

Government, Science and Society

Today "relevance" is invoked as an incantation whose very sound, it seems to be thought, will create relevance out of literally nothing. No one is against relevance any longer. Indeed everyone is willing to talk about it like the weather and to talk about it favourably like motherhood. But it all comes to more talk and more talk and no action.

Scitec wants to be relevant by its actions, not its talk. Scitec is the Association of the Scientific, Engineering and Technological Community of Canada and it wants to bring scientific, engineering and technological expertise to bear on the matters at hand which is what "relevance" means. (All references to "science" refer to "science, engineering, and technology".) Scitec wants to bring science to society and society to science.

The Federal government has recently taken a considerable interest in science as indicated by the creation of the ministry of state for science and technology partially in response to the work of the Senate Special (Lamontagne) Committee on Science Policy. Soon this interest will effect all of us who are students of a science. Eventually this interest will doubtlessly effect all of us as citizens due to the economic and social importance of science.

In its hearings the influential Lamontagne committee challenged scientists to fashion a common voice with which to speak to and hear from the public through government. Scitec aims to be just such a parliament of science. Starting from scratch Scitec has already drawn its umbrella over some sixty scientific associations with thousands of members who together constitute a good part of the Canadian scientific community.

While Scitec is beset by the organizational problems that inherently go with so ambitious an undertaking, once Scitec gets a chance to speak many of these problems will disappear. That

Scitec will receive a careful hearing is assured. At the very least government officials and the science minister will find Scitec's compression of its sixty member and thousands of individual voices into one channel, if not one voice, a great convenience. Further the scope, size, and prestige of Scitec's membership is great enough to insure respect from government. Scitec will get a fair hearing.

Scitec hopes to try its speaking voice on volume two of the Lamontagne report which is due anytime. Within forty-five days of the release of volume two Scitec will hold a seminar on it. Significantly, the Lamontagne committee has agreed to participate in this seminar. This will be the committee's first public forum for volume two. Then within six months of the release of volume two Scitec will present to the committee a collected and codified set of critiques of the report drawn from over one hundred scientists from across the range of Canadian scientists. For the moment Scitec has struck a committee to comment on the terms of reference of the science ministry before it goes fully into operation. In the meanwhile, at the invitation of interested parliamentarians, Scitec has already established a parliamentary liaison committee to discuss scientific matters relevant to the formation of public policy.

Besides reacting to government's actions Scitec continues to devote a good part of its energies and most of its money to its environment affairs committee. Last year this committee sponsored a conference called "Heritage Tomorrow". Significantly, a number of government officials including the Minister of the Environment attended this conference and heard detailed critiques of environment problems and policies. Now this committee will be focusing on the MacKenzie pipeline and population policy. In addition Scitec has an abiding

concern with the production and utilization of high qualified manpower.

Now and more so in the future, the attention which government shows Scitec causes Scitec's prestige to grow both with non-member associations and scientists and with nominal member association and scientists. This rising prestige will attract more associations to Scitec's umbrella and elicit more support, primarily but not exclusively financial, from member associations.

All of this though will take time. The most difficult period for Scitec is the present waiting period until it gets chance to speak to the minister and volume two. Then the capabilities of Scitec will be tested.

Scitec is anxious to have student participation generally. In the past rules have been bent to ensure student involvement. At present, however, a general unawareness of Scitec and the cost of travelling to Scitec meetings have together curtailed student participation. "Students" means only graduate students in Scitec's present view. Though presumably an undergraduate, special student or non-student altogether who belongs to a Scitec member association by subscribing to a member's journal is thereby a member of Scitec entitled to all privileges of Scitec membership regardless of student status.

Scitec is going to get its chance to speak out on the principle and practice of government in science and the role of science in society. If it is persuasive, it may even get a chance to act too. What it says and how well it says it are up to us as Canada's scientists both now and tomorrow.

Further information about Scitec is available from me through local 4726 or 466-5305, or directly through the Scitec head office at Suite 906, 151 Slater, Ottawa 4.

Michael Jackson
Department of Political Science

LETTERS

Dear Editor,
I would like to make a few comments about the management of the Bookstore. Last week I visited the store to purchase a pair of running shoes assuming that since the Bookstore was a service to students and since they supplied equipment for a large Phys. Ed. Department, this item would be cheaper there than at local retail outlets. I found the cheapest pair of running shoes selling at \$14.95. When I asked one of the salesclerks why they were so expensive she told me to consult one of the "managers" — a man identifiable by the expensive walkie-talkie he carries around with him. He informed me that they were a dollar less than those at the Bay and their cost price was \$13.95. This seemed hard to believe because then the Bay would be only marking them up \$2.00 to \$15.95 and I know that this is not their policy. When I expressed my disbelief the "manager" asked me if I wanted to see an invoice. I replied "yes" and he disappeared only to return to say that he could not find the invoice! Meanwhile I investigated the prices of posters and poster hangers which interested me since I own a business myself and know the cost prices of these items and deal with some of the same companies. I found, for example, that poster hangers retail at \$.98 a pair when their cost to the Bookstore is approximately \$.35 (they receive a 50% discount on purchases over \$50.00 and an additional discount granted to educational institutions which ordinary businesses do not get). Posters were also marked up similarly. Why are these items marked up so excessively? Is the Bookstore a profit making business or is it a service to students and faculty subsidized by the University? If it is a service to students and faculty, why are so many things sold at "competitive" prices or higher (as with posters which I can afford to sell more cheaply in my store) and not less than the prices at other stores?

Apparently the Bookstore was in the hole last year for about \$14,000.00. How can this be at these prices, with such a large volume and a captive market of about 20,000 people? Where is the money going? Is it going towards the salaries of the management? Is the Bookstore paying taxes? Is it paying rent and utilities which other businesses do pay and which account for a percentage of the markup? If the Bookstore does not have these expenses why are such markups necessary? I would like to suggest that the Students' Council appoint a committee to investigate the whole management of the Bookstore. I further suggest that the kind of management which presently exists is not necessary, that it should be abolished, that the Students' UNION take over the management of the Bookstore and organize it as a students' cooperative. This has been successfully done at other Universities.

Izabel Soliman
Grad Student
Education

Dear Bob,

Your reference to me as Commerce Rep in you last issue can only mean one of the following:

1. Your paper is two years out of date (I was Commerce Rep on the Leadbeater Council), or;
2. You believe I've killed my good friend Rob Spraggins (Commerce Rep) and assumed his duties as well, or;
3. "You just plain goofed"

Now it's fall and fall is a beautiful time of year and all mistakes are forgiven-

But would you do me a favour?

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Thanks Bob,

Gerry Riskin
Law 2 (?)
Law Rep (??)

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