

Matthews Midterm Meditations

THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS
THE STATE OF THE UNION
—HALF-YEAR REVIEW
by Dick Matthews

This article is a rather unprecedented occasion in that it is the first time that a President has asked to have the opportunity to explain his actions and justify his existence in print. It seemed to me that because your elected officials' year-end reports come out too late usually to be published anywhere much less read by even Councillors, the half-way point in my term was as good a time as any. I am also painfully aware that the Student Union, (and Council in particular) is viewed by many to be non-essential at best and counter-productive at worst. This is a mistaken impression but understandable given the constant criticism given it by the student press in the last few years and Council's dismal job in trying to explain what it is doing and even in informing its members as to the issues facing them. Hopefully, this article will prove to be informative and controversial and a small step in improving the information gap between the membership and their elected officials. Because I am responsible (in a general way) both for the services end of a large corporate body and the political activity of this campus, I will divide the article into the two distinct areas.

POLITICAL—(1) COUNCIL
The students on this campus should be aware that they are not being represented properly by their councillors. Six have resigned since Council's term of office began—most with reasonable explanations—but the fact remains that this represents 20% of the voting members of Council. The membership should be aware that we have not had a quorum for our last two meetings until calls were made to prompt members to attend. Even once enough members had arrived, by the end of the meetings we have been left with only a dozen or so voting members. You have a right to expect attendance



Dick Matthews, Council President Student

and performance from your elected members—so demand it. The issues facing us as Dalhousie students necessitate an interested and active Student Union.

(2) RINK—We have among the best hockey teams in the nation and still no rink. The delay in the reconstruction of our rink lies not on this campus but at Province House. I will be meeting with the Minister of Education in the near future to pressure him on making a commitment on the funding of a rink. I ask you, if you are concerned, to let your Council Rep know.

(3) NEW PRESIDENT—Dalhousie is in the process of searching for a replacement for Dr. Hicks who is retiring in August. Again, the kind of person found to fill this position will affect us all. Graham Wells is representing students on the Search Committee and the committee as a whole has met with the Executive of the Council for their opinions as to the qualities necessary in such a person. They have been promised further, more in-depth consultations as the

field narrows to the "short-list" stage.

(4) FACULTY CONTRACT—A significant change on campus can be expected with the implementation of the first contract signed by the Faculty Association. Students and especially the student executive should be monitoring the progress made in this area. I do not recommend any specific action on this topic right now, but urge students to be cognizant of the changes taking place as no doubt these will have effects on their education. Especially if our course evaluation program gets off the ground, this new relationship must be considered.

(5) STUDENT AID—The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission has invited submissions from all interested groups on changes in the Student Aid Plan. The Student Union has sent in a written submission on changes we feel are essential and I will be making a verbal presentation on November 6 when the Commission meets in Halifax. Proposed changes include establishing the age of

the summer savings criteria reflect the number of weeks actually worked at the wage received, and an increase in the grant rather than the loan portion of the aid plan.

(6) FOREIGN STUDENTS—Council has gone on record as being opposed to differential fees and is supporting the Federation of Alberta Students in their court fight against differential fees. In a more recent development, Council has joined the National Union of Students, other student unions, the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada and the Canadian Bureau for International Education in condemning the CTV network for its news program W5 which ran an unfair and biased segment on the question of foreign students in Canada.

(7) QUALITY OF EDUCATION—Students should be aware that the M.P.H.E.C. has recommended tuition increases totalling 15% over the next two years. It has also stated that "the continuing deterioration of faculty salary levels is having a negative effect upon this mobile resource as it appears to be contributing to the outflow of qualified faculty from the region." Both the rising costs and the declining quality of education should be of concern, and we are asking for comments, assistance and awareness on your part in making both governments and the public aware of the deterioration of post-secondary education.

SERVICES—The most obvious new service on campus is the DALPLEX. The full-time Student Union members on this campus should be aware that they are pledged to contribute \$350,000 to the cost of this faculty. It is for this reason that I am opposed to any "special rate" for use of the Dalplex by other university students. Other new or "semi-new" services include the "Grievance Forms" and the Student Directory. If you have problems getting your problem aired satisfactorily with your Council Rep please fill out a grievance form. I

assure you that they will be read and, hopefully, acted upon. Likewise, if you have compliments or good ideas please fill a form in and pass it on. Student Directories should be ready for distribution in the near future. They are being re-introduced after a year's absence and should be a valuable service.

A perennial sore point has been the Health Plan. Council has decided to stay with the same plan as last year primarily for financial reasons. The last referendum that was held on the subject indicated that you were prepared to spend up to \$9.00 on a health plan. The plan that we have is the only one that meets that criteria. If you are seriously dissatisfied with the present plan you should first let your Council Rep know, and second be prepared to spend considerably more money. Again, if you have problems with the plan let your Councillor know.

Relations with societies have been at times turbulent. Many society-executives have the mistaken impression that the Student Union is out to hamper or undermine their operations. Again, much of this fear is born of ignorance. In conjunction with the Alumni, the Student Union is sponsoring a Student Leadership Conference. The purpose is to acquaint society executives with the services the Student Union provides, an orientation as to their legal and financial responsibilities within the system and to instill the notion that the societies and the Student Union should be working together because their function is the same—serving the students of this campus.

As a final statement, I hope my comments although sketchy will demonstrate that there are things to be done, and that we are trying to do something, and that you should have more of a say in the issues that will affect you directly. Please feel free to come in and see me if you have further questions and make sure that your Council Rep is aware of your concerns and opinions.

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