



POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

This week's Perspectives has been submitted by Blake Patton, a 4th year philosophy student who is actively involved with Amnesty International.

Amnesty International estimates that torture and similar forms of inhuman treatment are presently institutionalized in approximately one-third of the world's nations. The use of torture as a means of political control is one of the remaining scourges vexing the human race. It is upon those two principles that Amnesty International combats torture and inhuman and degrading punishment in all its forms as a part of efforts to preserve human rights.

On Monday, March 25th, Dr. Abudl Lodhi gave two lectures on the human rights situation in Pakistan. Dr. Lodhi, a STU sociology professor and member of the Committee for Progressive Pakistanis, has had extensive contact with the political events in Pakistan's recent history and their effects upon human rights.

In 1977, Zia Al-Hag led a military coup against the legitimate democratic government, and had the leader of that government executed. Since that time he had ruled Pakistan in a brutal and repressive fashion with little respect for human rights or the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, which Pakistan has ratified. Last year he held a referendum on the question of transforming Pakistan from a secular state to an Islamic nation; implicit in the question was the understanding that he would rule the Islamic nation if it were constituted. Due to the fact that Pakistan is 95% Muslim, the Islamic question was endorsed. He recently held elections to ratify his position as President, in which all partisan opposition was prohibited.

The creation of an Islamic republic means that a number of exceedingly barbaric punishments will hence forth be institutionalized, including floggings (public, of course) and the amputation of appendages. Perhaps it is difficult for Canadian citizens to understand and visualize the horrors that have been perpetrated under President Zia, and understandably so, for we rarely see people whose hands have been cut off for stealing or hear of the screams of someone whose feet have turned into bloody pulp by flogging.

President Zia will probably remain in power for some time, since his regime is (at least tenuously) supported by the US government because Pakistan has great strategic and tactical value in the present Soviet-Afghan conflict. It is obviously to the United States' advantage to maintain working relations with any non-communist government in Pakistan. Furthermore, President Zia's government is rumoured to be capable of producing nuclear weapons, a capability that Canada aided by supplying a CANDU reactor to Pakistan in the early 70's.

As hopeless as the human rights picture in Pakistan looks at the present time, there are agencies concerned with altering it. Amnesty International and its members are continually pressuring Zia's government to relent and conform to established international guidelines concerning the treatment of criminals and political prisoners. It must also be added that all people are welcome to join in AI's efforts to improve the treatment of prisoners of conscience in Pakistan and elsewhere. Until massive amounts of public outrage and pressure are directed at governments like Zia's, the world will still be cursed by such crimes against humanity.

Amnesty International is open to anyone who supports its goals. It is impartial. It does not support or oppose any government or political system; it works for human rights under all systems. The work is based on careful research and accurate reporting of facts by the organizations International Secretariat Information is collected from a wide range of sources, and missions are sent to countries for on-the-spot investigations and to observe trials, meet prisoners and interview government officials. Once details are checked, action by Amnesty International's members gets underway: letters and telegrams on the prisoner's behalf, petitions and publicity. The work is funded by donations from members and supporters. This financial independence is as vital as the strict political independence. Amnesty International does not receive government money for its budget.

poverty cont.

The anticipated lifting of rent restrictions at the end of the summer will only make the situation worse. FAPO has been conducting a survey to determine the state of housing for Fredericton's poor. They found that many people are paying up to 80% of their monthly incomes on shelter costs, that many are going without proper food and clothing merely to keep a roof over their heads. FAPO chairman Nancy McFarland has stated that she believes many of Fredericton's poor will not be able to absorb the rental increases expected once rent restrictions go.

While institutions such as the Emergency Shelter provide needed services, they can only be considered as a short-term attempt to deal with the crisis in housing. The distinction between providing shelter for the poor and providing homes is an important one to make. The effects of not having a stable, private space with which to centre one's life can be serious. Severe depression, discouragement and health difficulties are only the most apparent symptoms.

Even those with private shelter are in dire straits, as evidenced by the FAPO survey. The rural poor of this province are even worse off. They experience a lack in such basic facilities as electricity, running water, indoor toilets - in short, all of which the "upper-classes" take for granted. Also, the rural poor are often out of reach of voluntary efforts such as the Community Kitchen and food banks.

The Community Kitchen and Emergency Shelter - in fact most of the city's charitable organizations - have experienced resistance from the community. While most people seem to agree that a need for these facilities exists, many have the "not-in-my-neighbourhood" attitude. This

seems to arise from an image of the poor, and especially of the homeless, of being an "undesirable character" - of being panhandlers and thieves and basically parasites on the system. Larry Wrothin, the administrator of the Emergency Shelter, has noted that a large number of the Shelter's guests are fairly young and willing to work when the opportunity presents itself. This would seem to fly in the face of the stereotypical notion of the poor as a gang of old derelicts. Mr. Wrothin thinks that the amount of abuse of the Shelter is very small. As an extra precaution, the Shelter is in close and constant contact with the Fredericton Police Department.

As noted above, the group which we have come to call "the poor" is made up of many distinct sorts of people in various situations. Given this, it is unreasonable to expect any kind of generalization to act as an adequate description of the poor. Nor has this article had the scope necessary to provide such a description. The poverty situation in this city - poverty in general, for that matter - is an extremely complex problem. By and large, the poor have not had much control over their plight. This appears to be one of the obstacles to the elimination of poverty.

For too long, perhaps the resources meant to aid those in need of assistance have been controlled by governments and the upper-classes and not by those who understand the experience of being poor. The poor themselves have rarely been organized, preferring instead to try to hide their need. They thus remain incapable of significantly improving their lot and the lot of others.

Real change - genuine social justice, if that is not too leftist a term - will only come about when this infrastructure of poverty is replaced with well thought-out, long-range alternatives. Until these alternatives are developed and successfully implemented, this society will have to live with its legacy of inequality.

However, he expressed annoyance at being unable to have use of the SUB for the conference as the Geological Association of Canada has the building booked for this time. Loane stated that the organizing committee and CHSR executive strongly question giving preference for use of the Student Union Building to a non-student organization.

Interested persons in the Fredericton area will be welcome to attend the conference for a registration fee of \$20.00, which includes a lobster banquet in McConnell Hall.

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I would like to thank all BRUNSWICKAN advertisers for their loyal patronage in the '84 - '85 school year. I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce next year's Manager of the Advertising Department, Katherine Davidson.

Thank you,
Derrick Stanford