Student Union, that to this date we don't think there is an excessive role for decentralization. We simply are not in activities that can be decentralized. Now that I'm in the middle of all this, I'll have to say that I'm sitting on the Society Support Committee and I do not think it is quite appropriate for me to speak on in great lengths because I'm part of this committee. This is not the committee speaking, these are simply my random thoughts and I am not going to analyze, or give you my opinions; I'm simply going to describe them to you. Anyway, this committee was set up to review the overall support structures that the Student Union offers and to determine if there was a better way of doing it, and I'm sure there can be some improvement. Take, for instance, the Grants Committee; the Grants Committee has \$15,000 to allocate and that's it. It's carte-blanche. Pretty well anyone who asks for money get it. Basically, what the graduate students are asking for is much more than \$15,000 be turned over to them. The basic issue right now is that they are talking much more money than the Student Union is prepared to give them. To get down to specifics, the Student Union does not see its role as an intermediary for dispersing money. The Student Union here, sees its role as a means for optimizing, among all students, the benefits that may be derived

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