

Student government — an alternative

The Dalhousie Student Union Council is theoretically the representative governing body of the Union. All students are members of the Union by virtue of a \$40 fee that is included in tuition payments to the university.

So what are you getting for your \$40? Well you get to listen to Dal Radio and you can read this newspaper. You can join any number of clubs or organizations and you can come into this building and use its facilities most of the time.

Basically, your fee provides you with a convenient place to meet with friends, with a few fringe benefits like entertainment.

But really, what do we get? We've got a Student Council with 22 representatives, an Executive and three secretariats. In many cases, Council is dissatisfied with the Executive because things are done without their consultation, and the Executive is fed up with Council because they are essentially uninformed, disinterested and most certainly unrepresentative, as everyone is willing to admit.

There is always internal bickering in the SUB, there are always clashes in job responsibility, and where the GAZETTE is concerned, when the "wrong" things are criticized, there are subtle and reactionary attempts to clean it up.

This "union" acts no more like a union of students than the Board of Governors, and not surprisingly the interests articulated are the same. If it is to be representative, if it is to be functional, if it is to work at all, then a change must occur.

We, as the Union, must concern ourselves with other things besides dances and constitutional nit-picking. We are part of the university, we pay for our education and we are being "groomed" to fit into a society which we did not create. Yet we are first of all, being forced to fit into it on their (society's) terms, and secondly, if we want to change it, we must do it from within, on their terms again.

It is no coincidence that Student Council, as our representatives, has been granted limited power. We have three students on the University Senate and two on the Board of Governors. That is barely tokenism. Realistically, why would these people seriously consider the views of students when they don't have to? If we do want to involve ourselves in change, then we are being forced to have it approved by the very people who created what we want to

change.

Under the present structure of student government and with the present Council, we have seen no attempt to improve student position within the union or within the university. Student Council President Brian Smith, also a member of the Board and a Senator because of his position in the Union, has helped form a Nova Scotia Union of Students primarily to get more financial aid for the university from the provincial government. He has stated we do not need more student participation on the university-decision-making bodies. Why should he feel otherwise? He makes a good salary and airs his views, and not those of students, to the university. His position is secure now, and he is ensuring that it will be in the future by pandering to the university. He, more than anyone else on Council, knows most of what the university is doing to students, through unquestioningly supporting war research to buying stocks and bonds in lieu of improving student housing or reducing tuition fees. Sure, he does some good things, but the basic condoning of university policies.

Students should know exactly where all their money is going, both here in this building and in the university. Right now we do not know. Most students do not know what the Task Force on the Quality of Student Life found out, even though it has been completed since last May. A Report on Undergraduate Education, apparently completed about two years ago, is gathering dust somewhere. The GAZETTE has learned through various sources that, if implemented, the report could provide for some far-reaching changes at Dalhousie. But we don't know for sure. Where is it?

Why do faculty — student disputes, particularly in the Sociology/ Anthropology department, get washed over in Council? Surely ignorance is not the only excuse.

We have no student union here. D. Ray Pierce, who resigned last month as Communications Advisor because he felt he could not accomplish anything, described the non-action as negative empathy. Perhaps that is partly true, but one cannot do anything if one does not know anything.

That is why the GAZETTE was opposed to past Student Councils and is opposed to this one. They simply do nothing — both because they hold the self-interest, self-benefit concept of power. Thus we propose a

change.

The Student Council structure as it exists now must be abolished. It is not sufficient to say that this structure will work if we get people "plugged in." As long as this structure has existed, students have never been plugged in.

AN ALTERNATIVE

A mass student union meeting should be called by Council as their last act. It will be called for midday and if necessary classes will be cancelled. And for as many meetings as it takes, the student position in the university, in faculty/student relationships, in education, will be discussed.

It is undoubtedly true that many people feel that the only problems that concern them are their own. This cannot be so, for anyone who ignores the problems of others contributes to and perpetuates these problems. There is such a thing as social responsibility.

At these same meetings, disputes such as the one that now exists in the Sociology department can be brought up in the context of it being not only a particular case but a symptom of non-student participation in matters strictly concerning students and their education.

These meetings will determine what group of people will carry out the policies and needs of the union. These people will be directly responsible to the Union. To be valid, any POLICY decisions must be voted upon by two-thirds of the student body and have the approval of 50% of the people present. A method of counting could easily be devised.

The union meetings must also initiate any actions or surveys, for example, to improve housing.

Day-to-day operations in the Student Union Building will be carried out by people elected by the Union with the same quorum provision as above.

Above all, the educational aspect of the union and the university must be concentrated upon as a priority. Without this emphasis, the Union will again fall back into the hands of a few people solely interested in self-benefit.

This is one alternative to the present student government a mass union. And if the Committee on Alternative Student Government does not implement some type of similar change by the next election, we will urge people not to vote again and instead to impeach the entire Council.

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