

Two countries for crazy old men

TAKE A STROLL DOWN ANY EDMONTON STREET right now and you're sure to bear witness to an endless trail of election campaign signs pledging loyalty to one party or another. By now, you've also probably noticed the first signs of the annual parade of nonsense that is the SU election poster campaign, plastered on every spare billboard around campus. But while it's easy to get caught up in the democratic spirit, it's even easier to ignore the kind of political activity that's been happening outside our borders in the past week.

After 49 years in power, Cuban leader Fidel Castro said that he wouldn't seek re-election last Tuesday. Though he has been ailing for several years, this still marks the somewhat surprising end of an era on the world's political stage. A polarizing revolutionary seen as a tyrant by one generation and a freedom fighter by another, Fidel Castro became one of the most recognizable leaders in the world and a father-figure to many of his most fervent supporters.

On Sunday, Fidel's brother Raúl assumed duties as Cuban president after being elected by the National Assembly. Although hopes were high for a new era in Cuba's history, much talk surrounding Raúl's succession has been pessimistic—especially after his promises to continue the policies laid out by Fidel's communist government during his time in office.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice displayed vocal opposition to the country's move, stating that Cuban citizens should be able "to choose their leaders in democratic elections." Considering the 77-year-old Raúl is another throwback to Cuba's old-world rule, and his second-in-command, José Ramón Machado, is a year older, it appears that Cuba will be short-changed on any sort of forward-thinking hope—at least for a few more years.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe has announced an election on 29 March. Another of the member of the "president-for-life" club, the 84-year-old Mugabe has been in power since 1980, when Zimbabwe gained its independence from British colonial rule. In the less than three decades under his grip, the country has slipped into a rapid freefall of unemployment, inflation, and rampant social disaster.

While Mugabe claims to support democracy by allowing "free" elections, history has proven that the democratic process is anything but balanced. During the last vote in 2002, Mugabe defeated opponent Morgan Tsvangirai with a 56.2 per cent majority. However, public outcry occurred when it was revealed that many citizens were prevented from voting, caught in a web of democratic manipulation and violence.

Mugabe has stated that he won't allow Western observers into the country for the elections in March and has already started a smear campaign against his opponents, comparing former finance minister Simba Makoni to a prostitute and labelling Makoni's opposition to his rule as "absolutely disgraceful."

The most shocking chapter of this tale, however, isn't the country's 100 000-per-cent inflation or the leader's self-indulgent birthday celebrations amid mass poverty and starvation—it's that despite 28 years of such tragedy, the problem has gone largely ignored by the Western world, which is concerned with the more trendy "Darfurnatocism," throwing money at problems they don't understand in other African nations because George Clooney said it was the cool thing to do.

Although there's little that a single person can do for a country like Zimbabwe, whose leader wants nothing to do with the West, an increasing awareness of the issue, especially with an upcoming election, is a contribution that's likely to be worth far more than any nameless donation to a faceless corporation vowing to "cure" the political strife in Darfur, Rwanda, or whatever other African nation happens to be the next focus of the media's attention.

Here in Edmonton, we're lucky to have a reasonably transparent political system, despite the mudslinging between our campus and provincial leaders. It's important remember these global tales when the call to vote arrives for you next week—democracy is a right that few of us have and even fewer practice.

MIKE KENDRICK
Design & Production Editor



KELSEY TANASIUK

LETTERS

Edmonton kayaking not what it used to be

This university just got wussier. No longer are we the key source of river-running, wave-surfing, badass whitewater kayakers in Alberta. Thanks to poorly planned restructuring by Campus Recreation, one of the best kayaking education programs in the province has been gutted. Students hoping to take up the sport will find the task much more difficult (and likely more expensive).

Last year, the University of Alberta Paddling Society saw over 100 students take the cheapest kayaking classes in Edmonton. Most of the Alberta Whitewater Association-certified instructors of the UAPS are alumni, and they were barely paid enough to pay for their parking. These people are truly dedicated to the sport; almost every summer weekend, they paddle well below skill level to teach us newbies on the river for free.

However, in what seems like a despicable power and money grab, Campus Rec will be buying new boats, running classes themselves, and leaving new kayakers dry on shore staring longingly at the river. The 33-year-old club can no longer offer their cheap classes, keep boats at the pool, run trips without prohibitive amounts paperwork, or generally have a backbone.

Instructors have been surreptitiously hired by Campus Rec from [outside of] the "old guard," and [...] Campus Rec has no plans to run courses on the river. What is the

point of frolicking about the pool without any intention of taking it to the river? [It's also...] irresponsible—whitewater is dangerous without proper training on the river.

As a member put it, "They just killed the [...] essence of the] kayaking club [...] to replace it with a fleet of boats that will never see the river and instructors that probably have very little interest in fostering the growth of the sport in Edmonton."

Campus Rec's changes seem unavoidable, and it stinks that folks who care deeply about fostering kayaking in the University community have been given the boot. It's time someone says a word of gratitude for their years of dedication.

On behalf of the scores of university students and alumni paddlers who under your leadership learned to eddy out, I want to say thanks to the old guard of the University of Alberta Paddling Society. See you on the river.

JANET MACDONALD
Graduate Studies

Letters to the editor should be sent to letters@gateway.ualberta.ca (no attachments, please).

The Gateway reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity, and to refuse publication of any letter it deems racist, sexist, libelous, or otherwise hateful in nature. The Gateway also reserves the right to publish letters online.

Letters to the editor should be no longer than 350 words, and should include the author's name, program, year of study, and student identification number to be considered for publication.

LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVES

Corrupt 1995 Gateway ignores pleas for justice

For various reasons of my own, I recently filed a complaint against the Gateway. I attended a meeting with Gateway and Students' Union bigwigs and walked away from the meeting feeling my problems with the Gateway were solved.

The next day, I opened up the Valentine's Day issue and read in the contributors list one "Demando—champion of everything unreasonable" listed.

I have few doubts about who the Gateway was referring to. To me this was one more example of the abusive and corrupt culture that seems to perpetuate itself year after year at the Gateway. Abusive because when an MLA writes a letter, it gets titled "More Bitching." Corrupt because I can't see how Todd Babiak's Valentine's Day opinion ever deserved to be published—never mind first in the Managing section.

I would like to live in a world where everyone made an attempt to respect the dignity of others and tried to take their happiness seriously. Perhaps it's about time that students started demanding this from our campus newspaper. We deserve better than this.

RUSSELL ELGERT
7 March, 1995

Holy shit, Noam Chomsky wrote us a letter!

The question of when some published material has racist connotations is often not easy to answer, and in the case of political cartoons, the problem is greatly enhanced by the fact that the primary device is caricature, with familiar symbols used for identification.

It's hard, under such conditions, to avoid racist implications, no matter who is targeted. Whatever one thinks about the cartoon in question, it doesn't begin to compare with the anti-Arab material that floods the media, eliciting no reaction—except from Arab groups, which, lacking power and influence, are ignored.

It seems to me that the response written by Karen Unland and Malcolm Azania was appropriate. As long as the journal remains open to critical comment on its practices, I don't see that any further action is appropriate.

NOAM CHOMSKY
4 March, 1993

Letters from the Archives is a semi-regular feature where the Gateway runs historical letters that we feel are of particular importance—or are just really hilarious.

Now you can check out all the old-timey fun for yourself! Just go to www.thegatewayonline.ca and follow the links to the Gateway's digital archives.