

The Brunswickan

Canada's oldest official student publication

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EDITORIAL

A PRAGMATIC GENERATION By Kwame Dawes

CBC'S Morning Side Programme decided a few days ago, to give some attention to a generation of people being ignored by the station - namely the 17-25 age-group. Hence, they aired an interview with three youngsters from across Canada who discussed questions of apathy, education and the environment. Commendably, the host of the programme admitted some bewilderment at the way in which this generation has shown itself to lack the aggression or distinctiveness of previous generation - particularly the sixties bunch. He seemed puzzled, for instance, that youngsters of that age were not at the forefront of movements that seek to right the wrongs of older generations. For him, it was curious that the leaders of the struggle to preserve the environment and to redress a potential nuclear holocaust were all of the older generation when the younger people were somewhat displeased with the way things were handled in the past. One of the guests answered with a clarity that must be seen as profoundly significant. Quite simply, he argued, his generation was more acutely aware of the hopelessness of certain situations. Hardened into a fatalistic inertia by the sheer magnitude of international problems - the only attitude that can make sense to him and his fellow age-mates, was one of live and let live. The sixties children believed change was possible. The tragedies of the seventies and eighties and the growing pressures of a more competitive socio-economic climate have made these people a very pessimistic and highly pragmatic bunch. It makes sense to me. Students don't march, they don't run for public office they don't rally to causes or sing wonderful Bob Dylan songs about Mr Jones because they don't believe that Mr Jones (archetype of authority and the establishment) will change. In fact, they believe that like them, Mr Jones has no choice; he just can't do nay better.

I walked with the "happy campers" who marched down to the New Brunswick Legislature yesterday afternoon and I was struck by the attitudes of those who choose not to march. "This won't help, we're wasting time. They won't listen." The mock legislature was further evidence. Wayne Carson, in his inimitable smooth and calm fashion was able to handle the role of government leader successfully simply on his ability to replicate the "we can't do anything about it, there is nothing we haven't tried" attitude adopted by our politicians. The oppositions was made to look unreasonable and ignorant. The fact is that students believe this. They believe that change is impossible. Are they right?

Perhaps, if the Polish people believed this in the 1980's, there could have been no change; nor would there be reforms in Hungary or in the Soviet Union. If the Filipinos did believe this, Marcos would still be in power; and if the blacks in South Africa believe this, we are all wasting our time crying down apartheid. But there may be a difference between the countries listed above and Canada. The element of suffering is markedly less, hence the threshold of pain has not yet been touched. Yet the student leaders are arguing that things are really, really bad. In a few years time, education will be impossible for many at the tertiary level. Perhaps then, the struggle is for then and not now. In the mean time, it is clear that the breathing room given the politicians is allowing them to master the rhetoric of appeasement and subtle change while the public looks on, causeless and uncertain.

Surely, the challenges for this generation of young people are different and the way to handle such challenges is to realize that people are far too informed these days to be overwhelmed by absolutist rhetoric. The enemy is no longer a clear target. The challenge lies then in identifying the enemy and seeking to make people aware of the dangers that this enemy represents. The CBC announcer/host could not grasp that the world has become more accessible to more people and views are no longer as easily streamlined in a single direction by a handful of media sources. With this onslaught of ideas, problems and world crisis, one is unable to easily take an effective stand. Above all, for some curious reason, those with power are seen to be entrenched and immovable. "My marching down to the legislature won't move Brian Mulroney. How can it?" Who am I? Somewhere, somebody in power is laughing at the dismantling of student power in North America. But the way back to advocacy and militancy is far more complex than many would imagine. There is still, however, a peer mentality that remains extant. While it would be hard to get people to march on a Peace Rally these days, hundreds of students will converge on the promise of free booze. The pleasure factor has just become more honest. At Woodstock, many equated drugs, booze and sex with peace and love. Today, we are more cynical and honest: "We came for the drugs and booze; let's not pretend about all that peace stuff!"

The tragedy in California is big news. It is frightening to see such a catastrophe in a major city in North America. Such major tragedies are normally linked with far-off places like India and China, where hundreds die daily. The frailty of humanity and the vulnerability of human technology are all brought to question by this tragedy. People have responded with much good will and community spirit; but some very fundamental questions have to be answered about the implications of continued habitation in that part of California before the World Series continues.

Just a word to the Engineers. We do apologize for failure to publish any releases on their week, however it must be made clear that no student organization has automatic right to unpaid publicity in the Brunswickan. We try our best to give voice to the student related issues that we deem news-worthy, and we regard each constituency of this university as equally important. A very careful distinction must be made between what constitutes news and what amounts to publicity. News takes priority and unfortunately, news generally emerges after the event. We did send a photographer to the coaster derby and a reporter to the Buners' concert at the cafeteria. The latter was very poorly attended although the band was quite good. The absence of Engineers--the 1/6th of the UNB population--was notable despite several ads published in the Bruns about the event. My central point is that the Brunswickan is committed primarily to news worthy material and no student organization has automatic right to unpaid publicity in the paper.