

# Letters to the Editor

## Student Union Undemocratic?

As Political Studies students, and as part of the executive of the Political Studies Society, we have a responsibility to the student body of this university to point out the recent unacceptable behaviour -- constitutionally -- of our governing student body. This is not a personal attack against the individual members of the Student Union; however, as a group, their uniform behaviour has been indifferent towards the desires of the Student body -- those they represent -- and in doing so, their behaviour has been undemocratic.

The university experience is one that fosters the principles of freedom of thought and expression. It is therefore important that our system of government (Student Union) adhere to these fundamental freedoms in a democratic manner. If this democratic ideal is not attempted, then we must question the need for a student government at all.

Over the past four years, there have been a number of issues in which the Student Union has been involved. Unfortunately, in the past year the good intentions of the present Union has run afoul of this "ideal". The fact that the CFS referendum was made null and void due to outdated voting lists was but one of a number of incidents this year that has tainted the "reign" of the present government. With the best of intentions, they tried to resolve this problem by changing their constitution. Believing that it would prove too time consuming, the Student Union adopted the present

Constitution of the government of Prince Edward Island. Unfortunately, this government did not recognize one major obstacle: the student government is organized under a republican system, the Legislature operates under the parliamentary system. In a republican system, as in the United States, the people vote for the president. In a parliamentary system, the people vote for the party, each party already having a leader. To use a parliamentary constitution in a republican government is like putting a square peg in a round hole.

The underlying principle of democracy is choice. In the upcoming student elections the position of president is being uncontested. Where there is no choice between candidates there must still be an option provided, in this case the simple option of refusal (i.e. "no, I do not want this person to be my president."). If the majority of voters choose "refusal", then it is obvious that the confidence for the one candidate running to assume the presidency is not there, and he/she would be defeated. At present, we do not have this choice. All students should be very concerned.

There are undeniable truths which determine "good: government:

- a) Government is empowered democratically by the people.
- b) Government acts on behalf of the people.
- c) Government acts in the best interest of the people.

d) The People can withdraw this empowerment if and when any of the above criteria is not met.

The Student Union, although acting with good intentions, has been lax in fulfilling the standards set for them by the very students who put them in power. With this in mind, we must ask the following: is the Student Union acting democratically (i.e. offering choice, especially for president); is the Student Union acting on the students' behalf or its own; is the Student Union acting in the students' best interest or its own?

In the end, if we cannot answer these question in favour of the students themselves, then we must be concerned with the legitimacy of the governing body itself. The responsibility to make this determination lies not with those who sit in power; it rests with those who put them there -- we, the student body. An election seen to be illegitimate is no election at all. The Student Union saw fit to declare the recent CFS referendum void due to improper procedures. We the students have the right (and power) to do the same when the Student Union election also follows improper procedures.

Where there is no choice, there is no freedom;

Where there is no freedom, democracy cannot exist.

Egan Henderson and Marianne Murphy, On behalf of the UPEI Political Studies Society.

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The *Panther Prints* is the student newspaper of the University of Prince Edward Island. Our circulation is 2500 copies per issue, ten times per semester.

Submissions will be accepted until 4:00 pm Thursdays. We will love you forever if you submit on disk in WordPerfect format. For legal reasons, all submissions must include your name and phone number.

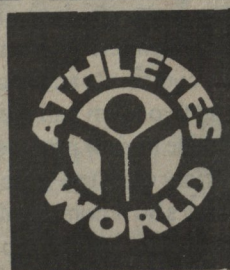
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