

Leadbeater

A new era for the Students' Union

Feature by Harald Kuckertz

With the Students' Union's major financial difficulties significantly reduced prior to his taking office, President Graeme Leadbeater looks beyond administrative functions and is endeavouring now to tackle the problem of student involvement.

Involvement is the magic word for this year's Students' Union executive and its leader, Graeme Leadbeater. Graeme, the son of an Edmonton minister and a graduate of Strathcona High School, emphasizes involvement on a personal level as well as on the level of the student body as a whole.

As part of his personal involvement, the twenty-year old science student has already been, more often on television and radio than his predecessors, Mantor and McGhie, together. By seeking the public spotlight, the new Students' Union president hopes to make students aware that the executive is active on their behalf, thus subsequently causing renewed student interest in S.U. affairs.

This more public-oriented and political style was one of Graeme's major election goals and promises. Reflecting on the reasons why he ran for election this spring, Graeme says:

"The elective Students' Union officials had been getting too much administrative-oriented. I felt that there was a need to make this organization a little more political, to try to bring up a few more issues and try to increase student involvement."

The S.U. president feels that another administrative-oriented executive would have resulted in even less student interest in S.U. affairs.

Graeme believes that a new era has begun for the Students' Union of this university.

"I think that last year showed one trend where the executive put the organization on solid financial ground at the expense of not being able to take in a lot of issues that they would have liked to. This year we feel on more solid ground so that we can get involved in other issues."



During the first four months of their term in office the Leadbeater slate has successfully tackled two major problems: the effects of the housing shortage on students and the forming of the Federation of Alberta Students. For the remaining eight months, Graeme feels that the Students' Union's possible affiliation with the National Union of Students (NUS) will be a major area of concern. He believes that it would be a benefit for the Students' Union to join the national organization.

While looking beyond this campus in the NUS issue, the new president nevertheless does not intend to neglect intramural problems.

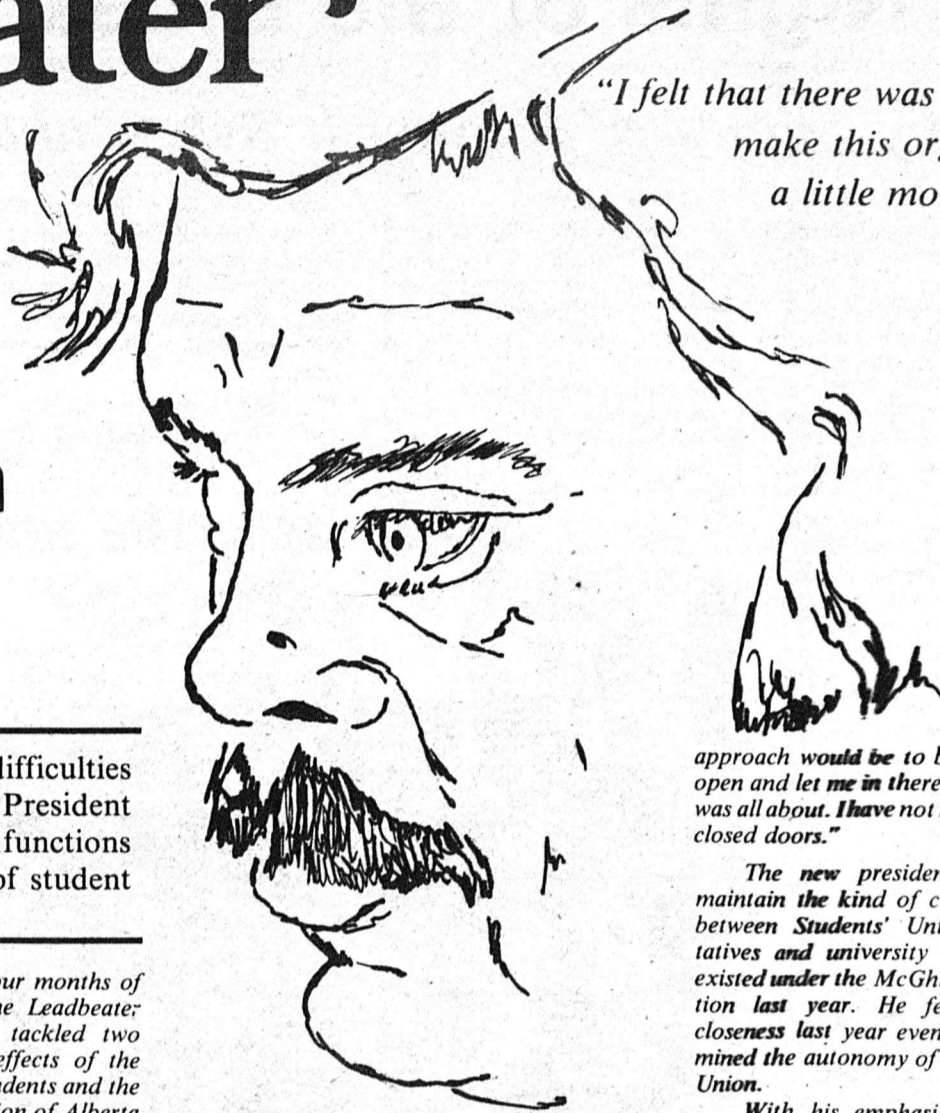
"One issue that we really want to go after this year and for which we'll try to get some guidelines set down by GFC, is on the private use of offices by professors for consulting work, seeing clients in law and psychology for example. We feel there are a lot of people who misuse their offices, who spend too much time on working for private interest to supplement their income right on the university campus."

"I think that it has got to be laid down clearly that any of this kind of work is going to be strictly monitored, and that only a certain amount of time should be allotted to this private kind of work."

"I think that it has got to the point where some professors' academic salary is supplementing what they earn privately when it obviously should be the other way around."

Graeme still objects to the Arts Court as the site of the new Commerce building but he realizes that "the only way to get it changed would be a two-week walkout of students on campus, and I don't think that's possible."

"I just can't buy the arguments.



"I felt that there was a need to make this organization a little more political..."

approach would be to be completely open and let me in there to see what I was all about. I have not met too many closed doors."

The new president avoids to maintain the kind of close relations between Students' Union representatives and university officials that existed under the McGhie administration last year. He feels that the closeness last year eventually undermined the autonomy of the Students' Union.

With his emphasis on student involvement, Graeme's style resembles that of his brother David who was Students' Union president in 1969-1970 and who is now an alderman in Edmonton's city council. Involvement in student politics has been a kind of tradition in the Leadbeater family. Graeme's older sister was an arts representative for a year in the early 70's. Asked for the reasons of his family's tendency to get involved, Graeme points at his father's profession:

"I think that by living in a minister's family you become a lot more socially conscious. You get people coming to your house at all hours of the day, for handouts or whatever, people in trouble. As a result you become much more aware of social issues and problems."

"And if you are looking for change, you look at the level of involvement that suits you for the time. Student politics, that's the level of involvement that I wanted."

"I think that has happened to all of us. We were made aware of these things through our family and through reading possibly more than other people. Therefore we feel more commitment to get active and do something about inadequacies."

At the present, Graeme does not intend to follow his brother's path into municipal politics or even further.

"I wouldn't write it off that I would go into politics but it's not my goal. If the right opportunity came up, I think I might. Right now I'd rather develop a career outside of politics."

Asked whether he might re-run for the presidency next spring, he says: "It would entirely depend on what happens to my academic program. Right now I would say no. I really don't think I'd change my mind. It is a sacrifice of time."

On the other hand, Graeme Leadbeater does not feel that he is sacrificing too much at this point.

"I maintain that what I am learning this year is probably more than you could learn in any two or three year degree in some programs. The university, the public relations, the staff relations, business and finance, negotiating and, generally, working in an office; all this has been a worthwhile experience."

They say it will look good in the Arts Court, it will tone down Tory. It makes no sense to me at all."

"I think their big concern in commerce - and I can sympathize with that - is that they don't want to get it delayed further."

"There are several other buildings coming. Agriculture 2-1, right behind the Students' Union Building, will wipe out the tennis courts. That concerns us also greatly. Recreation and green space is getting so short on campus."

Prior to his election, some people felt that the Leadbeater slate had a leftist outlook which would harm the Students' Union. Graeme pays little significance to this argument.

"I know that our slate represents a real spectrum of political leanings. I think we're slightly socialist oriented but I think we're very moderate about it in the kind of issues that have confronted us. I don't think that student politics is the place for this kind of thing."

"Working with councils that are made up with such varying philosophies, it doesn't help to get things accomplished if people take hard-lined stands on issues. It's more of a compromise. We present the side that we feel is right, and if that is somewhat more leftist and people disagree, then we'll work out a compromise."

"I don't think that for student politics it is even fair to label someone leftist because there are issues that we are bringing up for the common good, for the majority of people."

"If we have to oppose a conservative government in this province on some issues because they are not good for students, do we get labeled as leftists? If we are in BC and we have to oppose the NDP government, are we accused of being ultra-leftist or conservative? What's the deal? We are trying to work through a non-partisan group, the Students' Council, to bring forward the policies that represent the majority of students."

Graeme says that his relationship with the university and the provincial government has been quite satisfactory so far.

"I think that people were a little apprehensive when we got elected so that they thought that the best

This is Part I of a Series introducing the present Students' Union Executive.