

# Analysis — Boston vs. Hodgins

by Ken Bosman

This year's SU elections will represent a dramatic change in both style and direction of student leadership, regardless of who wins.

What is more important than the people who win, however, is why they win, and what that says about that segment of society called students.

Alberta students, like most Albertans as a whole, have been in a fiscal dream world for much of the past decade, and our student governments have matched this lack of reality.

When your student aid program is the best in the country, and your per capita university funding is the best in the country, priorities change.

As Mr. Spock of Star Trek noted in the election forum, "I promise cheap beer and more doors on bus stops... evidence shows these are of primary importance to the quality of education."

The winds of change they are a blowing, and the endless student aid and seemingly limitless millions for tenured professors have disappeared like the Cheshire Cat of Alice's Wonderland.

Only, unlike wonderland, not even a smile remains.

The self-destruction of OPEC and the illusion of the Heritage Fund has seen Alberta students begin to think and act like students everywhere else — we act worried about our destiny.

Fifteen million dollars or so may or may not be gone from the student loan remission program, loans are tougher to get, and the university as a whole will suffer a 7 or 8% real loss to its funding next year.

In reaction to this new reality, both Tim Boston's Assistance '87 and Floyd Hodgins' THINK! represent a break from the status quo, Boston a more cautious step, Hodgins a bold and unknowable leap.

Whichever slate wins won't, of course, affect any of our lives in the long term, but what it portends for the voting patterns of youth is very profound and far-reaching. For in those who choose to run, and don't run, lies an indicator as to who are the bold among us. To seek to lead is an act of leadership in and of itself.

The last decade has seen students, for perhaps the first time in history, become associated with the "conservative" side of political life. Not "conservative" in the old liberal tradition of Thomas Jefferson, but "conservative" in the sense of working within the system.

Implicit in working within the system was the assumption that basically the system was OK, and that if you worked hard, you too could have a house, a BMW, and 1.79 kids.

Student government was thus logically viewed as a training ground for this Utopia in waiting. Run it like a business, lots of servi-

ces, and why worry about reality. Cheap beer and a Goose Loonies Dinwoodie were the results.

This illusion crashed however, along with the price of oil and grain.

What lies beyond for us, in our \$18 a barrel of oil reality, will be defined by the collective degree of optimism, or pessimism, that we students are governed by.

Who we vote for, not only now, but during the rest of our lives, will hinge upon what our vision of the future is and whether, in our view, the future works.

The fact that we must pause and decide whether the future works is, in and of itself, a profound change.

The science fiction of our youth showed us an ultra high-tech, super clean galaxy — ours for the taking. While outdated radicals — you know — from the sixties, talked about poverty and the like.

Boston and Hodgins are embodiments of this change of vision.

Assistance '87 represents a positive vision of the potential of our current world.

More than anything, Boston and friends believe that, by and large, the system more or less works, or at the very least has big chunks that can be salvaged. And that with a

little tinkering here and there, current reality can be made OK for most of us.

Assistance '87 will fight for the SFB \$15 million, and defend against cutbacks, but they will do it as fine tuning to a system they think the youth of today are strong and wise enough to salvage.

Hodgins, on the other hand, is the product of a different world... Maybe it's his years of social work on Boyle Street here in Edmonton, maybe other factors, but Hodgins' attitude is definitely US vs THEM.

Hodgins would also fight for the SFB millions as but one step in the re-alignment of the social order.

There is a case for each of these positions.

In Canada, Hodgins sees a United Kingdom in the making. With no coal in the coal mines and youth who can't, and may never, find jobs. The U.K. could very well be doomed under any scenario short of the invention of magic.

As a consequence of this vision, Hodgins would make bolder, more dramatic, and more radical proposals than Boston. The changes he views as needed would fundamentally alter life for student and non-student alike. Inherent in this approach of seeking greater victo-

ries is being defeated more often. Hodgins has, and would continue, offending and outraging many in the government, the administration and society, including a lot of students.

Boston and Assistance '87, by contrast, are unlikely to try to change the world.

Boston would spend his year as President working to put into place small, achievable changes. Boston has shown himself a competent administrator, and would leave behind an SU better in many small, undramatic ways. Nobody would object to more photocopiers, or cheap beer, or a lot more help for clubs; but Hodgins and others would continue to view him as a Pollyanna rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

Boston and his Assistance '87 slate members see the world as sailing through rough waters, but is an essentially seaworthy ship.

When we all vote today and tomorrow for our next Students' Union Executive, we will give to the greater society a snapshot of our souls.

Mostly, the snapshot will be un-

clear. Most students won't vote, indicating either apathy or indecision (mainly the former). And, unlike last year, a sweep by any one slate is unlikely, and an independent or two has a legitimate shot at victory.

Yet, amid the conflicting trends, there is a change worth noting.

The past has been repudiated.

With only Hodgins' presidential year of 84-85 as the exception, the last six or seven years have seen our student politicians hold a basic faith and trust in the direction suggested to them by their elders, be they governmental, university, or otherwise.

This faith has been betrayed. The thousands of unemployed students and underemployed graduates attest to this fact.

Both Boston and Hodgins know this.

In this fact lies a great change. Either way, our student leadership will once again be challenging the ideas presented to them from outside.

Gone are the intellectual pabulum eaters we've had before.

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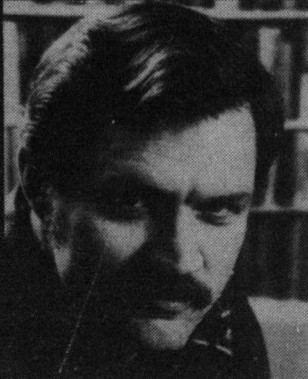
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