

We've all been here long enough to have lost the ability to look at Stirling University objectively. The article below was

written by a student at Dundee, who visited our Campus for the first time one day before the Easter Break.

SUPERFICIAL IMPRESSIONS

I'm not quite sure what I was prepared for. The Dundee equivalent of Von Bonhoeffer had told me "that he'd seen bigger public lavatories"—and certainly Pathfoot is not a particularly striking (or should I say imposing?) building. It seemed to sprawl, like a projected lunar farm at the top of some daunting steps, as I stepped from my car in the space reserved for visitors' cars. However, neither passports nor foreign Students' Union cards proved necessary — I just walked in, attracting no attention except for the momentary glance of the usual bright girls in a university reading room, who look up any time a pin drops, as if their only purpose in going to the library is to see how many of their friends have been foolish enough to do the same.

by Jim
Barnes

Penguins

Passing the cocooned university penguins snug in their glass box. I noted an industriously, presented, but universally ignored Kafka exhibition, optimistically staged by the German department. I found the two flights of further steps quite disconcerting, and I am certain that they pose an impenetrable barrier to disciples of both Bacchus and Leary. The thoughtless architecture must have caused great hardship, resulting in enforced neglect of studies, while the only justification would appear to be that the place was built on a slope. Through the glass panels which double as walls at this particular point, you can see how well gardens and ornamental concrete have been used for decorative effect. It reminded me vaguely of a reconstruction of Neuengamme Concentration Camp I saw in Copenhagen.

Shoddy Modernity

The central hall of the building opens out from the top of the steps. There is an air of shoddy modernity. It is dominated by student lockers which should curtail the pilfering which is the curse of Scottish Universities. An even better student amenity is the Bank of Scotland which flourished quietly in the corner in the mornings, but attracted rush-hour type queues just as it was due to close. There were toilets hidden coyly in a kind of alcove behind the lockers, and a quick inspection revealed the standard of graffiti to be appallingly low — at least in the gents. The sole matter for concern appeared to be the local veteran left-winger, and I don't think they were referring to Stirling Albion. Whereas, in Dundee recently, I came across this rather touching example — "Two years ago I couldn't spell engineer, now I are one." For truly artistic graffiti, one must obviously have a strong engineering faculty, as a priority. The rather luxurious C.S.A. office faces the hall from the other side. It seemed to be populated by the same set of people for most of the day.

Coffee Lounge

The coffee lounge is extremely civilised and worthy of a paragraph to itself. The long corridor leading up to the lounge, flanked by the society notice-boards and auxiliary couches and tables is very pleasing, and there was even a lady selling coffee and food from a trolley. But why she does this when the main hatch within the lounge is open, and is conspicuous by her absence when the lounge facilities are closed, rather defeats my logic.

In the lounge itself the chairs are comfortable, the coffee quite good and relatively cheap, but the cups compensate for this. They were surely designed purely to irrigate the saucers. The paper cups are refreshingly combustible and the private sugar cubes are a nice touch. I did not sample the restaurant haute cuisine, so judgment must be reserved. While I was in the coffee lounge, I had some of the local university personalities pointed out to me. They did not seem to be doing wildly exciting things different from anyone else, but there were dark hints from my host. Next door in the annexe, a guy was playing a guitar, but he was wearing a tie and had short hair, so he just couldn't be for real. He was surrounded by a group of sweet-smiling, well-dressed girls, whom you never usually see outside lectures, or perhaps the week before exams, in the library. Some of the library staff came in and sat down within earshot. They showed amazing ignorance of the current campus controversy (social space), and proceeded to castigate "Brig," much to the amusement of the editor, who was sitting beside me. One begins to understand why the silent majority remains silent.

General Meeting

Later, I attended a meeting on social space in the main lecture theatre, which was warm, vast and characterless. It was very similar to one in my own university. The meeting was immaculately and democratically chaired by a

disarmingly articulate student, wearing amazing blue trousers. Though he spoke well and made his points clearly, I gathered he was saying nothing new. There were a few token interruptions and questions, which were brushed aside, occasionally accompanied by a censorious in-joke at the questioner's expense. The veteran left-winger previously referred to, attempted to stamp his authority on the meeting, by turning round from near the front, to address the assembled company rather than the chairman.

The attendance at the meeting seemed small — about seventy, but it did not seem committed. What is important is that it is almost always the same people who attend such meetings. There is a corresponding situation in Dundee, where it is said that two-thirds of the students don't care about apathy. (Thing about it).

Subcultures

Although there are only 600 students at Stirling at the moment, a total of nearly 3,000 is already planned for. It will be interesting to see if the breakdown of the student population will continue along existing lines with expended student numbers. The current groupings or subcultures can be divided into the workers, who are usually smartly and conventionally dressed and are essentially non-political, and the sportsmen headed usually by rugby players.

These groups represent the majority vacuum of opposition to the left, who are represented by the politicians, and representative hierarchy, passively supported by a few anarchist freaks. The latter three groups are in an extremely strong minority. All the in-jokes in "Brig" are about these self-perpetuating personalities. The groups co-exist, and to some extent are forced to mix, but it would appear to be difficult, though not impossible, to cross party lines.

I left Stirling, secure in the knowledge that the future of the university was secure, at least until the next confrontation.

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