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kampus concern

Senate.....Part 1

The Senate of the university is a very powerful organization in the structure of the university. It controls and makes all decisions which are not fiscal in nature. "Academics" is their speciality, therefore the Senate is the supreme court of university education. Influential senators and administration determine what courses students are to take and how they are going to be taught (to some extent). But what is really ironic about this university is that it is very easy to get in but the Senate determines whether or not you are going to get out with their degree.

The biggest problem of our Senate right now, is the effectiveness in dealing with specific problems. There seems to be a problem in comprehension - a lot of time is wasted in determining whether problems are really problems or not. Their ineffectiveness lies right here. The Senate has a history of not dealing with problems as they are happening. Instead, the senate spends alot of time deciding whether a suggestion or proposal should be tabled for later discussion. Therefore they are not serving the purpose for which a Senate was created. Infrequent meetings, poor notification of meetings and agendas and lack of reality of facts stops the Senate from fulfilling its purpose. This is not to say that everything should be rushed through without due consideration, but, that senators are confused or don't know in what capacity they should be acting as members of Senate. This is the problem - lack of job interpretation. U.P.E.I. is not the only university with a senate that has this characteristic. It is common all across Canada.

Last week I came upon the book Towers Beseiged by Cyril S. Belshaw of U.B.C. Here is what he says about Canadian University Senates. In this time of studying the objectives and goals of our university it is

very relevant. Belshaw writes of the dilemma of the creative university.

"Reform, then, is not always easy. Academic Senates have great difficulty in knowing whether elements in curricula are being taught mechanistically or creatively, and whether they are technically necessary. They are too gentlemanly to question too deeply the specific operations of their colleagues. When they do discover flaws, members of Senate do little to correct the situation, more from the dislike of intervention than from problems of law. There are very few Senates which have disestablished courses of instruction over the objections of those who are giving them; very few have used academic criteria to turn down programs approved by a Faculty. (The criteria used are usually administrative, for example that the course overlaps with another already given, that there are insufficient staff or students, or that the theme is the property of a rival Faculty).

Senates and Faculties in this respect set a very bad example to students. By acting as administrators rather than as academic judges they fail to demonstrate in their own affairs the powers of judgement the university should stand for, thus failing to educate students and the public in

the nature of academic judgement, and losing control of their destiny.

In part, this is the result of a feeling that the only judges of academic activity must be those thoroughly familiar with and specialist in their field. This is the theme which runs through university life. There is no doubt that in many elements of academic judgement, the feeling is justified. Academics confuse the role of expert witness with that of judge. What sort of courts would we have if judges refused to judge when confronted with the arguments of an expert suppliant, or, when two such suppliants were arguing, refused to take action, but told them to go away and fight it out themselves?

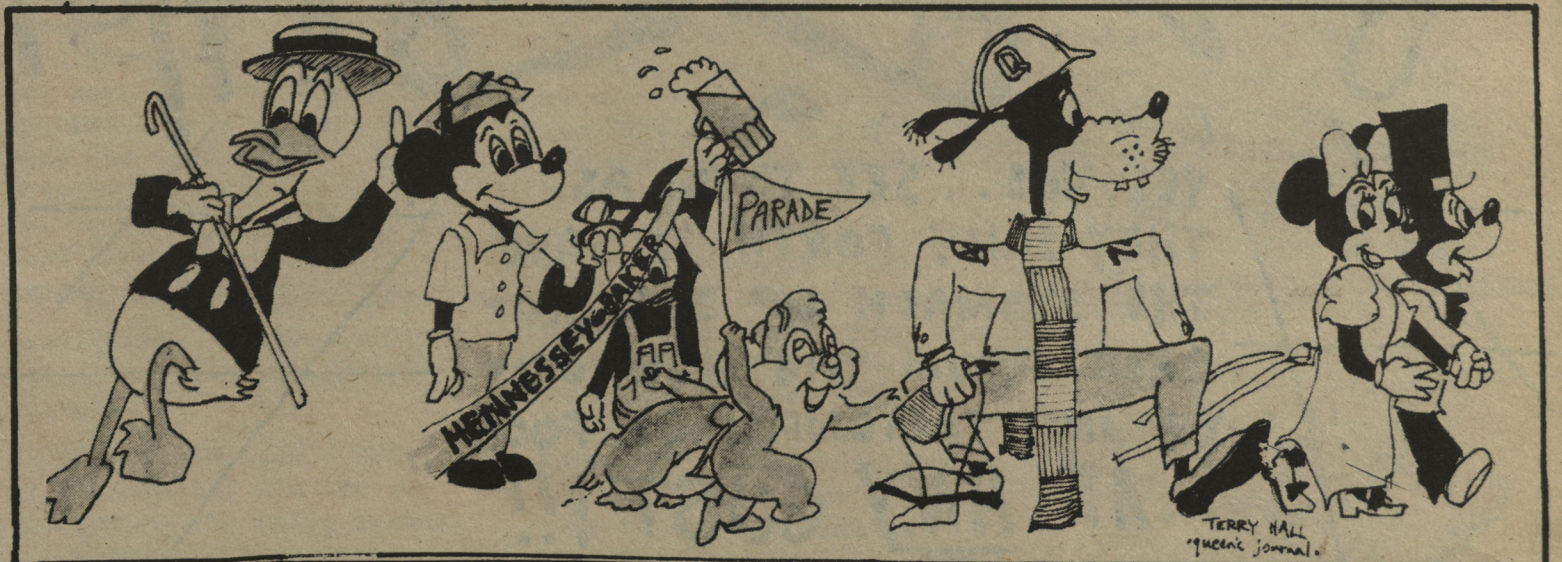
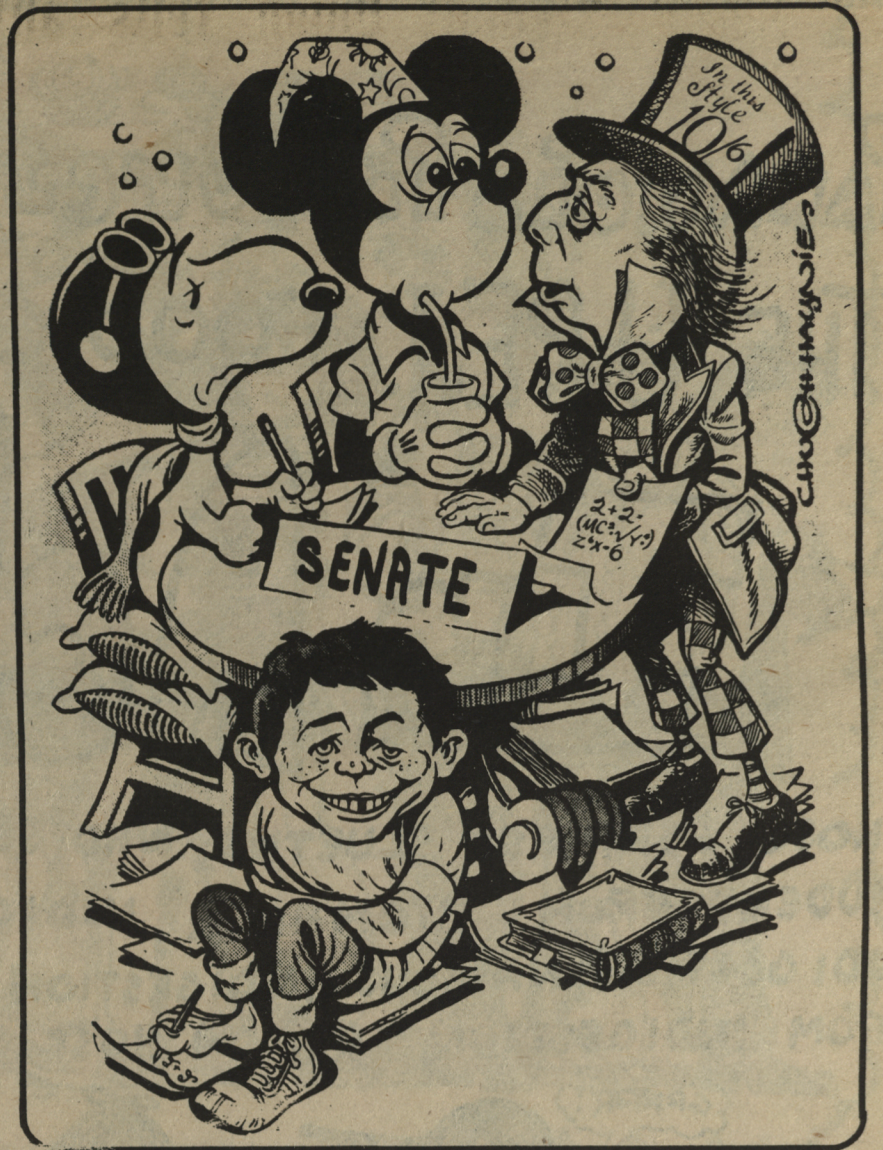
Senates, the highest academic judges in universities, usually behave in just this way. ..."

Do we want to change?
Do we dare change?

More next week.

P.S. Senate meets Thursday night in the faculty lounge. Drop in and see what goes on.

This week's "Poke in the Ribs" goes to Jack "Recruiter" Blanchard of Student Services. If you sing dance or even hum, he'll be after you for Campus Cabaret. He has the highest number of recruits to his credit of any of the directors. I'm gonna get you Jack.



Senate Meeting This Thursday - 7:00 P.M.