

Hope for Prensa

I'm sure you have all heard the expression that one of the functions of a newspaper is to act as a watchdog towards government. Through the reporting of abuses by government, democracy is maintained. The fact that a newspaper is allowed to openly criticize government demonstrates the democratic right to the freedoms of speech and of the press.

Daniel Ortega, the president of Nicaragua, has just announced the lifting of the ban against the country's sole opposition newspaper, La Prensa. The publisher of La Prensa, Violeta Chamorro, initially supported the revolution, but later became disillusioned with Ortega, and criticized his government in her paper. La Prensa had been closed by order of the Sandinista government for 451 days. The reopening of La Prensa complies with the Central American peace plan designed by the Costa Rican president Oscar Arias.

This peace plan (called 'Esquipulas II') was signed by the leaders of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala as well as Nicaragua. It calls for democratic reforms, amnesties, ceasefires, an end to rebel aid and the use of one nation's land to invade another, and an end to all censorship of media. Equipalas II should come into effect on November 5.

The Nicaraguan government is beginning to try reforms earlier than that date, as shown by the ending of censorship of all media, and the recent declaration of a unilateral ceasefire in the war against the Contras.

These moves strengthen Nicaragua's credibility as a democracy, since there have been charges made against the Sandinistas of becoming afflicted with what I call the 'Animal Farm Syndrome', when revolutionaries who overthrow an oppressive government become authoritarian themselves. Certainly the bans and censorship on the media were contrary to the doctrines of democracy; but the extent to which Nicaragua is undemocratic is difficult for the layman to determine, due to widespread propaganda from both supporters and critics of the Sandinistas.

It is to Ortega's credit that he has allowed La Prensa to reopen. Evidently, he has recognised the political value of the move; hopefully, he has also realised that a true democracy is not afraid of criticism.

La Prensa should be commended for reaffirming its opposing stance, and should not feel any pressure to conform, despite years of censorship and government claims of sedition. However, just as it must not cater to the Sandinistas, La Prensa should not become the mouthpiece of the Contras. It is suspected by many that La Prensa is financed by the CIA and right-wing Americans. The fact that the publisher's son Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Jr. (who edited La Prensa until 1984), is a top leader of the Contras does not enhance the paper's credibility. Neither does the fact that, in 1980, 80% of the paper's staff left to found El Nuevo Diario, a newspaper supporting the Sandinistas.

Chamorro claims that with the reopening of La Prensa, "Nicaraguans will be free to express themselves." This will be true only if the paper is completely independent, and not pressured to relay propaganda. In a country that is both politically and economically unstable, it is difficult for a newspaper to be truly objective and free of ideology — perhaps impossible. Yet this is what La Prensa must try to be, in order to save democracy and encourage peace. It should adopt the old journalism adage "all the news without fear or favor" as their motto, and practice it for the benefit of their country.

Elaine Ostry

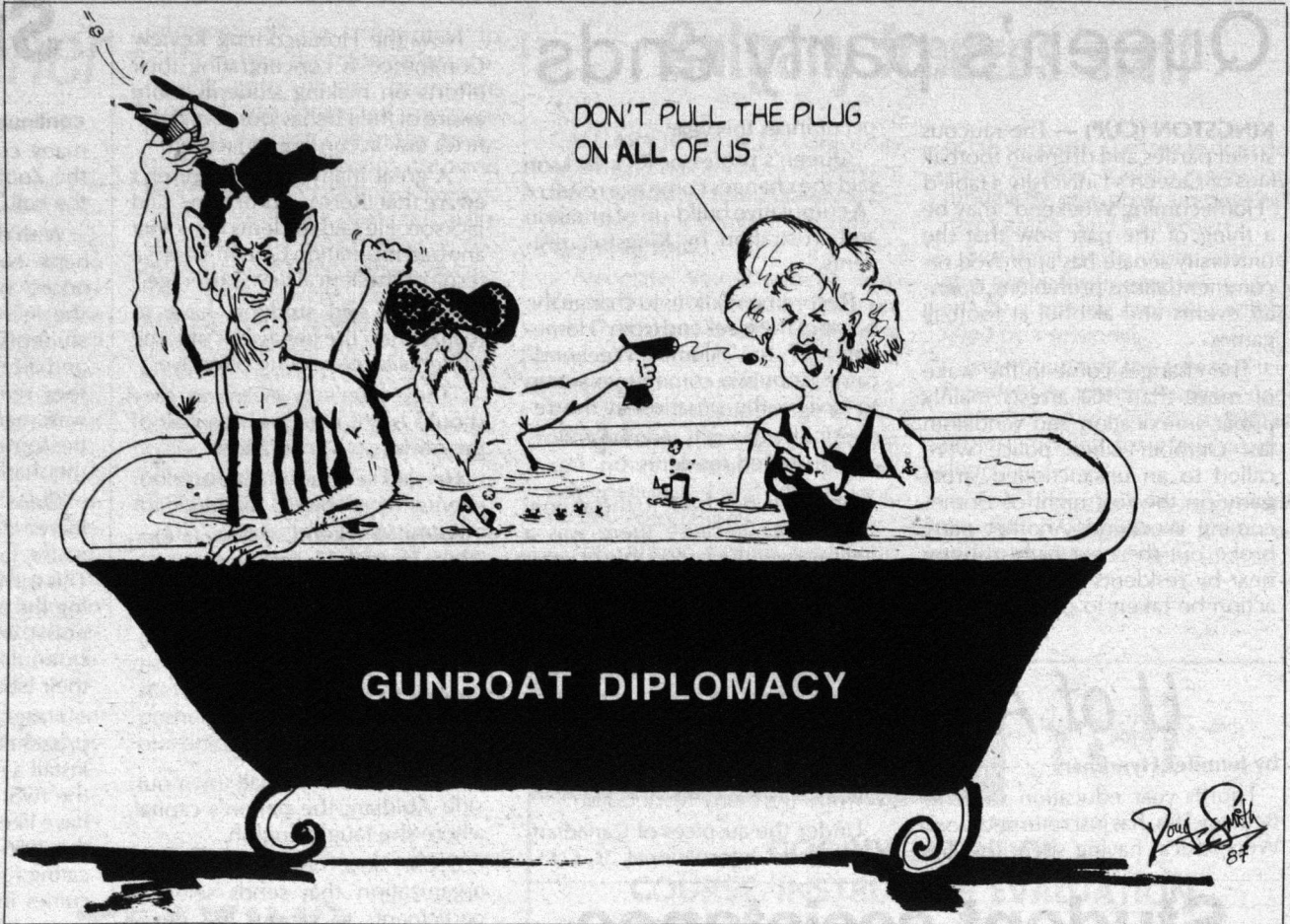
The Gateway



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Not propaganda

I'm writing in regards to the letter printed in the September 22 issue titled "Soviet Article Errs". I found the remarks both interesting and fairly depressing.

The Soviet article gave the reader a hope for peace and a greater sense of community with these people of a very different economic-political system. And it was automatically assumed by the letter writer to be propaganda. Do we live in such a paranoid and negative society that any seemingly good or hopeful news to come out of an "enemy" country is immediately regarded as an extremely biased judgement??

The travelling delegates were chosen from a group which focuses on awareness and involvement in contemporary issues — namely the peace movement. And directly stated in the article several times was the idea of the public considering the trip merely a piece of propaganda.

It is left to the reader to accept or reject the information as biased and one-sided. The letter writer, however, condemned the Gateway for printing such "biased" material when it was open minded.

The article presented much more than information about the Soviet peace movement. It created an awareness that something CAN be done by ordinary people, whether they be Canadian or Russian, to protest something as controversial as the arms race.

Corinne Yohemas

Academic worth?

I'm curious. Does anyone REALLY believe that raising the entrance requirements will determine who is academically worthy(!) of a university education?

Or is it more likely that, given the pressure on the secondary school system to advance its students, effort once deemed worthy of a 65 per cent mark will suddenly become a 70 per cent mark? Such a response would be natural but unfortunately would also have the effect of lowering the "value" of a

secondary school education — the "value" of which is already the subject of much discussion.

I'm also curious about the implementation of quotas. What will determine who gets in, and who doesn't? Will it be "first-come, first served", or "connections", or will there be a fair, academically-based determination? What about the brilliant high-school student who decides at the last moment not to leave home and go to Harvard? Are we going to turn him or her away to seek admission elsewhere? That would do wonders for this university's academic standing!

If access to university education must be restricted, I agree that the only fair criteria for doing so are academic ones. But we're deluding ourselves if we think that by arbitrarily adjusting a number, we can regulate the quality of students entering university.

The answer, it seems, lies in a re-vamping of our public school system, so that it becomes more relevant to students by preparing them for life as well as further studies. Until then, I'm going to enjoy watching governments squirm as they tell tax-payers that their dollars spent on education have not been enough to qualify their child prodigy for a university education.

Martin Levenson

Defending refugees

In response to Bonnie Dearing's allegations of misplaced motivation, I would like to clarify my own position. My personal involvement with the Student Refugee Support Committee stems from the conviction that action speaks louder than words.

The U of A is a safe, microcosmic forum where we, as students, can freely criticize government, discuss lofty ideals, or debate the abilities of a professor. This is not always the case elsewhere.

During my brief placement as a volunteer in Suriname, South America earlier this year I learned of a student leader who was detained, tortured, and shot without trial in December, 1982. Another was lucky enough to flee the

country and seek refuge in the Netherlands where he has continued his studies.

As one of almost 30,000 students on this campus, the scope of my individual actions is limited. But I can attempt to make a difference. This is why I am part of the Student Refugee Support Committee.

Jennifer Hyndman

More refugees

As the executive of the Student Refugee Support Committee, we would like to collectively address the misinformed comments of Ms. Bonnie Dearing in her letter to the 22 Sept. editor of the Gateway ("Hope Misplaced").

The most blatant error in Ms. Dearing's letter is her presumption that our group would support illegal refugees currently living in Canada. On the contrary, our group intends to aid only those student refugees currently living in refugee camps in third world countries. These people have been forced to flee their studies and their home countries — the result of excessive instability, violence, or persecution. They have never advocated violence.

Another error made in the letter is the suggestion that "... the refugees go back to where they came from, gain assistance from their own governing bodies, and return when the necessary requirements are fulfilled." First, the refugee can not return to his home

Letters to the Editor are encouraged and always welcome.

If you have a comment which would be of interest to the students of the University, please do not hesitate to send it in. All we require is your name, address, and phone number, and student ID if you are a student. We will not print letters missing any of these.

Letters should be no longer than three hundred words.

Mail or deliver your letters to room 282 SUB, or drop them at any SU information booth.

Vamp on Camp

