

Ballot-box blues

Ah, democracy. Even its staunchest defenders admit it's not perfect, but most insist it's the best political system anybody has yet come up with. Me, I'm not convinced, and voter turnout statistics suggest I'm not alone, in this country at least. But regardless, it's now official: Canadians will soon have the opportunity once again to play *en masse* that favourite game of what the clichés call Western civilization. Then the ballot-counters take over and *voilà* — in a flurry of little bits of paper, direction has been set for 27-odd million souls.

Many students voted for the first time in last fall's constitutional referendum. If that experience hasn't turned them off the process completely, they get another chance to play on October 25. Anyone new to Halifax (and over the magic age of 18) will be eligible to vote in a riding with a very high concentration of students.

Around the same time, Dalhousie students may or (more probably) may not be asked to play a smaller-scale version of the game. The question of an increase in the per-student fee for the Dalhousie Student Union's membership in the Canadian Federation of Students must be put to a vote this year, although Student Council gossip suggests it will be postponed until the spring.

What all this means is that there will be endless discussion and diatribe about those nebulous entities, 'student issues'. First people will try to define for you what they are, and what they are not, and then they will try to tell you what you should think about them.

The basic problem with democracy is that you can never trust everything a politician tells you. That goes for student politicians, too. The burden, therefore, falls on the individual voter (or non-voter, more commonly) to decide who and what to believe. Therefore, we have a political system based on mistrust.

As a student, some people will tell you that certain things are none of your business. They will tell you that students have no right to take a stand on issues that are too big for them to comprehend, and that are rightfully the realm of the grownups.

Don't believe them. If it concerns us, however indirectly, we have the right to express an opinion on it.

At the same time, don't believe anyone who tells you that because you're a student, you must vote AS a student, and furthermore that there is a correct way for a right-thinking student to vote. Interest-group allegiance is a cheap way to vote.

And finally, don't be sucked in by rhetoric. To suggest that the world is divided into fascists and good people, the enemies and the allies, is the quickest way to abdicate one's responsibility to analyse the situation critically. That's what this much-maligned system demands of us.

Oh, and one last note: don't trust the media either. There's a theory that deep down, the media is just an institution populated by wannabe politicians.

And if you can't mistrust a politician, who can you mistrust?

Ryan Stanley

CFS not representative

You have read and heard all the welcome's and welcome back's you need to, so I will dispense with the niceties. Instead, I will be the first to announce that you have been duped.

Yes, it's true: fooled, foiled, misled, swindled, tricked, led down the garden path, etc. Why? You paid your student union dues with your tuition fees, didn't you? That's not so bad except you got sucked in. If you are new here, you are excused; if this is your second year or more, two slaps on the wrist for you. Surely you realize that the CFS charges you \$4.10 for membership in their organization. Huh? What's the CFS?!

The CFS (Canadian Federation of Students) is a nationally based student lobby group that claims to represent you and me (as well as 400,000 other students). They are, however, totally unrepresentative and use our money to promote their own causes. Did you know that you are opposed to CBC budget cuts, Canadian foreign policy, free trade, any increase in military spending, and (my favourite) the "brutal death squads of El Salvador"? I found these policy statements particularly amusing coming from a student lobby group.

They used our money to co-sponsor an anti-NAFTA conference in Mexico. What that had to do with student issues is anybody's guess. The CFS also endorsed the 1986 NDP Task Force on Youth, going beyond its mandate to "represent, promote, and defend the common interests of Canadian post-secondary students".

This trend of misrepresenting students, and not addressing student issues like they are supposed to, is a disturbing one. Equally disturbing are the two consecutive \$200,000-plus deficits they have incurred. How do they intend to offset this debt? They're raising membership fees, of course. Your membership fees. Put to a referendum this fall, no less, will be the question to raise CFS membership fees to \$6.00 per full-time student (a 46 per cent increase). With some 8,500 full-time students at Dalhousie, that would be

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\$51,000. And as of 1995, they plan to increase their fees each year thereafter.

Undoubtedly, one of their arguments for raising fees will be "if you don't agree to pay, you'll lose Travel CUTS." Travel CUTS (the only solid evidence CFS exists for most students) is a travel agency operated by CFS and located in the SUB. Travel CUTS was around before CFS and will remain so after their gone. Two western universities have already discovered this to be true.

We should ask ourselves if this organization is worth \$51,000. The University of Waterloo did. Seventy-three per cent of the students voted to terminate their CFS membership. The U of Saskatchewan did much the same where 72 per cent of the students slammed the coffin shut on CFS.

Those students were not really averse to shelling out a few bucks for national representation. They were, however, against giving money to an organization which misrepresented them and got no results. The CFS claimed two victories last year: the removal of the GST on tuition fees, and removal of the notorious 3 per cent surcharge on Canada Student Loans. Both of these were obviously accomplished by the federal government — not CFS. Honestly, where do they get this stuff?

I, too, am not averse to a national student organization that seeks to promote our concerns to government. Problem is, CFS doesn't do that.

In a nutshell, the CFS misrepresents the students it gets its funding from, has been booted off several campuses in the last year, they've mismanaged the funds we have given them, and don't achieve any results. Are they worth an extra \$11,000? Hell, are they worth the \$35,000 we give them now? Nah, I'll keep my lousy \$6.00 and quaff some draught in the Grawood instead. Thanks anyway.

Rod L. MacLeod

Post-Secondary Director
NSPC Youth Association

LETTERS

The Dalhousie *Gazette* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday noon before publication. Letters may be submitted on Macintosh or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

Too much spirit

To The Editor:

As I came to work this morning I was bombarded by the most disturbing uproar I have experienced in a long time. "It's that time of year again, *!*!ing Frosh Week," I mumbled to myself. One hour into my work day it became clear that it was going to be very difficult for me to get any work done. My reasons for stating this are twofold:

One — the noise and chanting makes for a most unproductive working environment. I'm sure these students do not realize they pay my wages, and I suppose if they want to disturb me it is their right. Call me crazy, but out of some strange moral commitment I feel I should work when I come to my office. This week is making this simple task quite challenging.

Two — the content of what I am forced to listen to upsets me greatly. Again you can call me crazy, but it bothers me to see people humiliated. I was told by one of the Student Council members that the frosh leaders aren't doing anything mean this year. I am then left wondering how this person defines mean. Then again perhaps they are right, mean may not be the proper word to describe what I've seen. Demoralizing, cruel, and twisted may be more appropriate words.

As an employee of a society of the DSU I did feel compelled to voice my concern over frosh week activities and attitudes before the event occurred. I had several rounds of correspondence with two members of the Student Council. I was told that my ideas for alternative activities were valid but that things were already in motion, maybe next year.

So this year I am left in my office with the windows closed because I can't bear the noise, and then when the noise travels inside I shut the door. If I had a choice of whether or not to be on campus this week I would definitely head as far away as possible. The problem is: I don't have a choice. I work here.

Kristine Anderson
Executive Director NSPIRG

Please note: the opinions expressed in this letter are the Executive Director's and not necessarily those of the organization.



Dear readers:
The *Gazette* loves your letters, but we cannot print them if you don't sign your real name. You know who you are.

Ed

the Gazette

Vol 126 No 2

September 9, 1993

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