

ENGINEERS EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO CONTROVERSY

by Cathy McDonald

Strippers were featured at the "Beer Garden" last Thursday night in the Student Union Building, a closed event organized by the Dalhousie Engineering Society.

Reaction to this form of entertainment on campus varied from "laissez faire" to cries of immorality and anger that the objectification of women as sex objects is alive and well and living at Dalhousie.

Normally a society that thrives on publicity of their activities, the Engineers are dismayed that elements on campus would want to censor their right to chose their own form of entertainment.

In an interview, the society executive described the event as responsibly controlled. Door security was tight, and when people started jumping on stage they were quickly pushed

back into the audience, said Kevin Reardon, an executive member. There was no illegal or "extra-curricular" activity, he said.

"If you compare our events to other events on campus, this is baby stuff," said another executive.

The event was organized as a good time and a way to motivate the society, according to some engineering students.

"People overestimate why we want to have strippers. It's not just to see nude females, but is way to get first year engineers involved," said Bob Maloney, an engineering student.

"With the incidence of rapes on campus, and the administration's efforts to work against this danger by distributing pamphlets educating people on how to guard against rape, this condoning of strippers is especially disturbing," duToit said.

duToit linked the hiring of strippers to rape. "One is directly an act of violence against women, a power thing, which is similar to a strip show where the stripper is in a subordinate position to the audience. This marks clearly the power relationship between men and women."

The Newman Society circulated a petition opposing the use of the SUB for strip acts last year, obtaining signatures from 10% of the student body, according to McCann. They will not be repeating the petition this year as "we know how students think on the matter" said McCann.

However the society has expressed its opposition to the event by phoning into the Dave Wright radio show on CJCH and by notifying Education Minister Terrence Donahoe of their concerns.

Two engineering students, Bob Maloney and Tony Mas-kine, who do not represent the official society's point of view, said "being sexist has nothing to do with it. People who think it's sexist don't have to go. There are a lot of people on campus who instead of having a good time, spend their time preventing other people from having a good time..."

"Dal is a conservative school. People overreact to little things like this, things that happen more often in other schools. There is no sense of spirit at Dal, which makes Dal a stinky school."

Financially, the engineers broke even on the event, with approximately 170 engineers and 80 guests attending. The strippers cost about \$200 each, Petolas said.

When asked why the Dalhousie engineering society

president, Bernard Petolas, has said last Tuesday that no strippers were planned for the event, the executive responded that it was part of a concerted effort to keep publicity low.

"Tickets went on sale Monday morning, and people were told to keep it quiet, not to publicize and blab it off," said an engineer.

The Newman Society, a Christian group on campus, is adamant in its yearly fight to prevent the engineers from having strippers in the McInnes Room.

David McCann, co-chairman of the society, is incensed with the "phone vote" last week, in which student council overwhelmingly endorsed the engineer's right to include strippers in their event, 21 in approval, 6 against.

Before the vote, the engineers had not included strippers on the agenda of events at the beer bash, in a letter to Murdoch Ryan, manager of the Student Union Building. Despite this official agenda, council decided to vote on the possibility of strippers. Once the strippers were legitimized by council, the fact that the engineers were misleading in their letter is no longer a major concern.

McCann criticized council's actions as irresponsible and precedent setting.

"Any society can send a phony letter and then do what they want," McCann said.

Caroline Zayid, a science representative on council voted against the engineers being allowed to have strippers. She said anything a society does reflects on the union.

With respect to the issue of censorship, Zayid compared the issue to property rights, saying that if people were behaving unacceptably in her yard, she would have the right to ask them to move somewhere else instead.

"This is a women's issue, not a moral issue. (Hiring strippers) perpetuates a certain sexual image of women that I cannot accept" Zayid said.

Jim Logan, Student Union Vice President, said he voted for the engineers being allowed to have their strippers.

"As long as it's legal, council shouldn't ban things like that. It's a clear question of whether we have the right or not to let them do it. It might be sexist, but it's not up to (council). It's their choice, not ours."

"Also, I didn't want to alienate the engineers, and hope that they will slide back into council instead of being out in left field."

Delphine duToit, executive director of the Dalhousie Staff Association, was "disappointed council would have that kind of attitude for an event that exploits women." The DSA represents non-academic staff at Dalhousie, 75% of whom are women.

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