

The value of political satire



MUGWUMP
BEN CONOLEY

There's something to be said about the value of political satire.

The many people who wrote to us this week, upset by Nathan White's opinion piece, "The lesser of a bunch of evils," which ran in our February 25 issue, didn't say it.

Nor did the Student Union candidates who came in that Wednesday to point out some unfairness they felt was inherent in the column.

So I'm going to say it now - political satire is a vital element in a healthy democracy. Furthermore, it doesn't have to be nice, and very rarely is.

Let's look at some examples.

How often do you suppose George W. Bush calls Jon Stewart to say, "Hey man, come on, it really hurt me when you pointed out all the screw-ups in my speech, and could you stop exposing the flaws in my environmental policies? This is an election year Jon!"

How often does Paul Martin write the *Globe and Mail* to say, "Excuse me, Ed, I couldn't help but notice that the editorial cartoon this week links me to the sponsorship scandal. Listen, I wasn't a part of it, and this is a big year for me with the election and all, so could you lay off?"

It's also no excuse to say that such coverage is unfair when appearing during the election since our SU elections last several days, unlike most government elections that last just one. Look at *The Daily Show's* coverage of the Democrat's primaries which ran for weeks. Jon Stewart and his television, print, and radio colleagues hit the hardest during

these elections. Perhaps that's because satire is so much better during an election.

It's true that satire can persuade people to vote one way or another, but when said material is produced straight from the mouths/pens of the "victims," then it's fair. Just like people love to point out Martin's tax-saving ways, or what have come to be known as Bushisms, so can *The Brunswickan* point out and make fun of what is said at a debate, or written on a website.

Does anyone really think that come the call for an election, news outlets are going to stop making fun of our politicians? Of course not: they're going to lay it on even thicker. The length of an election is totally irrelevant in such a situation. An episode of *This Hour has 22 Minutes* airing the night before an election has enormous reach, and the potential to influence would-be voters.

The Brunswickan has the right, and dare I say it, the responsibility to publish columns like Nathan's. In a political campaign containing very little debate, I didn't hear any candidates exposing the flaws of other candidate's platforms. I'm not saying I want to see a dirty election next year, but come on - someone has to point these things out.

One candidate who stopped by our office said he wouldn't have even voted for himself had he read and believed what was written about him. Well, perhaps he shouldn't leave himself open to attack next time and take a second look at his public statements.

To suggest a complete blackout on media coverage during an election is a scary thought, and I was upset to see so many letters in our inbox that would suggest it's a good idea.

I pity the irresponsible voter who bases their choice on a humorous opinion column and not the weeks of serious coverage and debate beforehand, but *The Brunswickan* won't be blamed for his/her decision.



Loving the satire: An increasing number of university students say they turn to shows like Jon Stewart's brilliant *Daily Show* for world news.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Election piece poorly done

The article called "The lesser of a bunch of evils" [February 25] is conditioning me to grow rabidly angry whenever I see Alf.

It would seem that Nathan White not only has no idea what he's saying, but isn't sure what he's trying to say at all - though the paper claims it's "all in good fun," that little disclaimer comes long after White promises to give readers "a quick rundown on what we know about the candidates."

Coming out one day after voting began, in the middle of the campaign blackout, he must have known that this column would influence the many people who have never met the candidates (after all, on a campus of 10,000 or more, how many hands can one person shake?) and that those candidates would have no opportunity to publicly defend themselves.

If he didn't, the editors most certainly should have. Well, if they can't put up any defense, I'll do it for them.

White would undoubtedly say that he was simply trying to lighten the mood, mocking everyone equally. I'll say that it's strange, then, that he complains of being incapable of mocking Desmond Lockhart. Perhaps you should hire someone capable of equal-opportunity jocularity? It's funny that he turns Jeff Matheson into a beer-swilling moron for absolutely no reason, but can't manage to say anything bad about his competition - whom he lauds to the gods as the only decent candidate.

Since he's getting so good at warping reality, maybe he should use that ability to change himself into a writer capable of either giving a reasonably honest view, or an evenly humorous one. Anything other than one of these two options - such as, for example, the tripe that actually made it to print - is not only unfair to those running, but to those reading. If you can't come up with anything bad to say about one candidate, doesn't that mean that candidate is best? Well, no; it means one writer liked that candidate most, and decided not to let his readers decide for themselves. Surely you can see how dishonest and ultimately worthless that is.

You know what would've been the lesser of a bunch of evils? Having someone - even someone biased, even Alf! - write a real column on the election, rather than making up things that sound funny. Humour's great (and the column was funny), but when it's used to ruin someone's campaign while helping someone else's out, it should be questioned.

• Sarah Nason

Election article malicious

I would like to congratulate Nathan White on a well-written, witty, and clever article ["The lesser of a bunch of evils" February 25]. During the heart of the election voting period he successfully painted a number of SU election candidates with a sarcastic and defamatory brush that maliciously undermined the money, effort, weeks and months candidates invested into their campaigns. I was particularly impressed with White's noble attempt to "hold nothing back" especially when it came to malevolent

character attacks on the candidates he appears to particularly dislike. White holds nothing back? Nothing except for the truth!

According to White, underneath the façade of hard work and a willingness to listen, which I promote in my autobiography, is the code "give me a steady pay check and an excuse to stay in university for another year." I am impressed with White's adding abilities (two years at UNBSJ + two years at UNB = fourth year student); however, he might want to brush up on his reading and comprehension skills. The arts and education concurrent degrees, that I mention in the first line of my bio, is a five year program, which means I already have a great excuse for staying in university: finishing my degrees. And, just to clarify, if I was looking for a steady pay check, I would not have given up my well paying summer job in order to run for the comparatively meagre wages of the VP Executive position.

According to White, "Jeff Matheson's campaign slogan is 'I want to listen.'" If he had spent a little more time sharpening his own auditory skills, and less time thinking of ways to ignorantly debase election candidates, White might have accurately heard the slogan "I am ready to listen." Then again I am not sure why correct wording of campaign slogans matter when reacting to speeches one is suppose to offer an opinion on. Educated responses and little details are irrelevant when throwing insolent, border-line libellous comments around. Right?

The *Brunswickan's* claim, at the end of White's article, that the reviews of candidates are "all in good fun" does not erase the fact that during the election period the newspaper deliberately used its editorial page to openly attack some election candidates more than others, which necessarily biases voter opinion.

I believe that SU politicians do need to get use to critical comments, and that they should be held accountable by journalists, and the student body as a whole. But the cruel, uncalled for, misleading, and overtly biased nature of White's article is misusing the editorial voice.

• Jeff Matheson

Bruns misses out on Engineering events

Some of my fellow UNB students may recall that we recently celebrated the 150th anniversary of the first Engineering lectures held here, which also happened to be the first such lectures in all of Canada. Being an Engineering student myself, this struck me as a significant event: something to be widely publicised and celebrated. I would hope that most other UNB students, no matter their department, felt the same way about it, simply because it was a national first for our school. Throughout the entire week, the various departments within Engineering held open houses, held special guest lectures, opened their labs to anyone who cared to participate, and capped the week off with a great concert in the SUB.

When the Valentine's issue of the *Bruns* came out (coinciding nicely with the 150th celebrations, I might add), what did I see on the front page? A useful article on tuberculosis, and a picture of some asinine stuffed

racoon beside an article complaining about how Valentine's Day can cost a lot of money. On page 2, there was an ad for the Engineering concert, but there was nary another word about any of the celebrations or events throughout the rest of the paper.

Having asked someone more informed than myself about this glaring omission, the reply I received was something along the lines of "Valentine's Day is only once a year, so there had to be a lot of coverage." Hello! A 150th anniversary happens... well, once!

Sure, it may not be quite as funny and entertaining a topic as, say, the editorial on Janet Jackson's Superbowl halftime "show," but there are equally 'newsy' articles on pesticide bans that made it to the front page.

This in mind, perhaps more time needs to be spent looking at the big picture of UNB events when publishing the *Bruns*.

• John Michinsky

An argument for legal marijuana

In reference to "Marijuana bill draws criticism" [February 25]:

All body systems (cardiovascular, digestive, endocrine, excretory, immune, nervous, reproductive, skeletal) of every human being are regulated by marijuana-like compounds that we all produce. They are known as endocannabinoids. Some of us may produce too much, and others may not produce enough of these compounds. As we age, we need to supplement what our body makes.

Most people could benefit from wisely using marijuana. Cannabinoids protect against heart and brain damage, are therapeutic for a variety of autoimmune diseases, regulate pain and in numerous cases can directly kill cancer cells.

In general, cannabinoids protect us from age related damage caused by biochemical imbalances often associated with free radicals. If people knew the truth, marijuana would rapidly be legalized.

• Dr. Robert Melamede
Assoc. Professor and Biology Chair
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University of Colorado

Election criticism poorly timed

The election rant that ran in the *Bruns* last issue overall left me somewhat uncomfortable. White's insights were somewhat witty, but somewhat inaccurate, and also unfortunately-timed: In the middle of election week, they likely had an effect on the outcome of the election. I think the cynical, one-sided view presented during election week was unfair.

White casted Ouellette as a "would-be student despot." I think that Ouellette was well aware that he would have to work with council, not have absolute control (like the editors of some newspapers do over content).

Fournier's campaign was openly attacked, without acknowledging that he had the best-organized campaign going. The SU election uses far too much paper generally, so to pick on one candidate for making himself visible is very unfair, especially considering that Fournier would

work to re-vamp the solid waste program on campus. A few more pieces of paper in the short term to achieve that goal in the long term would be paper well "spent." I can tell you that one of the pains of environmentalism is that everyone sets far higher standards for you than they would ever set for themselves, and then criticizes you unfairly for even trying to do something better for the world.

Unfortunately, only a few people actually came out to hear Lynette Manderson's speech (which was one of the better ones, by the way), so she had to give reasons besides issues why people should vote for her. Attaining broader SU gender representation seems like a good one, and allows for a catchy slogan. She was encouraging voters to elect experienced SU people (like her) who have been involved and doing things on campus over the past year.

I was dismayed to see this year's awesome Red'n'Black Revue left off the front page in favor of other gripping topics like computer repair and rez students getting wet. It was even denied front page of the Arts section by a porn king!

The Revue was, by the way, co-directed by Jeff Brewer, the same guy who helped bring official status to Women in Engineering and Women in Law, and helped bring into reality the soon-to-be-realized GLBTQ Centre and the university's No-Sweat anti-sweatshop-support policy, among other initiatives. He also ran for VP of University Affairs, and was not only dissed by your writer during voting week, but his opponent was praised, too, despite the fact that the writer knew nothing about him or his history as a VP at UNBSJ.

As for LeBlanc and John's suggestions that the SU contribute more to the *Bruns*, I would say that is a great idea. It would be nice to have something weekly from the SU that tries to engage the students, or at least keeps them informed - although five articles per week would probably be overkill and make for less-than-gripping reading, I think Johns is onto something.

It was unfair to both candidates and voters to allow such a prominent, critical article during election week.

• Toby K. L. Stoddart

A bone to pick

In response to "Reds have bone to pick with STU" [February 25] I think it is wonderful that you are paying attention to women's athletics. The everyday press seems to ignore it, for the most part.

I think it is wonderful that coach Lavolette is optimistic and supportive of her charges and her employer. No one would expect anything less.

However, to try and raise UNB's status by demeaning other schools in the AUS is a weak effort.

If UNB is good, it is good. It is not so because Lavolette "bad mouths" other AUS members.

This shows a complete lack of character and class on behalf of the coach. I hope that this is not an example of the attributes she is passing on to her players.

Good luck to the Reds on the weekend. I hope the girls play well, but quite frankly I hope you get your rear-ends kicked, only for the coaches sake.

• Peter Davies

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Abortion rights is a queer issue

QUEERIES
VAL COLDEN

Abortion rights is a queer issue. Actually, reproductive rights in general is a queer issue.

Reproductive rights issues generally come down to a question of how much control we should be allowed to have of our own bodies. In the US, all contraceptive devices were illegal until 1965, and until 1972 for unmarried people. Queer sex was illegal in Canada until 1969, and it was less than a year ago that the sodomy laws which still existed in many American states were struck down. The legality of abortion in the US is being seriously threatened, while abortion access is becoming consistently more difficult in New Brunswick. All of these legal restrictions are related and aimed at reducing our freedom to choose what we do with our own bodies.

However, reproductive rights extend far beyond that as a queer issue. Some statistics show that teenage girls who identify as non-heterosexual or who are unsure of their sexual orientation are at a greater risk for pregnancy and are less likely to use contraceptives.

A friend of mine, in an effort to avoid coming out, had sex with a large number of guys at age 15 and ended up pregnant. My friend, who chose to have the baby, subsequently came out as a lesbian, then as transgendered, and his daughter is currently being raised by his ex-girlfriend. Even beyond coming out, many queer wimyn and female-bodied transgendered people are still at risk of pregnancy, either through

consensual sex or through rape. Especially for female-to-male transgendered people, who are often very uncomfortable with their feminine bodies, access to abortion can be critical.

Reproductive rights also have a huge effect in issues of queer parenting. Transgendered parents are frequently denied custody of their children; in the southern US, this still sometimes happens to gay parents as well. Several American states ban adoption by single people or by same-sex partners, and there are often huge barriers to adoption for same-sex couples elsewhere. Excluding the low tech "turkey baster" method of insemination and vaginal intercourse, other means of having children for a same-sex couple are typically difficult to access and expensive. Similar issues apply to male-female couples who are infertile.

It is also worth noting that many of the groups who crusade against abortion also crusade against queer rights, including human rights protection and marriage rights. In an article about an anti-abortion rally at which a lesbian and gay anti-abortion group was present, the author urges the anti-abortion movement to "not compromise our ranks by gleefully embracing just any ally," and calls this action a "sodomite cause that is repeatedly condemned... in Scripture." This also highlights the need for queer issues to be considered alongside abortion issues.

Whether we're avoiding children, trying to have them or just trying to control what we do with our own bodies, reproductive rights, including abortion rights, are clearly a queer issue.



There's one thing this kitten is thinking about. No, silly, it's not treats, or even a mouse. It isn't even a red ball of yarn! (and strangely, not the monsters either). No, it's the upcoming Brunswickan elections! They're being held on the 17th and 24th of this month. Wwooo!