

MUGWUMP

by Allan Carter

It is not difficult to look at the Student Union and wonder just what exactly they do for the students. Sadly, for many students, a councillor is someone who is looking to fatten up his/her resume and to bear out the drudgery of attending council meetings each week. And, what is even worse, is that sometimes this perspective is not very far off base.

However, there are always a number of councillors who, whether through the Student Union or completely on their own, strive to set some goals for the academic year and are genuinely concerned about issues affecting students at UNB. One such councillor is Patty Smith, an Arts representative.

When I asked Smith how many committees she was involved in, it took her a while to just remember them all. But Smith's involvement does not stop there. "If I want something done, I do it," replied Smith when asked how she would describe herself. And she is not exaggerating.

Smith sees her biggest accomplishment this year as FACTS, a self-defense course for women. Recently, they had their second course with a fairly large turnout of fifty students. Smith, though, is disappointed with the turnout and next year she is hoping to hold the course in all the female and co-ed residences and maybe in the Fredericton community. Since Smith is now trained as an instructor for the course, she will be able to hold courses during time periods which are more convenient for students. For instance, Smith hopes to have self defense mini-sessions during next year's orientation week.

Smith's emphasis on the self-defense course for women comes from her concern over certain situations which women sometimes are forced into. She said that she once asked a group of women in one of the residences if any of them had been attacked or raped. With the exception of one, the answer was no. But when she asked them how many had had sex without consent they all said yes, at least once.

However, with respect to the success of the course, Smith believes it has been good. She points out that nobody was ever come back and told her it has worked. But that does not bother Smith because she feels it is a good sign since the course teaches women to avoid getting into certain situations where physical force may be required.

Yet, the course does teach a woman how to subdue a man physically and Smith says she gets annoyed when women claim that they could never bring themselves to use such techniques. "I just tell them think of what he is going to do to you". And, for the most part, Smith says that the "passive" attitude quickly changes.

At the beginning of last term, Smith was actively involved in AIDS Awareness Week. In fact, she passed out so many condoms at McConnell Hall she was nicknamed the "condom lady". Because of her involvement in AIDS Awareness Week, Smith also decided to take the Peer Education for Healthy Living course which is being offered in conjunction with SWAT - Sex Without AIDS Today.

Smith graduated from Woodstock High School and was active in Drama since grade one. As with everything that Smith gets involved in, she eventually learned every aspect of Drama and by grade twelve, she directed, did lighting, and made costumes. But she never became involved in student politics until last year when she ran for student at large during the by-elections. "I didn't even want to run," says Smith laughing, "so I was quite surprised when I won."

But winning that position was the beginning of an active involvement in student politics. This year Smith is also involved in the Awards committee; Social Issue committee; Academic Affairs committee; and the Programs, Services and Review committee. In addition, she is president of the History Club and is active in SWAT.

Next term, Smith plans to run for an executive position on the Union and her primary concerns and issues which will become part of her platform include making the Socials Issue committee more active so aspects such as AIDS Awareness will be more than a one week initiative. She is also concerned with the accessibility for disabled individuals on campus and child care at UNB.

When Smith has finished her Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in history, she hopes to enter an education program so she can become a teacher. However, Smith has other ambitions. She is also interested in the Armed Forces.

"I enjoy taking on new things," claims Smith, and while she admits that she has difficulty depending on other people, she believes she is learning how to delegate authority. "I'm almost a perfectionist, if something isn't being done I'll get upset and I'll do it."

Smith believes that her biggest inspiration in her life came from her parents who she describes as being "very liberal and unconventional." Coming from a woman who was supposed to be an office clerk at a construction company last summer, but spent most of her time trying to pick up a quarter with a back hoe, it is obvious the "liberal and unconventional" inspiration has been a positive influence for Smith's own personal accomplishments and in her work for the Student Union.

OPINION

The opinions found in Opinion are not necessarily the views of The Brunswickan

Canada without Quebec?

by Matin Yaqzan

(The following are excerpts from a letter to the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Brian Mulroney, sent on February 4, 1992, with copies to the provincial Premiers.)

Quebecers are, of course, distinct in terms of their language, but what else makes them distinct as a society? In what other ways are they different from other Canadians or even Americans? They were certainly more distinct in the past, when they were practising Catholics, than they are now. They may eat and drink differently or express their affection differently, but there are no restrictions in this respect.

If the fathers of Meech Lake Accord cannot define precisely as to what exactly is meant by a "distinct society", how can the judges of the Supreme Court of Canada be expected to interpret this phrase in case of a future dispute? And disputes are liable to arise when the Government of Quebec enacts laws "to preserve and promote the distinct identity of Quebec", and these conflict with the individual rights of citizens guaranteed under the Charter of Rights. It is a sad commentary on our political leaders that they make a statement and then go the lawyers and judges to find out as to what the statement means.

We have been conditioned to adhere strictly to the letter of the law, rather than the spirit and purpose of the law. Hence the need for clarification and the fear of misinterpretation. The politicians come and go, but the words in the Constitution can haunt the future generations.

Mr. Bourassa has the primary obligation to explain and allay any fears of misinterpretation. The amendments in their present form can enable Quebec, to opt out of all the federally funded programs, can make it impossible for the English speaking Quebecers and their offspring to live in Quebec without becoming Francophones, and institute immigration policies almost like a separate country. If the government of Quebec can impose the sign law prohibiting the use of English in violation of the Charter of Rights, is the fear of future violations unjustifiable?

Quebec became a part of the British North America through conquest, as Quebec itself had become French through conquest. The treaties of the native peoples were made with the British crown, and are now the responsibility of the Federal Government of Canada. If Quebec were to opt out of Canada, the following questions arise. (1) Who will be responsible for the treaties? (2) If the right on the basis of conquest is not to be respected anymore, and Quebec can vote itself out of Canada, why should the same courtesy not be extended to the native peoples, who also yearn to preserve their languages and culture? Theirs are in real danger of extinction while the French and English languages will survive in Europe, even if no one spoke them in North America or anywhere else.

It is a common human fallacy to make some false assumptions and then use logic to come to contradictory conclusions. Many social, political and religious disputes are of this nature. One of the false assumptions is that all provinces of Canada, as they are constituted now, are "equal". Of course, this is not true in any sense of the word. So no amount of debate, discussion and late night argumentation on the part of politicians can resolve the conflicts ensuing from this assumption. While it is possible to muddle through life, using wrong hypotheses, it is not possible to justify every act on a logical basis. Hence the need to have a "supreme" authority to make a judgement which must be accepted without questioning - for example, the Supreme Court of Canada. One of the disputes arising from the 'equality' of provinces, is about triple E Senate, which can only lead to futile debates.

What should the government of Canada do?

The Government of Canada spent about 30 million dollars on the Spicer Commission, seeking advice from the "ordinary" Canadians, and another Commission is now travelling spending millions of dollars. I wonder, if it means an admission that the "extraordinary" Canadians, namely the politicians, have few ideas of their own! for only a million dollars, I would suggest the following course of actions.

1. The Government of Canada should go on its knees and pray to its God, and promise that it will be fair and honest in all its dealings, and will not engage in double talk.

2. Ask the Government of Quebec to postpone any voting on separation, until the following have been achieved.

(a) All native land claims and other disputes have been settled amicably, throughout Canada, within a period of 2-5 years. Any concessions necessary should be made by the Government of Canada, in favour of the native people, in view of the past injustices, and their present condition of hopelessness.

(b) The representatives of all the French speaking Canadians outside Quebec have met and discussed their future with the representatives of Quebec, within 2 years, with the understanding that if Quebec were to separate from Canada, the present bilingual policies will be eliminated. The English speaking Quebecers will be on their own to foster their language or will have to migrate to other parts of Canada, and the French speaking Canadians will have to maintain their "language and culture" on their own, or migrate to Quebec.

3. The Government of Canada should tell the Government of Quebec that it has less moral obligation to grant complete autonomy to Quebec, than to grant independent status as countries to all the native reservations in Canada. Only after the native claims have been settled inside and outside Quebec, and the fate of a million French speaking Canadians has been decided, can the nature of Quebec's position in Canada be altered in a civilized and friendly fashion.

4. The government of Canada should ignore the result of any plebiscite or referendum in Quebec, if carried out as planned at present.

5. The Government of Canada should use CBC Radio and Television to educate all Canadians, in Quebec and outside, about the benefits to be derived from staying together as one unit; for example, in connection with scientific discoveries and innovations and space explorations, which may be of great benefit and interest to the future generations, and require collective intellectual effort and immense resources, not available to small countries.

6. The Government of Canada should institute programs that will familiarize most Quebecers with the rest of Canada, and what they will lose in terms of freedom of movement and opportunities, by confining themselves to Quebec only. For example, the Government of Canada can provide free transportation by train or bus to any Quebecer, who cannot afford on his own, to travel once from Newfoundland to British Columbia and back to Quebec, and encourage all Canadians to open their homes and hearts to such travellers. Even hundreds of millions of dollars thus spent can be justified. Only after such an exposure to Canada, should their opinion be sought, whether they would like to remain as Canadians. The chances are that they will answer with a resounding YES.