

EDITORIAL

Lots of action . . .

It's hard to write an editorial on something a lot of people don't seem to care too much about.

This week is the national week of action organized by the Canadian Federation of Students jointly with the Students' Union of Nova Scotia.

Organizers of events this week at Dalhousie have been extremely active in setting up a wide range of workshops, seminars, and events focussing on specific issues that should be of interest and concern to all students. Capping the week will be a raffle for the equivalent of one term's tuition.

But are any students concerned they will be spending an increasing amount for an education that is sure to erode in quality as the government continues to cut back its financial support?

Are students concerned that university education will become

more and more a privilege of the rich?

Is the lack of apparent concern a fault of the students or of the "student leaders"?

Although there isn't any great groundswell of political activity among the student body, the student leaders aren't doing anything to encourage one, either.

The national week of action is something the CFS has because they had one last year. The rest of the year, the organization is about as active as a parrot in a gilded cage.

Its press releases and pronouncements are cloaked in bureaucratic language. Its style is very 80s. It has forgotten what it it supposed to stand for.

It's about time students who are not student politicians got involved in student politics.

Toby Sanger



OPINION

SUNS for more than students

By **BARNEY SAVAGE**

This week is being organized as a National Week of Action by the Canadian Federation of Students and the Students' Union of Nova Scotia.

But do many students know what these groups do?

SUNS is focussing this week on the issue of summer employment (or unemployment) and has circulated a petition protesting the 57 per cent cut in provincial summer employment spending.

Since 1979, the Students' Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS) has been the only provincial organization which represents Nova Scotian university students. Most of the province's 20,000 university students are members. SUNS is recognized by the government and the general public as the sole legitimate representative of Nova Scotian students.

The membership of SUNS includes every student at campuses where the student council is a member of the organization. A membership fee of \$1.50 per student is used to cover the costs of the organization, which include a part-time Executive Officer.

SUNS conferences are held 5 times a year, where students from each member school get together to discuss issues and to determine policy and strategy. Once a year, an executive is elected which carries out much of the organization's work between conferences. However, the success and effectiveness of the organization depend, to a greater extent, on the work of individuals at each campus.

The two premises for the existence of SUNS are that there are specific student issues which deserve the attention of student leaders and that these issues can be responded to best by a single, unified voice for university students.

What are the issues? There are a great many issues which daily affect students in very tangible ways, but there are a small number of issue which impact on so many students in the province that they demand the constant attention of SUNS. Just over half of Nova Scotians are on student aid; this system is not meeting the realistic needs of Nova Scotians who wish to study at universities. The system allows students \$300 a month for the necessities of life, despite the fact that the average room in Halifax costs \$260 per month. That leaves the student in Halifax a daily student aid allotment of \$1.33 for food.

Summer employment is also an important element in determining student resources. In 1984, an election year, the province spent over \$14 million on summer employment. By the summer of 1986, that number was down an incredible 57 per cent, to \$6 million. We have been attempting to persuade the provincial government to reinstate their 1984 commitment — we will probably get the answer in early February.

A quality education is impossible without the adequate funding of universities. That is why SUNS makes an annual submission to the Finance Committee of the Maritimes Provinces Higher Education Commission, in the hope that we can have some effect on the MPHEC funding recommendation.

Related to the issue of funding is the question of differential fees, which we feel are regressive, ridiculous, and counter-productive. Foreign students put much more into Nova Scotia's universities and Nova Scotia's economy than they remove, and differential fees mean that we are threatened with a serious drop in their numbers.

The tactics that SUNS employ are as diverse as the issues themselves. Representatives are in con-

stant contact with government officials, particularly in the Department of Education, to ensure that students are not forgotten in the process of governing. We try to maintain contact with the media, to make sure that student concerns are placed highly on the public policy agenda.

Occasionally, SUNS will use direct political pressure tactics, usually when the government is acting completely unreasonable, unresponsive, and irresponsible. Such tactics include the Summer Employment petition, which was distributed on campuses this week, and the march to Province House to protest against the adoption of the Royal Commission on Post-Secondary Education.

Apart from the political actions of SUNS, the organization is the only official forum in which the elected representatives of Nova Scotian students can meet to discuss both student issues and the running of individual student unions.

SUNS is not just for students. When students win changes they are not the only ones who benefit. In all SUNS campaigns, SUNS pays special attention to those who are not attending university, and tries to uncover any systematic attempt to block equal access to our universities.

Nova Scotians have made a huge public investment in universities, and if groups of people are denied access, then the system is unfair. In addition, university education reaps more than individual benefits. When Dalhousie graduates a medical doctor, when extensive research is done to help us better understand our past, when new and better ways to teach are discovered, these things benefit us all.

SUNS maintains that students, and access to students, must be a part of that plan.

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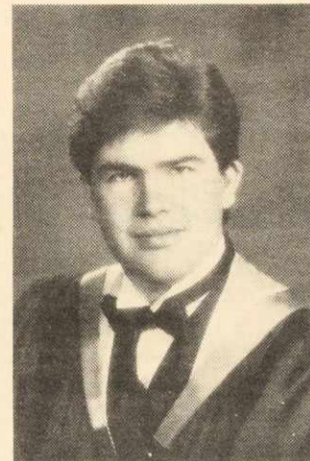
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