

Editorial

Jeff Cowley



Bad news at the U of A always falls in the form of heavy words. Every year the University Administration drops a new payload of words onto the campus like "tuition increase," "budget cutbacks," and "department closure."

This year's barrage of weighted words was delivered by department of Housing and Foods. Students returning to residence were hit by the words "food price increases," as they made their way through CAB or Lister.

To students and residents who have to dine in any of the Housing and Food cafeterias, the news went over like a fat kid cannonballing off of a high diving board: it left many financially soaked and angry, but unable to do anything.

The administration has released excuses for dropping the budget bombs, though. With education cutbacks ripping chunks of funding from departments all across the campus, Housing and Foods has been more or less told to make budgetary ends meet on their own. Lecturing about liberal education is nice, but in the end it's the accountant who talks; University is also a business.

Sidestepping all the business jargon and budget figures, Housing and Food's dilemma can be simplified into a "see-Spot-run" problem: Housing and Food is a business. Housing and Food sells food. Housing and Food was not making money. Housing and Food raises prices of food. Easy.

However, the real issue on trial here isn't the figures in accounting books, or competitive prices, or university cutbacks, or union salaries, or the price of this and the cost of that, or any other jargon from the administration's Book of Heavy Words. The issue here is . . . food.

Anyone who has experienced the culinary adventure of gnawing on a rawhide CAB burger, or slurped the magical melting eggs in Lister is familiar with the cosmic distance between cafeteria chow and restaurant food. If campus officials are unsure about food prices, they should poke their heads into one of the Housing and Food cafeterias and take a look. You don't have to eat the stuff to understand what it tastes like. A vivid description of the food is usually written on the students' faces.

According to the people from Housing and Foods, prices were jacked only to a point where they would compete with other campus food outlets. If Housing and Foods is going to compete in price for what they sell, they should also compete in quality of food.

On the other hand, if Housing and Foods is serving discount food, cooked by discount cooks, to people on discount budgets, it seems reasonable that they would get what they pay for.

The Students' Union is set to meet with administration this week to "discuss" the food pricing problem. If the politicians cannot resolve the dilemma by matching food quality with "competitive prices," or decreasing them to an acceptable level, Students' Union should drop a few heavy words of their own — like "public accounting," "forum," and the ten mega-ton words: "student-audit."

The Gateway

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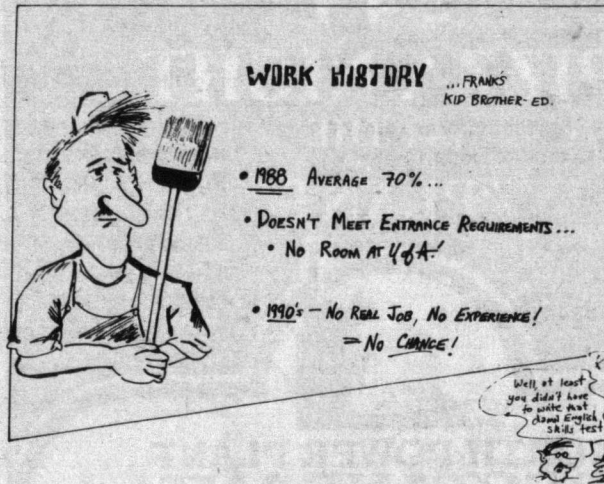
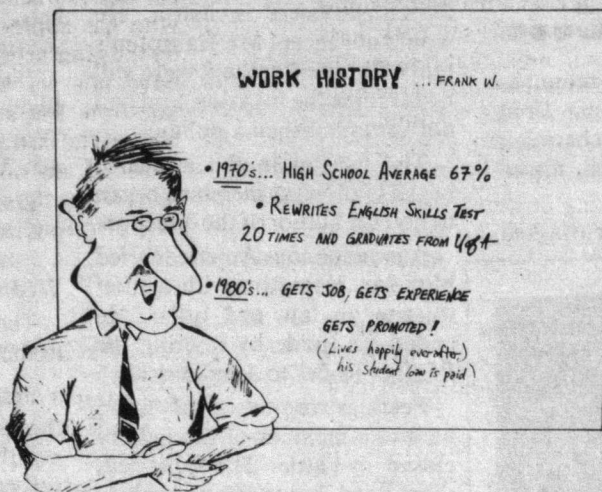
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The Gateway welcomes letters to the editor.

If you have a comment which would be of interest to the students of the University, please do not hesitate to send it in. Letters may be dropped off, or mailed to our office (Room 282 SUB), or may be dropped off at the SUB or HUB info booths. The writer's name, faculty and year of study must be included. Addresses and phone numbers are required, but will not be printed.

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Letters

Free Trade not free

Once, I mentioned to a friend of the family that I am going to school in Canada. (I'm from Georgia.) She asked, in complete sincerity, if I had to learn to speak Canadian before I could begin my studies here. I tell you this not to discredit my family or its friends, but to illustrate the point that a great many Americans know — or care — very little about what goes on north of their border. This is certainly the case when it comes to the free trade pact "negotiated" by Canada and the U.S.

I sure don't know much about the agreement. It's a long and complicated document which I'm far too lazy to plough through, and there's been damn little discussion of it in the US media. But I do know that the treaty would supercede Canadian, but not US, law. I do know that the treaty would prohibit Canadian, but not US, government assistance to regions or industries (e.g. financing for the heavy oil upgrader at Lloydminster). I know that this treaty is unfair to Canada.

Usually countries accept treaties such as this only after losing a war. Why is your government so keen on this treaty? I concede that those who've not given it much critical thought might find the "idea" of free trade appealing. But mature, responsible people don't risk their future on something no more concrete than a "neat idea". Anyone who would jump off the High Level Bridge because flying without an airplane seems like a neat idea should not be given a responsible position in the government.

At any rate, how "free" is trade likely to be between two partners of such disparate economic size? Should — heaven forbid — a dispute arise, which side would prevail: the side with most of the moral authority or the side with most of the power? The US Congress has *already* approved protectionist legislation that violates the treaty.

Come to think of it, maybe there's a reason public discussion of the treaty has been kept to a minimum in the States. Americans like to think of themselves as an honest, fair-minded people. There is nothing honest or fair-minded in this treaty, and those Americans not blinded by their greed should be ashamed that this pact has been negotiated in their name. And Canadians should not let it become law.

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Sex and religion

This has been the summer of sex and religion. From the United Church General Council's deliberations to *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the media and popular attention have focused on the relationship between sex and religion. The polar opposition held in the popular mind between "the religious" and "the sexual" has made the discussion an awkward one.

Since Descartes the distance between "the sacred" and the "profane", the "body" and the "soul" has widened and in some cases meant the repression and the denial of whole realms of human experience. This way of seeing reality, as a discontinuous and easily divisible set of independent realms, has done much to wound and distort human relationships.

It is bitterly ironic that one of the driving forces behind this dehumanizing and destructive world view has been the Christian church. Ironic, because the deepest insight of the Christian tradition is the understanding of atonement through incarnation. That is to say, that we are saved not by a holy separate and disincarnate deity but by an infleshed integrating gracious reality. The Rabbi Jesus did not teach salvation through separation into a moral or religious elite but salvation as a gracious action of

inclusion, forgiveness and healing. His disregard for common morality and for orthodox religious practice indeed is one of the unique marks of his ministry.

The erotic has always troubled us westerners. Jesus' earthy erotic nature has always troubled the church. Because we have felt that we must control and have power over the body rather than knowing the empowerment of being embodied-spirit we have distrusted the body. Eros is the body's desire for atonement and should be a profoundly religious and humanizing experience. Instead it has been trivialized by the pornographic and denied by the distorted views of the church. Our broken lives, the sexist and mechanist understanding of sex in popular culture, homophobia and our inability to deal with the religious power of the erotic are all consequence of the distrust we have of the body. To regain our sense of trust, to regain wholeness is a difficult process but one of critical importance for us all.

The Church as it enters the dialogue is itself in need of healing. We as a religious community have yet to deal adequately with the disease we in part have been responsible for. We tend to make morally pious statements when confessions of complicity and confusion are necessary. That we are concerned with meaning and values and human wholeness (the Greek and Hebrew for salvation is perhaps better translated wholeness) makes our role one of midwife and healer. The church, of all communities, should be a place of acceptance inclusivity, and humility.

Hopefully we might culturally and religiously mature beyond the popular mythology of our dualistic age. The transformation of self and society towards wholeness and the reclaiming of our erotic life as a place of healing and atonement is an enormous task. It is risky and some will wish to flee into the easy and safe answers of religious or cultural fundamentalism. Some will feel threatened as they are