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OPTIONS

assembly member Josh Stirling '99. "Do I enjoy this anymore? Not really. I'm disillusioned as hell. Even at the college level, politics is a dirty game."

The coalition of Cornell Greens, labor activists, gay and lesbian students, Students Against Sweatshops, Justice for Cornell Workers, and other progressives first met to commiserate in late 1996. Frustrated with an "unresponsive" Student Assembly, they developed their own platform affirming feminism, diversity, student empowerment, education, and environmentalism. They called themselves Students United, pooled their resources (photocopying funds, voter support, even chalk for campaign messages scrawled across sidewalks), and set out to win every open seat in the March election.

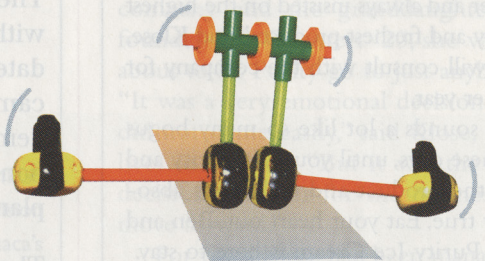
They came close, taking fourteen of the sixteen open seats and gaining a majority in the twenty-three-seat assembly. All four executive committee members were from Students United, including the assembly president. When unanimous votes became the norm, critics cried partisanship and claimed debate had been crushed by a political machine. "Anyone who was unaligned, the silent majority, was really swamped," says Stirling, who, with classmate Jeff Kozlow, founded Cornell Choice, a "non-partisan government watch-dog group," to pressure the assembly into restoring debate. Students United members claimed they were no different from the groups of friends who formed voting blocs in the past. "You always have people who vote together," says Raven Hall '00. "We became a target because we had a name."

On the Hill, student government exists to voice undergraduate interests and concerns to the administration. Every other year it allocates the Student Activities

Fee, a \$1.2 million fund collected from all undergraduates to support programs such as Cornell Cinema, student clubs, and the campus emergency medical service. Ultimately, much of the debate about Students United boiled down to the assembly's role on campus. Critics worried that the assembly had lost sight of student concerns like crowding in the dining halls, the new freshman housing plan, and the elimination of academic programs in its enthusiasm for legislation on sweatshop-produced products at the Campus Store and funding for a Cornell chapter of Ralph Nader's public interest group.

"It's nice to have resolutions about sweatshops," says Hall, who calls herself the dissenting voice of the assembly's executive committee. "But I heard a lot from students concerned about campus issues—the condition of Rand Hall, the exam schedule, and so on."

Rumors of ethical violations, collusion, and corruption circulated with each morning's *Sun*, and frustration with the assembly mounted throughout the year. When the student activity fee budgeting process began, critics charged that the appropriations com-



WALK MAN

ITS MAKINGS ARE HUMBLE, JUST A FEW PLASTIC toy parts and some odds and ends from the Human Power Lab, but it could lead to a robot out of *Star Wars*. Affectionately known as the Tinkertoy Walker, the six-inch-high gizmo mimics the human gait. It has no control system and can't stand still without falling down, but once it's launched down a slope, it strides jauntily on two legs. "We don't have a model yet that explains exactly why it works," says one of its creators, theoretical and applied mechanics lecturer Mike Coleman, PhD '97. In the more immediate future, the little walker may give the Slinky some competition. "But," says Coleman, "it's too finicky to market as a toy right now."