

Yes, our present system has flaws

"—but I will have to hear much better reasons before I want it changed."

Our September 19 Casserole printed a 'viewpoint' submitted by the Students for a Democratic University (the SDU). The article charged that this newspaper, like the university itself, is set up for 'the people up there', the bosses.

However, the writers presented the article as a challenge to set up a dialogue with the rest of the university.

Only two members of this community took the trouble to compose rebuttals to the SDU thesis. We have printed one in hopes that it will mean the start of the dialogue envisioned by the writers of the original article.

By DAVE TOMLINSON

This article was written by one of the working class ... and I used to be poor. Unfortunately only a few of you SDU will read it. Most of you who are SDU won't be reading this because you don't know a damn thing about the workers and the poor. You haven't been there.

I'm writing this anyway, because you claim you want to start a dialogue with me about the set-up of the university.

What are my qualifications to speak for the workers and the poor? Well, I spent the first eight years of my life in a log cabin in northern Ontario. My mother made soap and baked bread for a living, in a town with a population of about 200. We went hungry pretty often. I've been a private soldier in the Canadian army, an officer in the RCAF, a rock-saw designer, a trucker's helper, a gas-station attendant, and now I'm an electron microprobe technician. My last job before this one was a journeyman boilermaker. I was a fitter and steel rolls operator at Cessco.

If you want to, you can start distributing this paper at the gates of the factory, the labor union halls, and the unemployment centres. It won't get you anywhere. The workers and the poor are too damn busy trying to earn enough to pay the taxes that keep you in this institute. You complain bitterly that this university isn't set up to help the workers and the poor in their struggles. Well, of course it isn't, in your narrow view.

Why do I call it a narrow view? Because you have nothing constructive to offer anyone.

Let's analyze your conclusions.

When the university is changed by the people and the students so that it serves the needs of the people, things will be different (1)

Beautiful sentiment, but a bit unclear. Who is to say what the people need? You? I haven't seen many beggars in our streets lately. Could it possibly be true that a highly technological society produces high employment ratios, leaving only the hopelessly incompetent out of work?

The sons and daughters of the people will protest when their teachers tell them labor struggles are subversive. (2)

Funny. I can't remember hearing anyone teaching that labor struggles are subversive.

They will protest when they are taught that the government is right to interfere with the workers' struggles. (3)

If the workers feel that way about it, they can always vote the government out of office at the next election. SDU want a Marxist government; you can't vote that out of office.

They will protest when they are told that wage increases cause inflation. (4)

Migawd! Didn't anyone ever teach you simple economics? Or do you simply believe in protesting the truth if you don't like it?

They will insist that the university be a place for the sons and daughters of the people to learn about the people's struggles. (5)

As a member of the working class, I assure you that I don't give a damn about the people's struggles. I'm too busy struggling myself.

If I had children in the university, I'd want them to be studying something useful, like engineering or medicine, not theoretical politics.

I've studied a lot of politics, myself, and I note that all governments pass more laws than they repeal, thus inevitably reducing the freedom of the individual.

I note that freedom is that great quality that permits a citizen to do anything that he is not forbidden to do by the law of the land. Then I study which political systems forbid by law more things than their neighbors.

I don't think the Berlin Wall is to keep Capitalist slaves from contaminating Communist heroes. It is there because people who think for themselves move from areas of dense laws to areas of less dense laws. You can't enslave a free man; you can kill him, but you can't enslave him.

If I allow you to rise to a position of power, you will, in accordance with your Marxist doctrine, set up a self-perpetuating one-party state with an overwhelming bureaucracy to control every bit of my life. Thanks, but no thanks. I look askance at any man who tells me he has a message from God for me; no less do I look askance at a man who says that one Marx invented the One True Way, and that he has a message for me from Karl.

They will insist that the social scientists stop spying on the people. (6)

Why? Are the people not worthy of study? You complained in (5) that this information is not available to the student; now you want to ban the collection of such information. Make up your mind!

They will call on the teachers to stop frightening and pushing around the students. (7)

I've never had a teacher that scared me half as much as the idea of putting a group of nuts like you in charge does.

They will tell their teachers that the workers know best how to make better machines, because the workers are the ones who use the machines. (8)

Bull. I can run a lathe, but I sure can't design a better

one. If I could, I'd be a designer. It's a better paid trade. It's also a different trade, calling for different skills.

This statement exposes a monumental ignorance of practical technology. Workers ARE consulted about control placement, practicality, and ranges; but to ask a welder to design a high amperage d.c. generator is fatuous.

They will ask why the workers and the farmers do not teach in the university, since they are the ones who know the problems best. (9)

Sure they do. They send them to the university, and the university solves them, and tells the farmers the solutions. Anybody can tell you what the problems are; it takes someone else to solve them.

The SDU may be happy enough, sitting in a circle, discussing problems, but I want solutions.

The university is here to train people; but what they do with their training is up to them. They can join the SDU, if they wish; but the mere fact of its tiny membership (vocal, sure, but still tiny) gives the lie to the idea that the people want what the SDU has to offer.

SDU is a tiny, noisy, silly minority group with the gall to claim to speak for the students of this university. I watched them last year; about 30 grubby little people making as much noise as an empty wagon; talking to 500 people, of whom 400 were hostile, 60 were neutral, and 40 were pro-SDU.

They held a rally in SUB to support a couple of fired profs. From what I saw and heard, they richly deserved to be fired. From what I saw and heard, the students of this university don't want SDU to speak for them.

Jon Bordo was quoted in The Gateway following that rally as saying that the SDU speaker "liberalised out" by failing to call for a march on the Dean's office. I was there, and I don't blame the kid. That crowd wasn't about to follow him anywhere. They were hostile and questioning, and they got more fed up with the guff SDU were trying to peddle as the rally went on.

SDU wants to smash the system

Our political and social system isn't perfect. I know that, and you know that. SDU wants to smash it; but what about the system that is to follow the smash? SDU is a bit vague on that. The conclusions above have been dealt with in detail, but look at them again.

Only (5) suggests a positive change in the role of the university, and it seems to want to reduce the university to the status of a school of the history of the workers' struggles and nothing more.

(9) suggests a change in teachers, but can a welder teach the complex metallurgy, electrical theory, gas chemistry, and magnetothermodynamics required for university level teaching?

Your idea, SDU, would reduce the university to the status of a trade school. Moreover, tradesmen are not, and often cannot be, researchers. Research is one of the most important parts of the university, yet you don't even mention it except to condemn sociological research.

But they're "silly"

My main objection to SDU is simply that SDU is silly. As a working man, I don't want silly people in places of power. The SDU has no alternative to the system it opposes, and to assume that destroying a system results in its replacement by a superior system is to ignore (or be ignorant of?) all human history.

Every political system has claimed to be the One True Way. Marxism is only one of many systems, and not a tremendously successful one at that.

Our present system has flaws, certainly; but I will back someone with a reasonable and well thought-out constructive suggestion to improve this system, and I will oppose wholeheartedly anyone who attempts to destroy it without much better reasons than SDU has given.

Go down to the Union Centre, as I did. Get a ticket in the Boilermakers or one of the other unions, as a helper or a laborer. Work for a while, among the blue collar men you want to "start a dialogue" with. I did. Not as a stunt, or for research, but to earn money for food and rent and extras.

And are regarded with contempt

I know how they regard you. With contempt, as any man of pride regards a shiftless, non-working yelper.

I've been a soldier, a military officer, a white collar worker, a blue collar worker, and now I'm a technician here at the university. I've been a student here, too.

I know all of these positions, most of them far better than you do. You don't speak for any of them.

You speak, like anyone else, only for yourself and for those who will follow you. You won't fight an election on campus, for anything, because you have no real support and you know it. You're just a small pack of ignorant, noisy, silly twerps, as you proved in your witless article in The Gateway September 19.

Finally, I think you should read the Constitution of the Soviet Union before you get too far down this road to revolution. There is a principle in it that you might not like to live under; it is designed for people like you. In English, it reads: "HE WHO DOES NOT WORK, NEITHER SHALL HE EAT."

