

Warrian -- 'The just society is Rosemary's baby.'

Peter Warrian doesn't talk about the Canadian Union of Students, he talks about a student movement.

And he sees his main task as putting across certain relationships to students which they may not see now — relationships like what he sees in the movie Rosemary's Baby.

"How about a film review of Rosemary's Baby in terms of liberal consciousness?" he asked Peter Allnutt, editor of CUS' national student magazine, Issue. "The just society is going to be Rosemary's Baby."

Warrian is president of the Canadian Union of Students. The professional media pictures and quotes him as a building-burning revolutionary who intends to knock Canadian universities down to the ground and then move on to level the rest of society in the same way. The media lies.

Warrian on leadership says: "My concept of political leadership is not the leaders and the led. Leadership is describing the situation then presenting alternatives."

"The student movement has always been hung up on leadership, the charismatic leader like Dutschke or Cohn-Bendit . . . encouraged by the media which builds these people."

For the moment, Warrian would much rather stand on a table in some university cafeteria and talk to students than lead howling masses through the streets. He doesn't deny that someday he may be fighting in the streets, but he has no intention of doing it until Canadian students think that's what's required.

Clean-Cut Kid

When people describe Warrian sympathetically, they say he is the image of the clean-cut, Canadian kid — doesn't smoke or drink, likes football (he still plays it occasionally) and once was a seminarian. In short, he becomes the male version of Playboy magazine's "girl next door".

If you want to like Warrian, he's all that and more. When he speaks, he has a sincerity which, at times, becomes too much to believe.

He speaks in quiet tones, but the message is the short that is supposed to come across only in revolutionary rallies.

He wants CUS to take ideas to people and help them see their position: "We talked a lot at the congress about taking it to the student . . . when we talk about confrontation, we mean not only political confrontation but a confrontation of ideas."

CUS's September congress in Guelph passed several motions condemning American imperialism in Canadian society. Warrian is convinced the student can see his position within this

framework.

"When I say imperialism, I have in mind a system of political domination and exploitation," Warrian says. "Students may be turned off by the word imperialism, but that's a semantic problem."

"I think an examination of our situation will show we are politically dominated and economically controlled."

Student Housing

Warrian sees housing in similar terms.

He says, "You can't deal with the question of student housing in isolation. You must start with the overall problem of housing in Canada. Again, you are going to arrive at some basic contradictions which have produced the situation."

Warrian and CUS are taking things to the student with an expanded fieldwork program: four full time fieldworkers, one each in British Columbia, the Prairie provinces, Ontario and the Atlantic provinces.

If the approach proves completely successful, Warrian says, "The year will end with mass student involvement — the majority of students would demand their place in university decision-making and take that place firmly and clearly. The university would probably begin to operate on a sort of syndicalist (student as worker) line."

But even Warrian doesn't believe in complete success. Optimistically, he says, "I think it may be possible that by the end of the year 20% to one-third of the students in Canada may be involved on a continuing day-to-day basis, with an equal number following them in crisis situations."

If something near Warrian's prediction is not reached, the union may be in trouble. For the past three of four years there have been rumblings throughout Canada that "students aren't getting their money's worth from CUS" and talking to people is not going to produce easily defined financial benefits.

CUS lost nine members during congress, although three others signified their intention



Peter Warrian

to join. Referendums are taking place on numerous campuses about CUS membership this year — no one is quite sure how many — and if more large campuses withdraw, the union could be in serious trouble.

On the other hand, some universities not in CUS, most notably the University of Alberta, are also having membership referendums. If these schools decide to join the union, it would be in a much stronger financial position. But, it would also have a significantly stronger moderate block which opposes the line Warrian is trying to sell.

Referendums (counter-productive)

Warrian is bothered by referendums on member campuses, not because of possible membership losses but because, "Theoretically a referendum is a way to bring issues to the student; in practice it doesn't."

"Referendums may be valuable at the end of the year, but in the fall they become counter-productive, abstract, organizational debates."

"The major task is building a mass base for a student movement, the major thing is to educate — by making what we have more effective."

"If the conditions are there they give rise to the movement — if they remain, the movement will flourish. We don't manufacture the issues and it is impossible to justify CUS on those grounds."

However, whether Warrian likes it or not, there are fall CUS referendums and they do have to be fought.

Meanwhile, and between referendums, Warrian will be working for a new sort of university.

"We're sometimes slandered because it is said we want to destroy the university," Warrian says. "In fact we are trying to give it viability and life which can only come from ana-

lysis, self-criticism and definition — otherwise we become extinct like some huge grey mushy sort of dinosaur."

"Increasingly there is the feeling we will have an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist university or no university at all."

Warrian talks about the reaction from administrations to student activity calmly and coolly.

"I don't think they're capable of a common approach across the country," he says.

Recently, at Brandon University and Memorial University, threats have been made to expel students for demonstrations and other activities which were deemed disruptive to university life.

(More serious error . . . couldn't be dreamed of)

Warrian commented on the threat of expulsion: "A more serious error by administrations or a more beneficial act for the students as a whole couldn't be dreamed of."

"There are just too many students to whom the threat of expulsion for political action is a cause for glee rather than dismay."

There was a look of glee in Warrian's face when he said that.

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