

NYPIRG: Legitimate, Proper and Involved

By Brian Hasbrouck

This article is a reply to Gideon Isaac's January 28 viewpoint entitled "Condemning NYPIRG." I do not wish to take issue with each point of contention that Isaac raises regarding NYPIRG legitimacy. Rather, as an active member, I would like to correct some fundamental flaws in his conception of the philosophy and function of the New York Public Interest Research Group.

There is a question of whether it is proper for student funding to support an organization with a political purpose. This should certainly be a matter of primary concern to the students at Stony Brook and elsewhere who have

repeatedly supported NYPIRG funding through campus-wide referenda. Students should not take their financial support of NYPIRG indifferently and without scrutiny. The NYPIRG charter commits it to nonpartisan research and public advocacy. But it is solely through student participation that the organization arrives at a program of specific goals that carry out this philosophy.

Who is to say what constitutes the public interest? No one at NYPIRG would assert that the public interest is self-evident. What is self-evident, if one were to look at a roster of lobbyists in our state's capital, is that the minority interests of business and professional

organizations predominate. Public interest lobbyists and student interest lobbyists are all but unrepresented. It is through local support of NYPIRG chapters that a notion of public interest is promoted and translated into regionally coordinated research and lobby efforts.

Stepping on Toes

As much as NYPIRG would like to avoid stepping on toes, it is often difficult to act in the public interest without instigating controversy. Yes, NYPIRG does commit itself to political policy positions. Often students actively involved in NYPIRG disagree on policy positions the organization takes. But how can a public interest lobby function if it is not to take a position?

What sorts of public policy stands does NYPIRG take? Most don't seem very controversial at all. Being an organization run by students, NYPIRG has sponsored legislation supporting student voting rights and helped fund student voting court cases. Through a persistent effort NYPIRG helped pass the now famous "Truth in Testing" legislation that permits students to have access to scoring records of SAT and other standardized tests. NYPIRG has promoted legislation to give part-time students financial aid and a bill to ensure tuition deferrals so

that economic difficulties or financial aid delays will not prevent a student from registering.

Most NYPIRG sponsored legislation is not limited to student issues but serves the public interest at large. NYPIRG is concerned with such areas as consumer protection, environmental protection, public health, energy policy and election reform. To cite a few examples of NYPIRG sponsored projects: a bill to eliminate fraud and price gouging in the funeral business; a bill to permit "private right of action," the right of consumers to sue businesses in violation of deceptive practices and false advertising laws (currently only the state can do this); a bill to ensure adequate evacuation plans for "Three Mile Island" type nuclear accidents in our state; laws to ensure fairness in property value assessment for property tax purposes--the list goes on.

Some NYPIRG legislation is more controversial than the examples above. NYPIRG supports reform of marijuana laws. Some say this stand is immoral. NYPIRG doesn't wish to encourage marijuana use, but would not want to see a student spend five years in jail for simple possession of a small amount.

What Isaac fails to see is that

public interest advocacy can function without unanimous agreement on each and every policy stand. NYPIRG functions well because the need for students and consumers to be represented in our political process outweighs the problem that each student and consumer has somewhat divergent interests. On the Stony Brook campus, the function of NYPIRG is similar to the system of elected representative government in our country. Any student can attend NYPIRG meetings, publicized in press notices and posters, and vote to elect representatives to determine local policy and represent Stony Brook on the NYPIRG State Board.

Lastly, to counter a more slanderous claim, far from being reticent about its objectives, NYPIRG vigorously promotes its activity plans and policy goals. Activities on campus, such as the voter registration drive and energy teach-in, are self-evident. But anyone can come to the NYPIRG office in room 079 Student Union during normal business hours to learn of the lobby efforts, bill promotion work, and research that is being conducted throughout the organization.

(The writer is an undergraduate Computer Science major and a NYPIRG State Board Representative.)

Polity Perspective

Speaking of Students...

By Martha Ripp

Welcome back! I hope you had a great vacation. Here is what you missed.

After much time and effort the Commuter College contract has been signed enabling Commuter College to move from Gray College to the basement of the Union. The contract is valid until June 31 when the Faculty Student Association's (FSA) contract with New York State must be renewed. However, according to the contract, as long as FSA has the space, so will the Commuter College.

The flooding of a few buildings on campus, including five residential buildings and the Fine Arts Center occurred during intersession. Thanks to some fast and considerate Residence Hall Directors (RHD) there were many personal items saved. If you have any damage contact Residence Life or Polity.

The Coram Bus is now on a one month trial period to enable us to determine the number of people who utilize this service, in order to see if it warrants the approximate \$7,000 per semester expenditure. If you use it, let us know about it.

The Student Development Committee evaluated all the proposals submitted for the \$25,000. About 10 were selected, located throughout the campus, to discuss in further detail.

In the December issue of "By Way of Mouth," the following was stated: "Has your committee for corridor building decided how the \$100 (per hall) will be spent for your kitchen area? The Director of the Dormitory Cooking Program (John Williams) will be meeting with each building committee at the beginning of the Spring semester to discuss proposals for the spending of these allocated funds. Those kitchen areas where vandalism has taken place will be assessed the cost and this cost will be deducted from the \$100 allocated." I hope that this is a sincere effort; but, if John Williams has not gotten in touch with you then you get in touch with him - now. Any problems contact me at 6-3673.

Though it seemed to be a relatively quiet intersession, two very disturbing things happened. We were notified the third day of finals after all campus media ceased publication that the University decided to institute an 8 PM curfew prohibiting any unauthorized vehicle to enter the campus without prior authorization from Public Safety.

The second concerns the \$25,000 and the Commuter College. During the intersession, Marburger stated that the money was only to be used for social/recreational areas within residential buildings - not for Commuter College. This is not only unfair and discriminatory towards half of the Stony Brook student population but it further divides the campus community into commuters and residents instead of just fellow students.

Also, if the Commuter College did not move to the Union from Gray College, would it have been considered a residential social/recreational area? Is the Commuter College being separated from the rest of the campus community because they are moving to a better spot for both commuter and resident interaction? If so, is University President John Marburger willing to make an additional \$25,000 allocation to the other half of the student population?

On February 17 there will not only be Polity Elections but also the 3rd Town Meeting at 8 PM. The topic is Public Safety. For further information contact Polity at 6-3673. (The writer is Polity's Junior Class Representative.)

Victims of Fascism, Not Spies for It

By Simon Heller

Jerry Schechter has insulted not only the hostages and their families and friends, but has also managed to portray the United States as a modern day Nazi Germany or Stalinist Soviet Union ("Ex-Hostages: Heroes or Spies," Jan. 30). His remarks cry out for rebuke.

The U.S. "ruling class" and "rulers" remain, in letter and spirit, the people, not a mysterious band of wealthy men trying to thwart revolution by the masses. Whatever control the wealthy may have over this nation is due either to their wealth or to the unwillingness of other segments of the population to exercise their share of control. Furthermore, the admission of the Shah to New York was for medical treatment. Does Schechter propose that the Shah's cancer was also engineered by the "rulers" of the U.S., or could it have occurred naturally? Occam's razor dictates that we not invent unsubstantiated conspiracies to explain events explicable entirely without them.

The United States, with all its faults, is still the richest nation in the world, and still ranks first in Gross National Product. Pro-U.S. people are definitely not "wimps;" wimps are people who accuse people tortured by fanatical, fascist governments of being spies without having proof. Schechter seems to believe that the Iranian masses did not support the taking of the hostages,

violation of international law, or the Khomeini regime. Only a small minority of Iranians opposed the regime: many are here in the United States, many were executed by Khomeini's agents. The elected parliament in Iran prolonged the violation of international law and the inhumanity of the hostage taking, and this only serves to support the contention that Iranian popular sentiment stupidly supported these criminal acts.

Evil of Capitalism

At the conclusion of his "viewpoint," Schechter somehow expects his readership to understand the connection between the points he made previously and the "evil of capitalism." If there is evil, it is due to evil people, not to evil abstract economic systems which have absolutely nothing to do with the murder of black children or the Shah's torture devices. As evidence, I cite the non-Capitalist Stalin government, which killed millions of innocent people because they thought the wrong thoughts, practiced the wrong way of life, or wrote or spoke the wrong words. Evil has demonstrated itself to be independent of economic-theory affiliation. The ex-hostages were victims of a textbook example of fascism, and are heroes of a cause that includes the preservation of freedom, democracy, human rights, and of the nation whose evilness ranks among the lowest. (The writer is an undergraduate.)

Send all letters and viewpoints to Statesman,
room 058 in the Stony Brook Union