

# Opinion

Randal Smathers

## West still cold



The challenges to Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms created by the recent unrest in the Soviet Baltic states, coming at the same time as some unusually liberal moves in South Africa, expose some problematic questions for the West.

Most Western states probably empathize with ethnic Soviet desires for autonomy from the U.S.S.R.'s central regime — much as they empathize with black South Africans' claims for independence. However, Western support has been muted, largely in recognition that Gorbachev's reforms are still fragile enough to be completely reversed by continued turmoil. Therefore, instead of "Rock for Estonia," what we see is Pink Floyd witnessing a French cosmonaut going up in the latest Soviet space shot.

On the other hand, public opinion remains unilaterally hostile to the South African government, despite several — albeit minor — liberal moves by P.W. Botha's government. Botha's situation is similar to Gorbachev's, in that any moves popular in the West inevitably draw strong opposition from entrenched reactionary elements in privileged society, so even minor reforms take courage.

In Gorbachev's case the opposition comes from the enormous Communist Party/bureaucratic class which has run the Soviet Union for most of its existence. In Botha's case, the opposition comes from the white right-wing parties, and the right of his own party. In the Soviet example, however, the public in the West has put aside their early distrust of the reforms as being "merely symbolic," and it has become widely recognized that Gorbachev needs Western support to achieve his reforms (much as has happened in China with Deng Xiaoping's reforms).

The Western public has not shown any thawing towards Botha in the face of his recent liberalizing gestures, which is unfortunate, because any moderation in South Africa should be encouraged. If Botha is sincere about starting reforms, which it seems he may be, he will need support from the West — just as Gorbachev and Deng need — in order to prevent a reaction from entrenched elements which will make the situation even worse than it was before reforms began.

If that happens, it won't help South African blacks achieve their freedom — certainly it won't prevent the bloodbath which a moderate solution might avoid.

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## Letters

### Thorkelson sensitive, honest

Re: Sleaze exposed (Nov. 24)

I have noticed with some interest the consistent opposition to Scott Thorkelson of *The Gateway* throughout the election. You have accused him of being unapproachable and arrogant.

I would like to offer a differing viewpoint. First of all, Mr. Thorkelson came to my door soliciting my support. I had a few questions and reservations and he took the time (about 15 minutes) to talk with me, in spite of the fact that he needed to cover hundreds of homes in his campaign. I was impressed that he did so, but still was a bit cynical. Then a group of six to ten of us decided we wanted the opportunity to talk with him over areas that concerned us as Canadians. He came over to one of our homes and took over an hour to explain to us what he wanted to do in Ottawa, and then listened to us. What struck me the most was when members of our group confronted him on divisive issues, he dared to tell us what he really felt, even though his opinion differed and he knew he could lose votes. He was not confrontational, but incredibly polite. He carefully listened to what we had to say, and took time to reply.

As I went home that evening, I realized that the kind of person I want in Ottawa is someone who can listen to my concerns and has carefully thought about issues of concern, not someone who can act well in front of a camera, or be clever enough to fight off hecklers. At no time did any of us detect the arrogance that the press attributed to him. If anything, he seemed rather shy, but could handle a small group setting well.

When the press began to criticize Mr. Thorkelson, I thought that it is a shame we so often look for the

candidate who can grandstand well, be a clever actor, and tell us only what we want to hear. Perhaps if some of your reporters had taken the time to talk to him with an open mind, they might have discovered a man who is sensitive, honest and seems to have thought out what he can do for us in Ottawa.

Ken Light  
 Science IV

### Get bitching

We know all of you people out there on campus are apathetic but we didn't realize just how apathetic everyone is. WHAT, isn't anyone going to bitch about our Bar None activities? What about the straw, the water balloons, the drinking while driving tractors and/or horses, the interrupted lectures? Come on now, there must be something you bleeding hearts want to complain about. Surely there must be some decent, upstanding citizens left on this campus who object to these types of activities. It is our modest opinion that you people out there need a good swift kick in the ass. Come on, get bitching.

Doug Moss, Ag IV  
 Steve Hughes, Ag IV  
 Murray Jorgensen, Ag I  
 Derek Benedict, Ag II  
 Brad Kolstad, Ag IV

### Education outburst

Re: Letter contradictory (Nov. 24)

I want to tell you, right off the bat, Mr. Kisilevich, that the sections of my letter (Nov. 22) you particularly object to are modifications by *The Gateway* editors to what were much more intemperate outbursts. The key sentence deleted read: "The Faculty of Education seems to attract mediocre students and present them with a mediocre program." I do not make this statement blindly. As you correctly pointed out, this would be unfair. It remains, however, that the Faculty of Education demonstrably

attracts students with lower grades in their Education courses than their counterparts in Arts or Sciences.

You express the belief that most people in Education want to be Educators (sic). I should hope that this would be the case; otherwise where would our educational system and by extension, our society, be? Imagine if people going into medicine didn't want to become doctors! I agree that some people in general go to university for the wrong reasons. The Faculty of Education, however, seems to attract more than its fair share of riff-raff.

You castigate me for my perceived attitude towards teachers and for my contradictions (as you see them). I would suggest to you that there was nothing contradictory about anything I wrote. In fact, it's difficult to see which generate which: the quality of teachers or the public's attitude towards teachers. I was not undermining the confidence in teachers in my letter; the experience of teachers I know tells me that there is very little confidence out there to undermine. Yes, I am concerned about the quality of teachers produced by this institution. I believe the facts stand for themselves. Yes, I am concerned that teachers garner little respect in the community and we have to ask ourselves why that is.

Siobhan Muldowney  
 Medicine III

### Gee! A mistake

While Darren Gee is a nice enough fellow and his name is one I could live with, it is not mine. If you have not figured out what I am speaking about, I ask you to refer to page three of the Tuesday, Nov. 22 edition of *The Gateway*. You incorrectly put Mr. Gee's name under my face for a photo taken at the 40 Beer Club tryouts. The rest of the information is correct, as I was officiating and it did take place at the Strathcona Hotel.

Gary Wong  
 Engineering V