

CAMPUS

Wanted: Introspection, not intimidation

So how then, did the Executive react to the publicising of the working budget in the Cadre? Well, in addition to posting a statement (worded quite similarly to what I predicted in my last opinion piece) on the SU website, the SU Executive called for “an emergency meeting” (to which all Councilors were urged to attend) in the SU boardroom to discuss: “The printing of the UPEI SU Budget in the most recent edition of The Cadre” (the notice was sent to us on the very afternoon the Cadre was released). So, about twenty-four councilors (out of 32) met that evening at 9 p.m., in a room designed to seat 10; and it became quite apparent that the subject of the meeting was not the Cadre publishing the working budget, but rather, the letter I wrote accompanying the working budget. At the meeting – and I use the term rather loosely to describe what took place – the SU Executive presented me with yet another letter (see below) and asked me to resign immediately. Of course not having been given any time to examine and absorb the letter led me to, not only react to it in a belligerent way, but oppose their demand entirely, and remind them that only my constituents had the authority to demand my resignation.

In their letter, the SU Executive’s ghost-writers (really, no one on the SU Executive writes like this) claim that the publication of the working-budget “opened the SU to potential legal liability ... exposed members of the SU to the potential for individual harm ... and [exposed] the commercial entities of the SU to a significant disadvantage.” What? ... “legal liability [and] individual harm”? We are a not-for-profit corporation, you can be assured that no one is planning a ‘hostile-takeover’. Besides, have you seen the Wave’s financial statements? Conrad Black and Hollinger Inc. are being scrutinized for fewer discrepancies (I’m kidding of course).

Again, I have to restate my earlier point that: “the budget issue is interesting not so much because of the document itself, but rather, because

of the reaction it evokes from the Student Union Council Executive.” In this case, the SU Executive reacted by issuing another thinly-veiled threat (see the letter below), and by deciding to hold an “emergency meeting.” While I would remind the Executive (and their ubiquitous legal counsel) that although the Cadre’s managing editor (a fellow student and SU member) may have received a copy of the budget from me, I did not print it; the editorial staff at the Cadre made the decision to publish it independently, and they stand firmly behind their decision. Even then, the question that has yet to be answered is: So what? There is nothing in the SU Constitution or bylaws that prevents the Cadre from printing the SU’s working-budget. I may have breached protocol, but Council has subsequently justified this action by voting not to publicise this years budget by the end of the academic year (see the minutes from our April 1 meeting), which itself is a breach of the very article I have been accused of “violating” (that would be: Article XIX subsection A of the SU Constitution).

Of course, what is most impressive about the SU Executive calling for an “emergency meeting,” to which the vast majority of councilors actually showed up to (on a stormy night I may add) is that they have the ability to mobilize on very short notice! I’m being absolutely serious here. Now imagine if they put this ability to use on issues actually affecting the vast majority of students (as opposed to the power-brokers in the Student Union). For example, an emergency meeting could have been called in response to the projected (minimum) 12 per cent increase in tuition students will be facing over the next three years, despite the fact that the Federal Government has dedicated \$3.2 million in post-secondary transfers to PEI per year (ironically enough, this can be found in the Federal budget: <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2007/themes/bkrfbse.html>); or to address the increasing rates of

assaults and thefts across campus; or in response to the cancellation of ‘supplementary exams’. Again, at no time did any of these events evoke an “emergency meeting” of Councilors, much less the Executive.

At the “March 28th emergency meeting,” many Councilors took issue with my assertion that, “we act more as rubber-stamps than voices of student-advocacy.” But what else explains our actions? Councilors clearly have short-term memories; because only three days prior, at our March 25th meeting, Council more-or-less unanimously (there were four ‘abstentions’) voted to approve rate increases to our dental-plans for the coming year, without coming to know, or even wanting to know, the numbers behind the justifications given by the “Health Plan Committee” (the minutes from that meeting will confirm this). Further to this, and only four days after the March 28th “emergency meeting,” Council was again almost unanimous in its acceptance of a report reeking of intellectual dishonesty (and a subsequent motion calling for a referendum question in the Fall elections) written by the “National Representation Committee.” Again, I can make this assertion because I sat on that committee (at least until the Cadre’s publication of the budget) and alerted the Committee members to the many factual and methodological errors I saw in earlier drafts of the report; (un)surprisingly, these very errors still ended up in the Committee’s final-report. I would urge students to get a copy of the two and a half page report (if it is not published in this edition of the Cadre) and do some basic “number-checking” (you can probably do it online even). Again, I must repeat: we only alienate the student-body when we make decisions on their behalf without thinking about those decisions critically.

The concern here is that we are simply going ‘through the motions’ on Council; and by not thinking critically, nor independently, about the vast majority of policies brought

to us to approve (on behalf of the student body) we do the student-body a disservice. At some level this creates detachment; not only between Council and the student-body, but also between Councilors and their duties. As reflected in the fact that a fifth of all Councilors have missed at least 4 (and in some case more) meetings of the 16 that we have all year (these numbers rise sharply if one examines how many Councilors, including the Executive, have missed at least 3 meetings). And while some Councilors may think they are volunteers (this comparison has actually been made), they should know that they are not; this is why there exists a Constitutional bylaw calling for the automatic impeachment of Councilors who miss 4 meetings.

Readers will be pleased to see that aside from complaining about the state of student affairs on our campus, I do have some suggestions for those students who may be encouraged (or at least, less discouraged than others) to run for Council next Fall and Spring. Run on a populist platform, of (1) Promising complete financial transparency (which would include not only promising to publicise our working-budget, but also having a referendum on whether the VP Finance position should remain unelected); (2) Promise to institute job reviews of all the salaried positions by the entire Executive (there are other Student Unions who do this); (3) Promise that you’ll hold a minimum number of ‘consultations’ with your constituents each term (and advertise them well in advance); (4) Promise to lower SU fees (even if it’s by cents and not dollars); (5) Formulate (and express) a clear position on tuition-hikes (you will be surprised to know that we don’t yet have one). There are many more issues of course, you’ll probably come up with them while studying for finals.

Faiz Ahmed
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