

# guest editorial

## STUDENT UNION IN TROUBLE

by: Kevin Gauthier

Harken back, Dear Readers, several issues of The Sun and recall, if ya will, the Student Union President's State of the Student Union Address. In that articulate, well intentioned communique from the office of our student leader, we were informed that all is well with the Union and their future holds nothing but promises of bright sunshine and happiness for all. Well, begging the President's pardon, I must disagree.

Having been closely connected with the Union during three of my 4 years at UPEI, I am quite familiar with how it should function and how it really does. And believe me, there is little of the former in the latter. President Walker's assertion that the Union is in good shape is wrong; dead wrong; the Union is sick and dying slowly.

Evidence? You want evidence? I'll give you evidence! First of all, I'll bet that, of the roughly 850 students who take the trouble to begin reading this article, 700 have turned to the next page before this sentence. The mere mention of "Student Union" is enough to either send most students into paroxysms of yawning or make them wonder what-the-hell those idiots and rip-off artists in The Barn are up to now. Hardly a healthy attitude. For an organization that claims 1,350 registered members, it speaks poorly indeed that less than 60 know enough about it to be interested in playing an active part. Hardly a healthy attitude. And for the past three years, more and more elected positions in the Union are being filled by acclamation, even though most of them involve

nothing more than attending one meeting every two weeks. Hardly a healthy trend.

The problems that afflict the Union stem basically from two causes: apathy, and finances. The second one is most easily dealt with, so let's approach that one first. The Student Union is in poor financial shape. We have a substantial debt, with no immediately available way to retire it in the foreseeable future. Our fixed expenses devour approximately 80% of our fixed revenues. We have a capital savings plan that presently claims 20% of our revenue from fees. Our revenue-generating activities are increasingly becoming drains on the treasury as fewer students attend events and spend less money when they do attend. Now, before we proceed further, I must confess that this writer did play a part in putting us in this uncomfortable spot, having been President when the capital savings plan was introduced. Although I strongly believe that the plan itself was and still is a necessity, it must never be allowed to cripple today's Union for the sake of tomorrow's. And I sincerely hope future Executives will not allow it to do so. Expenses must be cut and revenues increased. Salaries at the Union (which currently run upward of \$25,000 yearly) must be cut as soon as possible. Radio CIMN has to be closed until we can afford to operate it properly. The SUN must increase its advertising rates, but this will only work if students support the businesses who support us.

Pig "N" Whistle should be held only once every three weeks, at least during the second semester. Yearbook fees should be doubled. Medical plan fees should be increased to provide additional revenue. Some intelligent investing of capital, other than term deposits, should be undertaken. And, most important of all, an arrangement must be made with the university so that at least half the cost of maintaining The Barn will be assumed by them. We gave them \$100,000 for that building, which they otherwise would have torn down, and it's about time some of that money came back to us. Office expenses have to be cut or held in check. Liquor prices have to go up, and less expensive means of providing entertainment will have to be found. It all makes for very tough medicine, but it's needed if the Union is to get back on its feet.

But all this will be for naught if Student Union members continue to ignore the potential benefits the Union offers them.

At various times through the past four years, I have been alternately disappointed, depressed, dejected and disgusted by the total lack of enthusiasm and support for the Union among its members. It's true that apathy was a hall mark of the 70's, and will probably be even more so in the 80's. But the Student Union is a positive force in our lives at university, and a necessary element in our broader education. If we allow it to die for lack of interest, we will have to throw away a vital tool in our efforts to educate ourselves, and university students are supposed to know better.

So, although it is understandable that a retiring President would wish to complete his term on as pleasant a note as possible, I think that Mr. Walker and the rest of his Executive should not bow too grandly. Neither should I disclaim any responsibility for this unpleasant situation. Nor should you. None of us can afford to delude ourselves any longer. The Student Union is sick and the treatment required is of three parts: first, the surgeon's knife, to cut off the diseased parts and strengthen the as yet noninfected areas; second, some careful monitoring after surgery to ensure the infection does not spread; and third, some warm affection and constant attention from the loved ones. And that's where you come in. So take off the rose-coloured glasses, and either find a cure or pull the plug.

## UPEI SUN

The UPEI SUN is a member of the Canadian University Press (CUP) with exclusive national advertising rights held by Youthstream, 310 Davenport Road, Toronto, Ontario.

The UPEI SUN aims to be an independent newspaper published weekly throughout the academic year by the UPEI Student Union, printed by the Journal-Pioneer in Summerside and distributed throughout the campus.

Contents are the responsibility of the editor. Opinions are those of the persons expressing them. All letters and articles must be signed even if the name is to be withheld from publication.

Deadline for all submissions is Monday noon.

The staff meeting is every Monday at 7 PM in The SUN's office, fourth floor Main, East end.

A sincere thank you and a helluva lot of gratitude to:

Alan Buchanan  
Maureen Hartman  
Derwin Banks  
Todd MacLaughlan  
Richard Lee  
George Barry  
Catherine Wilson

for all the work they did on this week's issue.

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