

COMMENTARY

The delightful Edgar

edgar the anarchist

You will all be delighted to know I have been recruited for occasional articles to the *Gazette*, since it was felt that the *Dagger* (the Dalhousie Graduate Students' Newsletter) was not a big enough forum for my abrasive honesty. If last year's political scene looked grim, this year's has all the promise of desolation. Nevertheless I plan to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me Bakunin.

As anyone with any sense knows, bourgeois democracy is an illusion sustained by the haves to the detriment of the have-nots. Thus I was not at all surprised by the results of the student elections last term. The Logans are pleasant enough court jesters who suddenly find themselves with the problem of leadership. They were elected in past by a reaction against the sterile ramblings of such ludicrous figures as our student Vice-President.

Now the Logans have to do something to justify the electorate's confidence, and suddenly their humour has dried up. No doubt they have spent a large part of the summer reading old minutes and reorganizing filing cabinets, which may be a rea-

son necessary first step, but they have yet to come forward with coherent proposals to solve the widespread disillusionment which catapulted them into office. If they change from their electoral platform of studied irreverence to the system, to a council equivalent of

"Business as Usual" they will have betrayed many of the people who voted for them, and will deserve our contempt.

It is, of course, too early to either praise or bury them. One thing is clear: they have been presented with a remarkable piece of luck in the form of the provincial elections on October 6th. Terrence Donahoe, the present Minister of Education, is running for re-election in a riding that contains Dalhousie University, as well as a number of students from other institutes of Higher Education. Here is an excellent opportunity for students to protest the cutbacks in higher education, which will inevitably mean decreasing standards, and has already meant substantial tuition fee increases. The Logans and the Student's Council in general would be failing the students of Nova Scotia if they do not take the lead in organising a protest vote against Donahoe, and in

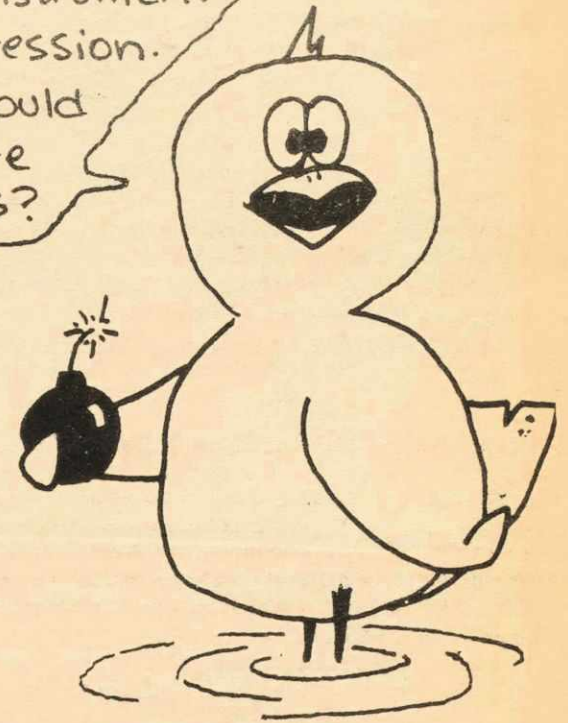
communicating their reasons for their opposition to the wider electoral community. Let there be no misunderstanding, Donahoe and the Conservative government are directly responsible for the cutbacks to Established Programme Financing (EPF) which the Federal Government is considering proposing.

If the Student's Council does not work hard over the next few weeks to convince potential voters of this, then we can look forward to another five years of Conservative misrule. Of course, the Logans and the Student's Council may have no genuine interest in politics, and may look upon their posts as sinecures and the stuff that Curriculum Vitae are made of. They may even be so stupid as to think that student politics begin at Robie Street and end at Oxford. Only the next eight months will tell. I await developments with my dagger sharpened, but with all the fairness of an unaligned neutral.

Edgar the Anarchist is the pseudonym for a well known *enfant terrible* of the Dalhousie political scene.

Controlled as it is by the ruling class of society, this university serves their needs (at the expense of the needs of the people) and as such is an instrument of oppression.

What could be more obvious?



Helpline needs help

by Greg Morgan

Distraught people -- potential suicides, confused recipients of social assistance, the pathologically depressed -- had always had access to Halifax's phone-in counselling service. But this summer, the counsellors were in need of counselling, and last Tuesday the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia handed down its

verdict. The bitter tug of war between Helpline Society and rival Hotline Society, which had "seceded" from it in August had apparently been settled. Judge Rodgers had granted the restraining order that Chairman Gregory North of Helpline had requested against Hotline's president Gary Tanner. This affirms the legitimacy of what

appears to be an oligarchy. Unless lineworkers can secure greater say in Helpline's running, the decision would appear unfortunate.

The Helpline volunteer lineworkers who later formed Hotline reportedly left the older agency over the question of whether they should have the right to elect the agency's leaders and Board of Directors. It was the June 8 firing of coordinator Cheryl Downton by a superior whom the board had recently appointed that incensed them. They felt the firing was neither fair nor just. A Downton Support Committee was formed. Led by lineworker Gary Tanner, it circulated a petition endorsing Downton's work and requesting her reinstatement. It collected 47 signatures from a volunteer corps that numbered somewhere between 65 and 100. Yet the petition was rejected by the Board of Directors, and the Board's Personnel Committee upheld the dismissal. Still, the Downton Support Committee persisted. On June 29, its leader, Tanner, was also dismissed, accused of trying to undermine the agency.

The disgruntled volunteers denied that Helpline's Board was a legally constituted body, charging that elections for it had not been held properly. A considerable number of disgruntled volunteers left the agency to express their dissatisfaction. They elected their own Board and executive and opened an alternative service named Hotline. Upon opening August 28, it had a volunteer corps of 43. The same day they began picketing the original Board at an intersection near Helpline's

offices.

Meanwhile, Helpline's Board of Directors had brought an action against Tanner. The case first appeared in court July 29, and this Tuesday was decided against Hotline. Judge Rodgers ruled that it was the original Board chaired by North that constituted the legitimate Helpline leadership. The Judge also placed a restraining order on Tanner, both in his personal capacity and as representative for the Hotline Society. It merely limited Tanner's involvement in Helpline affairs.

However, the Helpline Society action might not have been so successful had its bylaws stated that all its volunteer workers were to be Society members and were to elect the Society's Board of Directors. The lineworkers were represented by two seats on the Board, but they were apparently unable to elect it. Strictly speaking, the constituted Helpline Society could not have been called a *voluntary* agency. To quote the **Report of the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action to the Government of Canada**;

"The very essence of a voluntary association is that it is controlled by volunteers. Ultimately, the officers elected by volunteers must have real control over policy or the association is not voluntary."

Regardless of the professional or administrative demands that may have recommended Downton's firing, its aftermath reflected the powerlessness of Helpline's volunteers. On the other hand, that the resulting bitterness ultimately divided the organization suggests that some emotional distancing on the part of lineworkers may be necessary for the agency's health. Yet the Hotliners were heard to contend that it is exactly this kind of emotional commitment to an

agency that makes a phone-in service an effective counselling unit. And while the Court's intention to begin a process of reconciliation should be respected, one cannot help noticing a paradox. While the Helpline Society is able to rely upon the Volunteers' humanitarian impulses, the volunteers have not in the recent past been able to determine how their own talents should be utilized and under what conditions.

However, Tanner's lawyers, Andrew Pavey and Michael Coyle, believe that the door has not been closed to a more meaningful volunteer voice in future Helpline decision-making. The injunction that Helpline requested was amended by the Court to forbid the Hotliners' involvement "unless and until the respondents become members of the (Helpline) Society" At present the Helpline Board of Directors

contains almost all the voting members of the Society and has the exclusive right to vote new applications for Society membership. But the Hotline volunteers had never actually applied to the Board for this membership. Coyle believes that the wording of one of the Society's bylaws indicates that any person who applies to the Board **must** be permitted to join the membership. Perhaps if Helpliners begin to apply for voting rights, at least some will receive them. Quite apart from what the bylaws have to say about it all, Coyle considers volunteers to have a highly unusual political status inside Helpline. He said: "I can't think of a single voluntary organization where the active volunteers are denied membership." He cited the Red Cross Society, Heritage Trust, and The Ecology Action Centre as examples.

