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Referendum March 15-19

Life or death for radioland

by M.L. Hendry

Dalhousie students will be asked to decide the fate of CKDU radio during student council elections March 15-19.

Exact wording of the referendum question is yet to be decided, but it will likely offer students two alternatives: give CKDU enough funding to properly broadcast in the SUB and university residences, or cease funding the station completely. Dollar figures will be included so students will know exactly how much it will cost.

Implicit in the option of increased funding is the future growth of CKDU to serve a larger percentage of the Dalhousie community. Implicit in the option of shutting the station down next year are plans to bring it back - a Phoenix rising from the ashes - after careful planning.

CKDU itself is divided as to the best route to follow. There is some concern that were the station to break its "promise of performance" to the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) by going off the air, it would be extremely difficult to

get another license in the future.

Station manager Neil Erskine said Monday night that CKDU "will be united in a stand by this time next week".

Right now CKDU broadcasts by closed circuit in the student union building and by carrier current - via the power lines - on AM radios in Fenwick Place residence. Although the station is also licensed to transmit by carrier current to Shirreff and Howe Halls, reception in those residences has been unreliable for several years and right now is non-existent.

Student council minutes from the February 14 meeting report that "this year, as usual, CKDU is not operating very efficiently" and "the majority of students do not receive it".

Both CKDU and council agree the radio station must change. The question is what the students of Dalhousie want from their radio station, and how much support are they prepared to give.

The present \$12,500 operating budget is simply not enough, according to student union president John Logan. "Council and CKDU will have to arrive at a

mutually acceptable figure for a budget, then figure out how to get it," Logan said. "It will be in excess of \$20,000, no question about that."

Given the small number of students actually receiving CKDU this year, the \$1.85 every student paid in student union fees for the radio station was not worth it, Logan said. In his opinion, if all the residences were in fact receiving broadcasting, the cost would be reasonable.

Technical difficulties in transmitting to the residences, old and damaged equipment with no funds to repair or upgrade, and a general lack of organization have combined to make service this year unacceptable to many, including council and CKDU itself.

If CKDU is to continue, Logan said, reception must be guaranteed. Students must make up their minds on where they stand and how much money they will pay for their radio station.

Council and CKDU are meeting this week to bash out the best wording for the referendum question.

Before you become a good FM station you need to be a good station

by M.L. Hendry

CKDU: your radio station. If you don't spend any time in the student union building or in Fenwick Place residence, you may never have heard it on the air.

If you do live in Fenwick or frequent the SUB, you probably are aware of the existence of CKDU, but you might not know what to think of it.

You might tune in 610 AM in your Fenwick room and be impressed with the choice of music and the professionalism of the programmer. You might tune in to a newscast, or a live play-by-play broadcast of a Dal hockey game, and feel that your \$1.85 in student fees was money well spent.

Or, you might tune in to the sound of a needle being dragged across a record, a newscaster who can't read, a voice which apologizes every third word, giggles, swears and talks to unseen people. You might love what you hear, you might hate it. You might hear - silence.

You might ask yourself, how can something be so good, and then so bad, and then not be there at all?

It only stands to reason that the product reflects the source. So, if you wander up to the radio station on the fourth floor of the SUB, you never know what you'll find. Doors locked, and everything quiet. Doors wide open, maybe even a record on one of the turntables, needle in the last groove, going round and round, and nary a human in sight. Or, who knows, you might peek in and witness a bee-hive of activity, and somebody sitting at the console, talking to their audience, looking and sounding like they

know what they're doing.

Like anything else, behind what you hear coming from CKDU at any given moment there is a story. There are people, history, a vision.

The present station has been in existence since the SUB was built in 1969, and they are licensed by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) to broadcast in the student union building and in the three university residences.

This year students paid \$1.85 each to give the station an operating budget of \$12,500. Neil Erskine is the station manager - the only salaried employee of the outfit. They have a lot of equipment, some of it in need of repair. They don't have a lot of money.

Anything that gets done at the station, other than what Erskine - a full-time science student - does himself, is by volunteers: students.

Last term there were 65 to 70 volunteers. Right now, nobody is sure how many there are.

According to Neil Erskine, radio is the fastest growing medium in Canada, and remarkably low-cost compared to television and more immediate than print. Radio is a very cost-effective way to exhibit culture and art, and to make news and information known to a wide audience.

And for those students who involve themselves in the station, it's a terrific opportunity to learn, about radio, about music, about art, politics, working with people, running a business, organizing an office, teaching, creating, watching something grow - and sharing with an audience.

Members of CKDU have for

years dreamed of going FM - being able to reach everybody in the Dalhousie community, and maybe all of Halifax as well. The prospect of such an audience would attract more volunteers, placing the station in a better position to carry out its double mandate: to provide interesting, stimulating programming, and to provide an alternative to what is already available on the airwaves.

"...an FM-cable hookup could be accomplished tomorrow..."

Going FM involves a great deal: it means a commitment, it means new and better equipment, some full-time employees, which means money, and responsibility. It involves preparing a well-developed proposal - detailed down to the serial numbers on the equipment - for the CRTC.

Such an undertaking demands support from the students of Dalhousie who are the financiers and potential audience of the station. It means a commitment from council who will be legally and ultimately financially responsible. And it requires an organized and sustained effort from the people who will make it happen - those who work on the radio station.

Other universities in Canada have radio stations - some of them wildly successful. Carleton University in Ottawa's CKCU-FM has been termed "the best rock-n-roll station in North America". CHSR at UNB in Fredericton received FM licensing last year, and seems to be going full steam ahead with lots of enthusiasm. CHSR has been working towards

FM for years. In 1979 UNB council took the question of an FM station to the students in a referendum, and in the highest student turnout ever for a vote at UNB, seventy per cent of voters said "Yes" to FM.

The station continued to buy equipment, plan, raise money, and prepare a 200 page report for CRTC. With some good breaks on the transmission end from the university, donations from alumni and the campus bar, and a strong core of knowledgeable resource people, CHSR is now FM, with a potential audience of 60,000 people.

A radio station can't become FM overnight: it takes years of

planning. And before you can become a good FM station, you need to be a good station.

One priority of CKDU right now is to get the transmission problems sorted out.

That may or may not be possible

within the carrier current system now used. Transmission to the three residences is via power lines, with the wiring systems of the buildings acting as antennas.

The problem at Shirreff Hall, according to station manager Erskine, is that the characteristics of the wiring system vary from electrical appliances - especially in the huge kitchens - switching on and off during the day. The solution to problems caused by power surges is to install new wiring, solely for transmitting the radio signal. While wrapping wire around each wing of the residence may be a viable alternative in Howe Hall, and would probably give excellent reception, according to Erskine, there is a problem with the cost of installation. This solution is impossible in Shirreff Hall, Erskine said, because it is built differently than Howe Hall and to install new wire would be extremely expensive and difficult.

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THE GAZETTE NEEDS:

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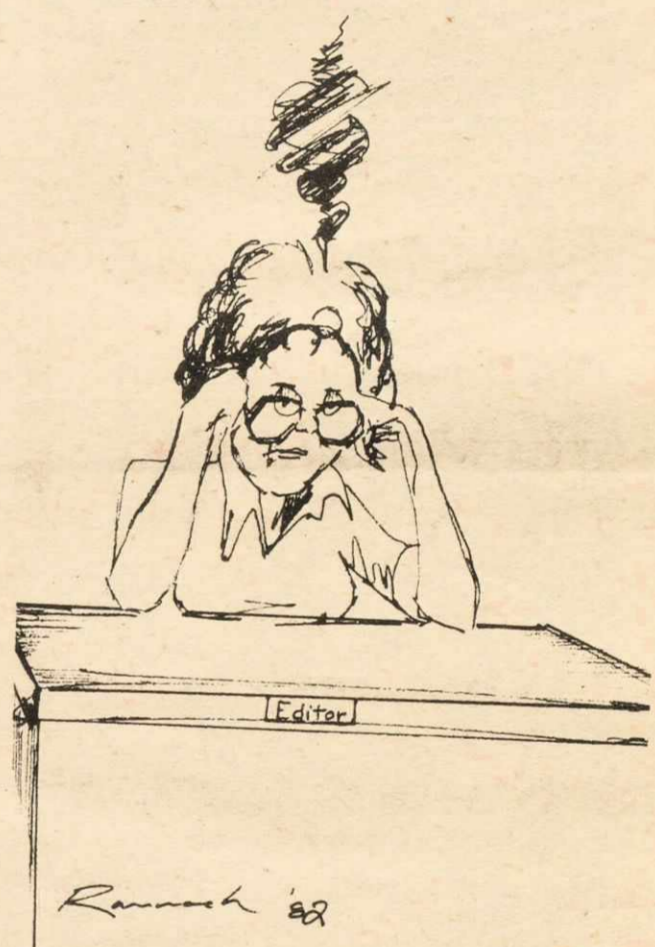
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Gazette Editor Needed



Announcing a vacancy at the helm of Canada's oldest student newspaper; the *Gazette* is looking for an editor for the 1982/83 publishing year.

Needed is an individual who thrives on little sleep, low pay and controversy, and SUB coffee. Desired talents include an ability to pass on writing skills, copy editing, layout and design, work well with people, be responsible for the quality and continuity of a weekly newspaper and possess an understanding of the whole student press.

Elections will take place on Thursday, March 11 at 7:30 pm, in the *Gazette* offices, 3rd floor SUB.

Applicants should submit their resumes as soon as possible.