

EDITORIAL

Town meeting (UNB, 6.11.90)

Tuesday night I witnessed one of the more impressive refutations of student apathy at the MacLagan Hall, UNB. The Student Union's meeting to discuss the question of their involvement with the Social Club turned out to be a controversial one that brought together over two hundred UNB students. The Student Union must be commended for organizing such a meeting and for inviting the Social Club to participate in the meeting. It appeared to me, however, that much of what was discussed was misdirected largely because the Student Union was addressing quite a different proposal than were the Social Club representatives. I left the meeting wondering about the strategies being used by both parties and questioning the very point of the entire thing.

The Student Union has come up with an interesting new proposal which seeks to have the constitution of the CHSC Board of directors changed. According to Bourque and Brathwaite, the new Board would entail the participation of two Student Union executives as well as two elected students-at-large from the student population. The hope would be that these individuals would serve the interest of their fellow students. At the basis of this position is the assumption that since these students would be selected from a wider pool of constituents than the pool that selects the present Board, it would be more representative of the campus student community. Complete with representatives from the GSA, St. Thomas and an Administration person, the proposed Board appears to comply with the typical representative structure of Student Union organizations. Ultimately, the club would be a University Club in which decisions about the use of funds could have the direct input of individuals who officially represent the students. Ostensibly, the proposal assumes that the membership of the club will continue to be made up of mainly students at UNB, thus the role of the student members would be to be legitimate representatives of students.

There is much to recommend this proposal. Surely, as long as most students agree that a student directed social club that legislates the input of elected student representative in an attempt to enhance the overall quality of entertainment on the campus is a good thing, then the above proposal is a very valid one and should be seriously considered. Despite this, it must be seen that the change will have some serious implications that can not be dismissed. At the moment, the Social Club's Board is made up of individuals selected from the rank and file of the membership. These people are not usually politicians, but members who want to get involved in the running of things. There is something attractive about this kind of Board structure which is not restricted by the pressures of specific representation. Hence, while the proposed board will include people who have a vested interest in the needs of very specific groups, the present Board is not set up to function in that way. They simply represent everybody. Is this a great loss? Will the proposed board structure not in fact demand greater accountability from the Board by its strictly representational form?

And what of the fears that the Club will fall victim to the vicissitudes of student politics? We have had a few rough years of Student leadership in the past, and contrary to the much held view of every student council that has taken office after the Bosnitch era, such problems did not end with the Bosnitch years. Will councillors have the time to run a regular club? Is the current structure of the Student Union as yet able to handle another business organization (for this will be the case as long as two to three executive members of council are sitting on the Board of Directors)? Will a Board that is made up of people who are selected in the context of what is essentially a political election be an appropriate one to run a business? For, despite all that has been said by both sides about the desire of the club to serve the best interest of its members, the club must be very interested in making money and pulling in significant profits. This kind of hard business line which is what makes bars succeed could be jeopardized by the political tone of the Board.

The Student Union could rightfully argue that so many other campuses have managed to run such bars successfully. The question is, will the Union be adopting a structure similar to any of those used by some of these campus clubs? we must hear answers to these question because in light of the present proposal, the Student Union's would not own the club. It will have more say in the running of the club, but there is no way that the Student Union will benefit financially from the board change. Money cannot be transferred from one non-profit organization to another according to Bourque and Brathwaite. If this is the case, is the change a very viable one and will promises that it will make UNB up-to-date on Student Unions across the country be valid? Do students think it is worth the twelve thousand or more to have greater representational status at the club? Also, will we then see the financial benefits that such universities obviously have by running clubs on this campus?

The Student Union's proposal should therefore be considered by the membership of the Social Club. The forum of the meeting last evening was not the one for that to happen. The Student Union had not as yet sent the Social Club the proposal mentioned above. The last proposal that was received by the Club was the fairly untenable one that was sent out during the summer months. It is clear that the Student Union did some wise back-peddling and discovered that in fact the only way to gain an involvement in the club without risking the repudiation of the club's liquor licence was to come up with a proposal like the one they presented at the meeting. I was disappointed that neither Bourque nor Brathwaite came out and admitted that the reason for the change in proposal was largely because they discovered that the initial proposal would not be a viable one. It seems to me that stating this would certainly have made it clear that their central interests did not include any serious damage to the club's existence. However, their failure to state this did not make the Student Union popular at the meeting. I am convinced that it was a mistaken political tactic especially in light of the fact that the advertisement for the meeting was at best misleading in its wording as it stated that the Student Union organized meeting was intended to discuss the acquiring of a "controlling interest in the Social Club." Quibbles about the ambiguity of the wording could last forever, but it is clear that it is misleading simply because it is only reasonable to assume that those interested in acquiring a controlling interest would be the Student Union. According to Brathwaite and Bourque the wording of the advertisement was in keeping with the rumours that were circulating and not a reflection on the Union's intent. Sadly, this kind of misleading advertising is at best a misguided waste of time and energy and at worst a very deceptive way in which to go about doing things. It would have been more appropriate to have worded the advertisement in the following way: To discuss the alleged desire of the Student Union to acquire a controlling interest in the CHSC.

But now, it is all out in the open. The Social Club representatives were not very well prepared to handle the new proposal and understandably so. It seemed to me that they could have rightfully chosen to be silent on the entire issue until they had had time to consider. Jane Arnold, a past Student Union president and the current CFS chairperson, asked why the Social Club does not call a members meeting and put the proposal to its members. I would say that a meeting of this nature would be in order if in fact the Student Union puts forward an official proposal to the Social Club and if the membership can convince the Board to hold such a meeting. If the membership dismisses the proposal, as is likely to happen, then the Student Union will have something more tangible to work with.

In one of my last editorials I stated that I believe that the Student Union is working in the best interest of the Students. While this may be so, I am not convinced that their strategy towards this end is particularly prudent. The withholding of information to the media, the secretive nature of their dealings on this issue were unwise. There is greater openness now and we welcome it. One hopes that the paid advertisements that the SU is publishing in the coming weeks will continue this trend. If nothing else comes out of this, one suspects that it will at least encourage the CHSC to be far more efficient in their election process for Board members. It is amazing the extent of student participation that this issue is creating. The discussions that I have had with students have been remarkably well informed. Students should think about putting some of this energy into the struggle to cope with increasing tuition, the GST and the like.

Kwame Dawes

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Lynne Wanyeki

Hi-Ho-Ho! lately in the week, it was yes, the bo-rumoured to (ir)responsibility ironic.

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