

Where do we go from here?

by Kim St. Clair

Is it a breath of fresh air? Or just a recycling of the same old furnace drafts?

A Student's Union Executive and Council have once again been installed for a new year of political manoeuvrings. Council is ultimate authority within the Students' Union, but its 21 student councillors generally only act upon work and

recommendations generated by the five member SU Executive.

Knowing this, and realizing that our Students' Union is a massive organization with a membership of 20,000 and operating budget of over three and one half million dollars, *The Gateway* approached SU President Len Zoeteman and SU vp (finance and administration) Eileen Gillese to discover their reactions concerning the future of the Students' Union

Directions

Q: The sale of HUB was ratified in the Board of Governors meeting last Friday. How do you feel about this?

LEN: Very happy. It'll give us time to work in areas other than HUB.

EILEEN: But there are going to be negotiations on it until at least the end of June. The major things have been settled, but now comes the interpretation of responsibilities. Len and I are faced with negotiations at least once a week for the next three months.

Q: In what ways will the HUB sale free your executive to devote time to other things?

LEN: I think first of all, you're going to see more time available to devote to student issues. We're going to be able to delve more into the real purpose of a students' union; that is, to work towards improving student situations.

EILEEN: Without HUB we're going to have time to stop being administrators and start getting back to the students.

Q: Are you referring to improved services?

EILEEN: Yes. We want students to become aware of the services available to them, but I also mean academic services. FIV Freshman Introduction Week and FOS Freshman Orientation Seminars and things like that have got to start teaching the students that university is not entirely fun and games.

LEN: I think it's a question of revitalizing services. We have to work on forums, CKSR, socials...

Accusations

Q: I'm not sure whether you're

aware of this, Len, but people have accused your executive of being rather apolitical. What do you have to say about that?

LEN: I think they consider us apolitical in the sense that we perhaps haven't taken upon ourselves the image that some students' unions have in the past, in the sense that they directly lobby with the provincial government — to see how loud we can beat our drums.

We emphasized in our platform that we wanted to get involved with the community, to make the people around us aware of what students are doing. It's a subtle type of lobbying, but if the time comes when we have to approach the government on a situation, we feel we'll have our guns loaded. We'll have the support of the community because they'll understand why we're going to the government.

Q: Getting back to your political views...

EILEEN: We did not go into student politics to get a political career or to further any political ambitions. If people think of us as apolitical in those terms, we are.

LEN: Not every student is that concerned about politics. It is so far beyond their touch that it has no meaning to them. What we've tried to do this year is to come up with issues that students are genuinely concerned with.

Q: Regardless of what students may think about politics, don't you feel that as the Students' Union executive, as leaders of a union of people which is a political organization, your role is primarily a political one?



Greg Neiman

EILEEN: Our executive stance is this: there's definitely a place for politics. We are the representatives of the people on campus. Whether or not they're interested, we are their elected voice. But if we don't have the support of the students and we go and talk with Lougheed it's no wonder he doesn't listen to us because he says "you don't represent 20,000 voting people in this province"

We're saying lets put things in perspective. We are political representatives, yes, and a lobbying group, yes, but not to the exclusion or detriment of services, both academic and social. Preparing for the possibility

Q: What would you have done if you were in power during the big tuition fee increase debate?

EILEEN: We as an executive recognize that FAS (Federation of Alberta Students) has great potential. A simultaneous walkout of all post-secondary institutions in Alberta should have been organized. We would have turned more to FAS and said, 'let's get a unified approach here.'

Q: Would you have organized some kind of vocal protest against the tuition fee increase?

LEN: Yes.

Q: If there is a significant fee increase proposal next year will you organize a similar protest?

LEN: If it's beyond 10%, I think so.

EILEEN: FAS has got to get organized. If we're going to raise our voices and have a march on the government or whatever, yes, we're all for it, but let's try to become unified.

LEN: But there are measures that can be taken that are far more effective than a march. The point is that we're not going to simply fall back and take the steps of our predecessors.

The government pulled a fast one and they caught this year's executive and other groups unawares, perhaps a march was the only thing that could be done. But our job is to be aware of increases far in

advance, so that we can take measures besides marches that might be more effective.

Death of an Issue

Q: Do you support organizations like the Federation of Alberta Students and the National Union of Students?

EILEEN: NUS is a dead issue as far as we're concerned. It has been turned down four years in a row by students on this campus.

LEN: The only way you're going to win a NUS referendum on this campus is if it comes up from the students. You can't just have a poster campaign.

EILEEN: FAS is an alternative, and I think it's more viable than NUS. Canada is so big that a national union of students would not serve the purposes of the U of A students. And to date, that's the way the rest of the students on this campus feel.

Next fall we're going to do an information campaign on FAS, pros and cons. It's a very young organization; what you have to do is look at its potential. We're going to have a referendum on it next fall.

Councillors upheld

Q: How do you plan to use your Students' Council next year?

LEN: I want to develop better communication with councillors, and I want councillors to have valuable input to what goes on.

Q: I'm sure last year's executive wanted to do the same thing, but the fact is that a lot of councillors are not very responsible. Many of them don't even show up to meetings, serve on committees. Do you think that this aim is a realistic one?

LEN: Yes I do. I think to a large extent councillors can be motivated by the amount of responsibility they have. We don't want Council to think of themselves as rubber-stampers this year. And I tell you that's what they think of themselves by the end of the year. You need to just look at our Council meetings

— how many issues were voted down this year? Negative points were never brought up against anything because they felt it wasn't going to do any good. We've got to get away from this image of councillors being rubber-stampers.

On Censorship

Q: Several years ago the entire Gateway staff quit because the Students' Union executive wanted censorship rights over it. What role do you think The Gateway should have in deciding its editorial policy?

LEN: The Gateway should definitely serve as a constructive critic of Council. *Gateway* editors have every right to criticize council in their editorials.

EILEEN: We would never attempt to dictate to *The Gateway* what its policies should be.

Housing

Q: What are your feelings regarding proposed rent increases in Lister Hall for next year?

LEN: Students have been asked to pay 45% rent increase in Lister Hall in two years. I'm going to fight to hold the increase down to 10% rather than 15%.

EILEEN: Housing is going to be a problem next year. Last year we got several thousand dollars from the Board of Governors to operate the Housing Directory. With 200 beds empty in Lister do you think we're going to get that kind of support again this year? Not a chance.

Q: Doesn't the Housing Directory direct people to Lister Hall as well as to other places?

EILEEN: It advises students of the conditions and what they have to pay, and they still don't go there.

Q: What's happening with the Course Evaluation Guide?

LEN: We have to get more support from the faculties on this. If it's going to be effective it has to be well received and widely used.



Mike Amerongen