

The Real Power at UPEI - Ron Baker

This entire campus has been buzzing the last few because of last Wednesday's Senate meeting and a thousand related things. Important as these issues are we must not allow them to overshadow the larger questions in education. On the contrary they must be used as a tool to both understand and challenge these structures. Unless we remember the essential power structure at this university, or for that matter any other, then we cannot mount an effective opposition to it nor provide any kind of viable alternative.

At this university the power is divided between three groups, the Board of Governors who control the purse strings (and therefore just about everything else). Student representation on this body is barely 10%. 2) the Senate which has power over academic matters 23% Students), and 3) the President. Some of his legal powers include: recommending the establishment of new buildings, faculties, programmes, etc; to suspend any member of faculty or the student body (the latter have appeal to the Board); to establish committees on "matters affecting the university" and to examine all the activities of the university. As well he has ex-officio seats on both of the other governing bodies (on Senate he is also the chairman).

Thus we have a situation where one man both recommends and (in the case of Senate implants) the policy of our governing bodies. This not only gives him considerable discretion to act as he pleases but also gives him primary access to almost all of the information gathering services on campus. Further because these services are set up by him, he can have their viewpoint slanted to his, especially considering that their jobs are on the line. Look what happened to the man who was brought to this campus to be our vice-president. He's lucky he's still on campus. Because all the information services are slanted then it becomes very difficult for any view which dissents from Baker's to be accepted for it can only rarely be more than an instinctual response. Lack of both time and alternative sources makes any kind of reasoned argument very difficult to prepare.

It is not surprising that both the Board and Senate have very rarely argued with Baker since the Constitutional Conferences. Baker want-

ed Bernadine. And got it. A new library. And got it. Blanchard. Here. Music and Home Ec on campus here. Whether or not these were "good" measures is not really relevant. The point is that if those who the university exists, the students, decided otherwise they would have no recourse. Whether or not our king is benevolent is not relevant, the point is he is a king.

Why have the Board and Senate allowed there legally delegated power to be taken away from them? First the Board. Fifty per cent of this body (+ Baker = majority) are from outside the university and the body sits only two or three times a year. Thus these people are unable to make any kind of intelligent decision. This



is not to suggest that they are stupid, merely divorced from the day-to-day activities of the campus. Hence they are unable to vote on a motion on any but grounds of the authority of its mover. When Baker is virtually the only person who submits motions who has any kind of prestige, his motions naturally have greater likelihood of passing than yours or mine. Baker himself told me that the Board was a rubber-stamp, although he did not mention of what.

Senate is a more complex affair. There are many reasons why, until recently, it too has acted as a rubber stamp. Given that Baker has been Senate chairman since it was formed and operates under almost no rules ex-

cept those laid down by the chair, it makes it considerably easier for Baker to ensure the passage or defeat of motions. But it goes farther than that. If Baker is able to control the Board then he can control the hiring and firing of staff, therefore designing a faculty which hold essentially the same views as he does. And the threat of dismissal is always there. But a difference exists on Senate now. These guys, unlike the Board, have access to information and know what going on. If they are willing to analyse that information and to take a risk (it was never, after all, more than a threat, anyway) then they can apply that analyse and, perhaps for the first time, vote independently.

representatives is but at most 2000 people (counting students and all staff) then neither of these suggestions should be particularly difficult to implement, provided the structures are there which will allow them to happen.

How can we as students provide the impetus to make changes such as these happen? First of all we must join together and create a solid movement; instead being apathetic and squabbling, we must become interested and unified, showing our solidarity on all issues of true importance from "more student reps on everything" to the whole question of exactly what direction this university will take. A Student Objectives Committee with only fourteen students on it is a black mark on us all. It should have had input, not from 14, but from 1400!

Course unions should be established, enabling the students of each department to deal with complaints, large or small, not to mention to provide student input on questions of policy within the department. If a student is getting a bum deal on marks (as an example) then he has the support of a hundred others. He is no longer isolated. If a prof with a good head is summarily dismissed then the students have a structure within which to take action. Power to the formerly powerless can only be obtained through the force of numbers. Unless we exploit that power then we will never be able to influence the decision making process here. It is our best trump card, indeed our only one.

We must also go to meetings of any type, avail ourselves of all information sources, such as they may be. Then our opinions will carry weight. Indeed if we do not become informed then they don't deserve to carry weight. And they won't.

Finally and perhaps most important, we must not be scared to resort to the ultimate of resorts - shutting down this whole institution, even to the point of forcible occupation of buildings. In the present situation, for example, which amounts to Baker screwing around with our choice of representative, our constitution, our decisions, then there can be no other alternative if he refuses to back down. Our rights to self-determination are inviolate. And God knows, we have few enough of them.

Yet even if Senate does decide to take this initiative then little has really changed. Senate can hamper and harass but it cannot change the basic plan. Thus if students desire a change then they must not devote their total energies, nor even the major portion, to Senate.

We must rather attempt to ensure that this university is run democratically. And democratically does not simply mean elective. It must also mean 1) that the members have access to all information relating to the campus as well as the structures to provide them with their own sources and 2) must interact on a day-to-day basis with the people they are intended to serve. When the major constituency of these rep-