

letters & comment

All letters should be addressed to the Editor, *Excalibur*, room III, Central Square. Please type letters, triple or double spaced, and keep them to around 250 words. Name, address and phone number must be included, but name will be withheld on request. *Excalibur* reserves the right to edit for grammar and length. Deadline Monday 4pm.

They argue USSR is democratic

The interview with York student and immigrant from the Soviet Union, Isabella Kravez (*Excalibur*, 1 Dec. '77) raises a number of questions which in our opinion require a reply. There are two issues which seem to be embodied in the article and which are consistently found in off-campus media items on the socialist countries: (a) Soviet Democracy and (b) Soviet Jews.

With regard to democracy in the Soviet Union, Kravez decries the socialist system because of the absence of democracy: "Russians don't know what's happening. They only know what's happening from the papers and they are government controlled." Obviously, Kravez has become enamoured with the concepts of "freedom" and "liberty" and has chosen to join the chorus in accusing the Soviet Union of violating the principles of the Helsinki Agreement, of denying human rights to its citizens.

But what do these words "freedom" and "liberty" mean? At one time these words had a truly meaningful ring to them - as a step forward from preceding socio-economic formations. Today, in countries with capitalist controlled economies they still have a significance which every Canadian should be aware of and which should be continually extended.

But can it not be said that these



Gary Hershorn photo

Letter takes issue, with "Free Sharansky" campaign.

words are used all too often to warp values to such an extent that the lives of baby seals and whales take on more importance than the lives of fishermen and their families; to pay low wages, create unemployment, increase prices, and make higher education increasingly inaccessible; to elect what many people consider to be a "Tweedledum" and "Tweedledee" every few years.

Did not US Presidents Johnson and Nixon attempt to bomb Indo-China off the face of the map in the name of "freedom"? Was not the freely elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile overthrown and thousands of Chileans murdered in the interests of

"liberty"? In Canada, after the War Measures Act and continuing RCMP activities, what freedoms we have are on precarious grounds indeed. You have to be aware of the different interpretations of the concepts behind these words.

In the Soviet Union, it is our contention that there exists a different, more substantial kind of democracy. There, every citizen has a right to take part in democratic participation in the social and political life of their country. After the October Socialist Revolution in 1917 the organs of government, the political foundations, took the democratic form of Soviets of Working Peoples' Deputies.

Deputies are elected to these bodies through universal and equal suffrage. There are no qualifications or restrictions in the election of deputies, the majority of whom are workers with more than half of this number being women. In 1976 there were over two million deputies in a total population of nearly 260 million. These freedoms were defended during World War II against the onslaught of fascist forces. In the process the Soviet Union lost more than 54 million dead and another 70 million wounded.

The rights and duties of Soviet citizens are protected in the statutes of the Constitution of the USSR; this year, after a democratic discussion which reached into the smallest village, a new Constitution was adopted which enriched and developed the concepts embodied in the old.

However, these rights and freedoms are interdependent with an overall responsibility to the welfare and well-being of all citizens including Soviet Jews engaged in the construction of a socialist society.

What of Soviet Jews. In the 1970 census Jews made up less than one per cent of the total population (this figure could have been higher except for the murderous activities of the Nazi occupation forces during World War II). Yet according to the

Novosti Press Agency, 6.1 per cent of Soviet citizens engaged in scientific careers were Jews; 6.9 per cent in literature and journalism; 5.2 per cent in the arts; and 3.4 per cent in medicine.

There are more Soviet high school students who profess Judaism than any other ethnic group and there are more Jewish students as a whole than in Israel, whose Jewish population is roughly 50 per cent more than that of the USSR. 10% of all Lenin Prize winners are Jews.

Jewish newspapers and journals, in Yiddish and the various national languages, are available. There are several Jewish theatrical companies and musical ensembles. Synagogues have not been closed down; in fact several function throughout the country.

Jews or other Soviet citizens wishing to emigrate are free to do so. Nor does Soviet law forbid people to travel; in fact, last year three million Soviet citizens visited other nations.

The Western media has made a great noise out of the restrictions, wholly justified in our opinion, the Soviet authorities have placed on travel abroad by certain categories of occupations such as state employees, armed forces personnel, common criminals and other assorted misfits, whose release could be utilized by states hostile to the USSR. It is proper that these potential anti-Soviet elements should be dealt with according to Soviet law.

But what it all boils down to is the fact that Western monopoly capital, ably aided by Zionist propaganda, are using these so-called dissidents to attempt to discredit and undermine the gains made by the socialist countries and as a smokescreen to cover up the Western economies' own shortcomings.

Nick Pierros
Norm Faria
Debo

Another view of the ULS council

The letter from the vice-president of finance, Tom Silverhart, in last issue, contained an attack on the United Left Slate when it formed the majority administration of the 1975-76 CYSF.

Firstly, Silverhart accuses the council of having "approximately \$1,500 in outstanding accounts left for the new council to assume."

What he hasn't stated is that the same ULS council allocated \$5,000 in its budget to the new council to take care of any outstanding accounts and any expenses required during the summer period prior to receiving the new operating grant from the university administration.

Secondly, Silverhart claims that the ULS council "ended the year with expenditures exceeding revenue by approximately \$7,000". This is not true. The financial accounts of the CYSF were balanced at the end of the 1975-76 term. What the ULS did do was spend funds that were left to its council by the previous year's council which was revenue to the CYSF.

Thirdly, Silverhart alleges that the books of the council were not in order. I challenge him to show where there is one case of expenditure being made without authorization from the council (it doesn't have to be as big an error or deception as his putting away \$10,000 without proper authorization). Furthermore, balanced books were kept and presented at less than half the cost of the wages of the current business manager of CYSF. The delay and minor disorganization of the books were due to the multiple transitions in the position of CYSF book-keeper.

Fourthly, yes \$500 was allocated for a study on Uganda. This was a study done in association with the Black Students Union which wanted a study printed attacking Idi Amin as a dictator and murderer, so that it could be circulated underground in Uganda. It could find no other means of publishing the material and the ULS could only be faulted for providing too great an amount, if one wished to. The study was submitted, which I know since I saw it myself in my position of external affairs vice-president at the time.

Fifthly, the ULS council did not

allocate "a further \$500 to obtain a lawyer for a student radical who destroyed the computer centre at Sir George Williams University in Montréal". I don't know of any such allocation and I would further advise Silverhart to be considerably more careful of what he writes, since that student was not convicted of

having destroyed the computer centre, and so Silverhart could be sued for libel.

I regret having used my time and the space in the pages of *Excalibur* to refute the allegations of Silverhart's but unfortunately he represents the prevailing body of opinion on the CYSF. A body of

opinion which obtained office without stating its position clearly to the students who elected them. Hopefully, in the coming elections, candidates will present the positions which they intend to implement when and if they obtain office.

Able Weisfeld, ULS-NDP
Grad rep. on CYSF

What to do with an empty Blue.



When you're smiling, call for Labatt's Blue.