

Clothing awareness

TORONTO (CUP) — Clothing produced by artisans in developing nations is, in many cases, worn for fashion rather than for expressing global awareness.

The cultural significance of these clothes is ignored — yet tainted — by the economic decision makers who exploit workers in the name of profit.

Textile makers once designed clothing to express their cultural identities, which were rooted to their lifestyles. Today they are forced to sell both their clothes and identities just to survive.

For the rural poor in any developing country, the freedom to sell their work to different buyers is severely limited.

Tory Mercer of Pueblo to People, a Texas-based Alternative Trading Organization (ATO), says that those who sell their work independently are constantly striving to make enough money to pay for supplies like dye and to feed their family.

He also says that tourists and large-scale buyers stroll around the markets in search for the best price — but they purposely wait until the very end of the day, when the artisans are so desperate to earn money that they sell their goods at terribly inequitable prices.

Sweatshop working conditions are just as bad. In Latin America, most of the clothing produced is designated for the United States for brand names such as Levi's, Liz Claiborne, Sears and Ocean Pacific. These companies escape the factory legislations in their own countries by operating in the Third World, where labour is cheap.

According to Barbara Strong, a Canadian human-rights advocate, women are paid between \$1 and \$2 American for a 16-hour work day, six days a week.

The Multinational Monitor reports frequent instances of forced overtime and sexual abuse, as well as respiratory problems like asthma attacks because of cotton dust.

"When you get pregnant, you feel the strain of weaving," says Josefina Vasquez, a Mexican weaver. "With the first child, a lot of weavers feel the pain because the loom mistreats your belly. It is hard to stand up for so long."

Also, workers are seldom protected from toxic chemicals and dust, to which they are constantly exposed when dying cloth.

Violence against women epidemic, says UN

MONTREAL (CUP) — Violence against women is a world-wide epidemic, transcending all regions, classes and cultures, says a United Nations study on the world's women from 1970-1990.

Examples of violence include systemic rape, forced pregnancy, genital mutilation, conjugal violence, torture, discrimination and murder.

The international community — through the United Nations — intends to address the issue of violence against women at the fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995.

The agenda for the conference also includes eradicating poverty, eliminating inequality in education, ensuring access to relevant health care, employment and economic participation, preserving the environment, ending inequality in sharing of power and decision-making, improving images of women in the mass media and promoting women's human rights.

Madeleine Gilchrist, Canada's representative for women's non-governmental organizations at preparatory meetings for the Beijing conference, agrees that violence against women is a global issue.

"Violence against women exists everywhere, just in different forms around the world," Gilchrist said. "It's not so much women being physically beaten, like in the Western world; in other regions it is more subtle, like traditional practices being pushed on women."

For example, in Southeast Asia, the key issue of violence against women is forced prostitution, said Gilchrist, who is also the head of Canadian Voice of Women for Peace.

"In Africa, it is that women don't have the same access to health care or education as men. Or, in some regions of rural China, girls are not even given names. They are given numbers. These are all forms of violence against women because women's issues are all interlinked," she said.

The United Nations has been directly addressing women's issues since 1975, when the first World Conference on Women took place in Mexico City.

However, it has been only recently that violence against women has been placed on the global agenda. And Canada played a fundamental role in putting it there.

Canada asked the United Nations to establish a 'rapporteur' to monitor violence against women around the world.

This led to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women that was adopted by the 48th General Assembly of the United Nations in 1993.

Canadian University Press (CUP) is a national organization made up of over 40 student papers from St. John's to Victoria. CUP enables student papers to exchange stories and ideas through the wire service, regional and national conferences. As a founding member of CUP, the Dalhousie Gazette makes sure that our university news becomes national news.

Fear and loathing in Ontario

Gazette news editor enters the fray at CUP national conference

by Milton Howe

After furiously fighting my way through a stampede of gambling-crazed maniacs, I managed to park my car and walk into the Windsor Hilton, a proud delegate to the 57th annual Canadian University Press (CUP) National Conference. I was excited at the prospect of meeting so many student journalists, but I was in for a bit of a surprise.

When it became apparent that I was surrounded not by journalists but instead by a bunch of overly-politicised student union rejects I began to worry.

When we the delegates, the poor huddled masses, sat down at the opening plenary for some top-down socialism from the CUP elected executive, I had difficulty stifling my laughter at the hypocrisy inherent in our "cooperative." This was magnified when the woman from the "Labour Resource Nook" complained about the exorbitant cost of our "Union Made" labour propaganda booklets. Bloody union shops.

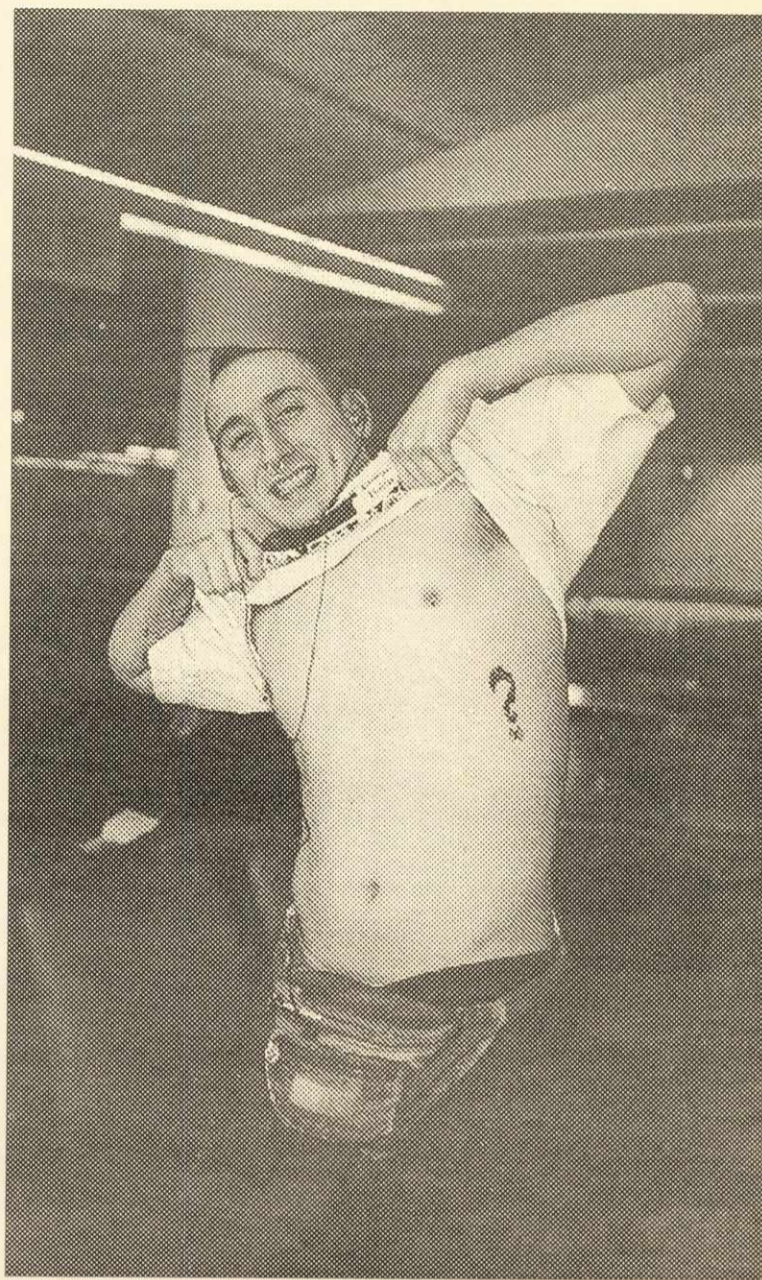
Having resolved to avoid the political wrangling and enjoy myself, I attended some seminars over the first few days. Unfortunately, the organizational emphasis on the seminars was somewhat lacking and a number of them were cancelled. At one such non-event, a discussion on newspaper content sprung up among those in attendance. I excitedly participated until the moment when the delegate from British Columbia complained that the student press did not adequately address the issue of "post-modernism." Exeunt.

A visit to the casino sounded like a refreshing respite, so off we went. Only in progressive, liberal Ontario could one imagine seeing the government turn a modern and spacious art gallery into a smoke-filled bingo hall, all in blatant servitude to the almighty dollar. And it's no accident that it's right on the border. Elbowing my way past the un- and under-employed victims of the collapse of the Michigan automobile industry, I initiated a quick round of "Spot the Canadian" with my colleagues. They were easy to spot, as they were the well-dressed ones not seated in front of the slot machines holding yogurt containers full of coins. Taking care not to tip anyone's life savings onto the sticky floor, we gathered our shattered sensibilities and moved on.

I missed the all-night hash party hosted by the Montréal delegation, whose obstreperousness in the hallways and stairwells eventually forced the hotel staff to reopen the lobby bar in an attempt to contain the disturbance away from the weary-eyed casino players from Michigan. I also missed the key note address by Buzz Hargrove, which I understand was no great loss.

But the plenary sessions, which all but enveloped the conference, chipped fastidiously away at my crumbling resolve. They were tedious and repetitive on one hand, and frustratingly thoughtless and hypocritical on the other.

The same people who were asking us to band together to fight Lloyd Axworthy and the Social Policy Review were presenting us with a budget proposal detailing how our advertising cooperative was earning



An unidentified delegate at the CUP national conference in Windsor, Ontario questions the purpose of it all before boarding an airplane for British Columbia on January 3.

tremendous profits and skillfully avoiding income tax.

The same people, who in their daily lives at their newspapers squirm with excitement at the thought of exposing greed, corruption and graft within their student unions and university administrations, were there merrily signing away even larger portions of their students' money toward more paid CUP staff with duties that are yet to be determined.

I resorted to drunkenness

When concerns were raised about the cost of adding an environmental resource room to future conferences, the talking heads allayed these fears by pointing out that it would in all likelihood be funded by government money.

Having exhausted all reasonable means at my disposal, I turned to slander and was thoroughly disappointed when the CUP president became uncommunicative upon being accused of "having led the delegation down the garden path."

I resorted to drunkenness my last night there both as a means by

which to cope with the inanity of the debates and to give me strength to speak my mind despite my shattered credibility in the eyes of the other delegates and the national executive. This strategy unfortunately backfired and I was forced to retreat from the conference in disgrace. I was not alone in my shame, other disgraced delegates included the British Columbian who prefaced each (and there were many) remark with "Speaking as a professional journalist..."

Fortunately, Windsor is ready-made for disillusioned conference-goers, providing at least two very immediate and obvious distractions. Having already toured the casino, all that remained was Detroit. I set off in the morning with Jana Kutarna, editor of the St. F-X Xaverian, to witness firsthand the rapid decay of America. Nothing in the world can prepare your eyes for a sunny morning in downtown Detroit. We were speechless as we drove aimlessly through the modern American mock-up of Carthage, pausing only to load up on our own form of decadence (Camel Filters). I give it another fifteen years, tops.

And what of CUP? Fifteen more years for that decadent institution? I am reminded of the veterinarian examining 15 year-old arthritic Sparky — "I would suggest that you find a nice, quiet corner in the back yard and..."