

# EDITORIAL

## Bubble Gum Politics

by Lynne Wanyeki

A friend of mine has often decried what she terms the Bubble Gum Politics by which the Student Unions of UNB and STU have operated at various times in the past. She uses the words Bubble Gum Politics to describe the way in which our student politicians throw themselves into the positions to which they have been elected with a level of vigour that can only be described as excessive. What begins as admirable concern for protecting the interests of the students turns into not-so-admirable concern for protecting their own interests. A twisted and myopic vision leads them to believe that the interests of the students are tied irrevocably to their maintaining power. Their ends thus become the maintenance of that power, rather than the maintenance of interest in the long-term planning for the betterment of the lives of students at UNB and STU.

The wrath wrought by such Bubble Gum politicians on those who they see as attempting to thwart such maintenance of power is extreme. My friend, who has been here far longer than I have, tells with wry amusement of media types being shut of their offices, of the Student Union threatening libel suits, of having to publish as a supplement in the other campus paper ... the list goes on. I listen quietly to her stories and thank the heavens for the fact that that sort of interference has not been as present (or at least as overt) in the three years that I have worked at this paper.

But the fact that the *Brunswickan* has not been the victim of such Bubble Gum tactics in the last little while really says little. I know, from my own dealings with the administration and the faculty here at UNB, that Bubble Gum Politics are being played at all levels of this university. I use the word played very deliberately here, because Bubble Gum Politics can be likened to a role-playing game. The danger is that when anyone takes seriously the notion that (s)he has interests to protect (in the ultimate interests of protecting her/himself), they tend to assume the appropriate role and play by the rules which are required by that role, rather than truly (and in all seriousness) examining the issue at hand for the true principles involved. What is sacrificed here is integrity of action in respect of the persons who are affected by such action.

Bubble Gum Politics can be amusing if one watches the game unfolding before one's eyes without getting involved or without being affected by such twisted workings oneself. Cynicism, or at the very least skepticism, is something people are trained to buy into nowadays, so we talk of happenings influenced by Bubble Gum Politics with a light and bright (but somehow tarnished) ease. However, they can leave one with a slight feeling of distaste if one does not subscribe to such games, but this is a distaste which is easily ignored if the issue at hand is a minor one. But when the issue at hand and the principle at stake is not a minor one, they leave one with an overwhelming sense of anger and frustration which is impossible to put aside.

This sense of anger and frustration is what the Bubble Gum politics played out during the US Supreme Court Judiciary Committee Hearings over the weekend left in me. I don't recall a time that I have ever before felt so disgusted by proceedings that do not directly affect me. A reporter in Wednesday's *Globe and Mail* made the following observation: "As in all contests in the capital, the parties and the interest groups had already staked out their positions and were spending all their time trying to manipulate the process that they spoke of with words of such concern and reverence. The scalding process was not only about race and sex, and women and men. It was about power and who knows how to use it more effectively. The answer so far is, still the Republicans."

Well of course the Republicans wielded power with a vengeance. They just happened to have had the most to lose: an ultra-conservative nominee to the Supreme Court who just happens to be Black. Yes, from the Republican viewpoint, Judge Clarence Thomas is a prize, if I ever saw one. Especially in view of the fact that George Bush intends to cut-back on the quota systems and other forms of affirmative action programs that advocates of the Civil Rights Movement worked so hard to achieve. He is a very clever prize too. His furious denunciation of the televised hearings ("a high-tech lynching for uppity Blacks") was a classic performance which will stand out forever in the annals of Senate proceedings. Carefully designed to make the Southern Democrats whose crossover confirmation votes he desperately needed shiver. Anita Hill didn't stand a chance. Determining whether or not she was sexually harassed was never part of the Republican agenda. They had interests to protect and they did a damn fine job of railroading her for having *dared* to interfere with their game.

So many times I have heard the following statement from my contemporaries (some of whom are well on their way to becoming finely polished Bubble Gum Politicians): "But you can't honestly expect integrity?" (Said with slight disbelief and gentle condescension) "Don't be ridiculous, that's not politically smart." I cannot say these words. They gag in my throat, I spit them out and stamp on them. And as proceedings this past weekend have proven, it doesn't matter if I sound hysterical. After all, I'm only a female.

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