

Student Apathy Rooted In Student Powerlessness

In the fall of 1970, Prof Don Wiener of the psychology department, called a general meeting of all students and faculty in the Duffy Amphitheatre. His reason for doing so was to reveal a "startling" discovery he made: there was apathy at UPEI. Furthermore, this apathy was among students. He didn't say why there was apathy no one did, because no one at that time knew the cause of it.

For four years thereafter everything was blamed on apathy, and apathy was blamed on the students. Faculty blamed students and, after a bit, students blamed students. Students were niggers. Because they are this, they must be taken in tow "for their own good". And who we need do this? Why, faculty and administration are their "natural superiors" without whom "the students seemed to be lost".

Now we're going to leave this for the moment for other considerations but we will return to it later.

In his excellent editorial of Jan. 21, 1975, Richard Willis, Cadre Editor, wrote in "Cheating on Exams". "It would be nice to say that all students are here to learn, but it just isn't the case. The majority of students put the majority of emphasis upon getting the degree.

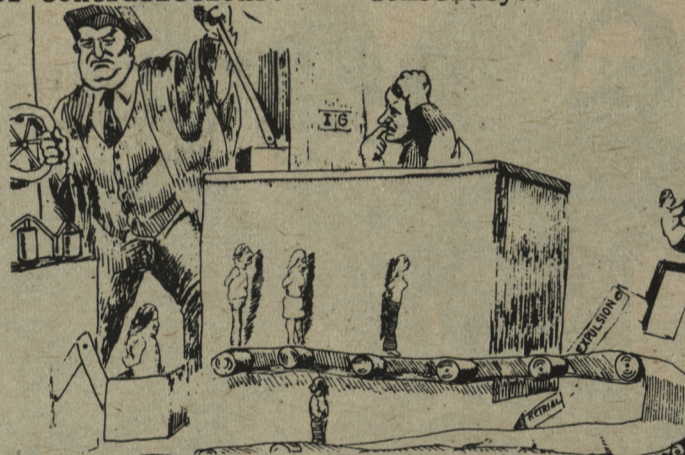
Universities have always been aware of this fact and as a result have set up testing and grading systems, which are in effect a way of saying that students must be forced to learn. This testing system as it exists, tends to alienate students even more from the process of learning. The emphasis is moved from the process of learning, to doing what is necessary in order to get a good grade (or pass). What this has lead forth to is a highly complex system of cheating and plagiarism. The goal becomes "beating the system" and all methods are employed in order to do it.

This is very easy to understand when you consider that education is determined and controlled in the interests of the leading class in Canada, a capitalist country, the leading class is the capitalist class.

Education is obviously not for the student. The student is educated in

such a way as to be of use to the capitalist economy; therefore most students major in Business administration, economics or the sciences since science is heavily employed by the capitalists for industry. The student cannot fulfill himself by studying what would be most useful to himself he must subordinate his own development to the wishes of the capitalists whose dictates are chanelled to the students via the government and media. The student whose efforts are not for himself will inevitably begin to appear apathetic; anyone who has not the right of self-determination will eventually rebel.

"But the students have their own student union" you may object. Yes, but its constitution reflects the interests of faculty and administration the representation of the capitalist class; therefore when the students turn to it for guidance they find it full of contradictions.



A few examples will suffice Louise Mould, in her article of file 4, 1975, p.4 said, "At UPEI we have, instead of this hypothetically strong, together, powerful union; a burocratic, administrative, glorified social committee." Miss Mould said, in the following edition. Feb 11, 1975, p. 6

"If the elected council proves to be a problem to the administration, they simply wait the year out until a new council comes in. Perhaps this indicates that terms of office should be extended over a greater time period.

Faculty and administration (hereafter referred to as "Management") have the advantage of longevity whereas students have only a brief space of time within which to organize to defend their interests. By the time a student is prepared to execute his office effectively, his term expires.

All to the advantage of

management.

Not only do the students have no effective body of their own to defend and promote their interests those bodies of management which are dominated by management, discriminate against students voice. Here again we'll speak.

David MacRae, in the Cadre, Feb 18, 1975 p 16 observed: "Thus there are three people who are members of both bodies (Board of Governors and Senate), President Baker, and his cohorts, Regis Duffy and Ken Ozmon. "All well and good. We have then forty-one people who control our university; only eight are students. Even if that could be justified the whole system is largely artificial. If a "matter of academic concern" happens to cost money (as most do) then who gets the final say on the matter? You guessed it the unelected, unrepresentative Board of Governors."

Imagine, eight students of almost 2000! Some democracy!!

MacRae's article was responded to by none other than Baker himself on Feb 25, 1975, pp. 2 & 4 "There is no need for anyone to strain his imagination. I was on record (Baker always seems to be "on record") as favoring a single governing body for universities fifteen years ago. One of the reasons I took the job here was that I understood that the government was prepared to set up the new university with a single governing body, with a majority of members from the university communittee. (I was also in favor of students on the governing body.)" (Italics mine)

It comes as no surprise to me (or to anyone who knows R.J. Baker) that he would assume presidency under these terms. Can you imagine the power he seeks when he is in favor of the concentration of power in the hands of a few with him at the top? And where would student representation fit in? Very minimally to

be sure! But Baker has the gross and unmitigated gall to put in parentheses "I was also in favor of students on the governing body." Imagine! In parenthesis!!

Is there any doubt now as to why there is apathy? Is it not made sufficiently clear that apathy is rooted in powerlessness the lack of self-determination?

Art Laffin, in his article of Feb 25, 1975, p. 3 put it very well:

"My reason though, for writing this article is to try to explain that the reason why students have devoted so much attention to "secondary problems" is primarily because we as students have failed to recognize the "root problem" here on campus or to put it another way we try to solve secondary problems without ever asking why the problem is there in the first place. I am merely suggesting that if we got to the root of the problem here on campus, a lot of these secondary problems could be allentated.

"As far as I am concerned the root problem that we as students have virtually ignored and now are beginning to recognize, is the importance of the major decision making committees on campus and the role they play in determining university policy" (Italics mine)

Mr. Laffin in particular is to be commended on his penetrating insight which gives all students a knowledge necessary to wage an effective struggle against management. Mr. Laffin will no doubt be at the fore as it develops.

The following facts are now evident:

- 1) Student apathy is rooted in student powerlessness;
- 2) Student representation is, at best, only token;
- 3) The student union and its constitution is contradictory and too weak for studnets to use effectively to protect and promote their interests;
- 4) Education is not for the students, but serves the dominant social class, and is therefore against the students;
- 5) The government appoints not elects the most important posts (Board of Governors President etc.)
- 6) Democracy does not exist for students.

Stan Dalton

(Continued next week)

Part Two: What Must Be Done