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SAM ... will students again be a political force?

The Student Association of Maine has embraced an ominous task. In its effort to represent 32,000 post-secondary students throughout the state, conflicts are bound to surface. But if SAM can unify its student membership, the prospects for developing a powerful voice in Augusta, a voice that would be heard in the halls of the State House and reverberate back to individual campuses are bright.

It's time students realized the only way to become an effective force is through political action. Students need a voice in Augusta to balance the oft-times unbalanced and erroneous conceptions legislators have of students. Last year's furor over the Gay Symposium held here in Orono showed students the attitudes held by some state representatives. And students had no effective means to combat the accusations which were not only levelled at Orono administrators and students, but hinted at prevailing negative attitudes towards students and student rights in general.

The results which can be obtained by banding together as a unified student voice were witnessed in last spring's tuition hike debate. Orono students let it be known they were opposed to an increase in tuition that would largely benefit other UM campuses, and the trustees reacted.

Of course we don't know for sure how influential students were in affecting the trustees' final decision to levy proportionate tuition increases within the Super-U system. Certainly President Neville was the driving force in bringing home the UMO point of view to the trustees. But we'd like to think student opinion and reaction had something to do with the outcome.

The need for a student lobby in Augusta is more than evident. Recent comments by Don Pendleton, this year's chairperson of the University of Maine organization of Student Governments, that he doesn't see a need of a student representative on the Board of Trustees hit hard. Pendleton is a newcomer to the job as UMOSG chairperson, and perhaps by the end of the year he'll think differently. But by then a whole year will have gone by, along with countless issues and decisions students should have had more than indirect access to.

Now that university employees seem headed for collective bargaining, we doubt faculty will be far behind in pushing for the same rights. Classified and professional employees will have direct access to their employers and the decisions made affecting them as employees. Meanwhile, students will still be floundering for some type of established representation affording them input into an educational policy



which is made at the upper echelons and drifts down to students as a fait accompli. SAM could provide Maine students with this access to decision-making bodies. If the Augusta gang recognizes this new force, which, of course, is contingent upon whether or not SAM does develop into a bona fide political force, the possibilities for such never before witnessed input is there. Simon stressed the need to develop communication with the state educational commissions, and if this group is able to follow up on this priority, students will no longer have to fight for a voice on these commissions; it will be there.

Simon listed a number of issues he believes

SAM could and should become involved in. Right now, however, we hope he and other SAM members will spend their time establishing the fledgling group as a permanent one — not one which will disappear and fluctuate with leadership.

The birth of SAM gives us the hope that students will rediscover their potential as a political force. The late 60's and early 70's were years of violence and anger, and we're not advocating temperaments should swing back to those turbulent years. But those years did prove students can be a power. We would like to think this power cannot be attained only via demonstrations and violence.

Maine
Campus

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