

# Is Democracy hogwash at Dalhousie?

People power, mob-rule, funny farm, do we have a democratic university? Recently, I picked up a September 11, 1998 letter addressed to DSU President Ted Chiasson from the *Alliance for a Democratic Dalhousie*. Essentially, the *Alliance* cites an undemocratic administrative process as the underlying cause of the community problems at Dalhousie. It asks the DSU to support an inquiry to:

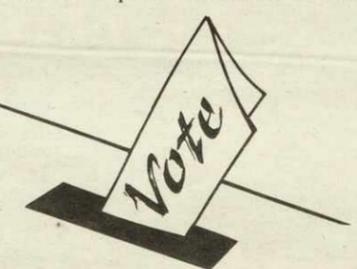
"help identify and recommend renewal strategies that will strengthen and promote more open and constructive relations among various sectors of the university; consider if Dalhousie's approaches to, and structures of, administration and governance as well as the legislation that governs Dalhousie university meets the standards of best practice within the Canadian university community; make recommendations designed to improve Dalhousie's ways of developing, implementing and monitoring financial policies and priorities and

overall levels of openness and transparency in financial decision making".

After I read this letter I questioned whether the writers took into account the constitutional structure of government at Dalhousie University. In my opinion, democracy is already entrenched in our two institutional governing structures. The first is the Board of Governors and it is the legal and financial caretaker of the university. It contains 15 public figures appointed by the *elected* Provincial Government as well as 3 Senate, 3 Alumni, and 3 DSU representatives. The second is the Senate and it is the academic regulator for the university. It consists of 48 *elected* Faculty representatives, 19 Administration Ex-Officio representatives, and 5 DSU members. Unless I have my facts wrong, it is inaccurate to assert that Dalhousie has an undemocratic governing system. The institutional structure here provides elected representation for the various commu-

nity groups on the campus and for the provincial government that financially supports it.

Now, please do not take my criticism of the *Alliance* to mean I do not believe there are community problems at Dalhousie. There are plenty, but I believe the problems on this campus are a result of an un-



healthy debate within the democracy, not the democracy itself. I state this because there appears to be no other reasoned policy alternatives for our representatives to discuss at the Board and Senate. The president and senior administration seem to be the only leaders in this field while the rest of the

community plays the role of a unified reactionary. Fortunately, we can avoid this if the university community starts producing solid alternative options about current university governance. This is especially relevant to university budget policy.

Presently, president Traves appears to be the only university caretaker who extensively researches the university budget. He has a Budget Advisory Committee to help him make educated decisions on the use of financial resources available to the university. This committee contains administration, faculty, and student representatives and it entertains input from the Dalhousie community. In its history, I have only come across one incident of alternative budget policy. The 1995 DSU Board of Governors submitted several alternative options for the BAC regarding tuition announcements, student assistance, and program differential fees.

If this is the case, we must ask

ourselves if we are utilizing the full potential of our democratic institutions? How can the Board of Governors, Senators, DSU, DFA, or any other community group complain about democracy if they do not use it? Instead of investigating whether Dalhousie is democratic or not I urge the *Alliance for a Democratic Dalhousie* to focus on logical administrative and budget policy alternatives for this university. If their efforts encounter obstruction from anyone they should exercise their legal rights in the court of law. Our campus is democratic and it needs a healthy civil debate, not name calling, bickering and rhetoric. It's time for the Senate, DSU, DFA, and alumni to supply their own budget advisory committees with ample resources to meet their mandate. Then we can experience the true benefits of living in a democratic political system.

DAVID A. COX

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PM:	14:00-16:00	St.Mary's University Loyola Building 186

For more information:  
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