

Furor over fed cuts

By DAVID OLIE

THE SHOCK OF FEDERAL finance minister Michael Wilson's announcement of \$6 billion in cuts to Established Programs Financing (EPF) is causing ripples in Nova Scotia and nationwide.

Wilson confirmed rumours of the massive cuts two weeks ago. EPF, or transfer payments, is the

money given to the provinces to help fund health care and education.

The Nova Scotia department of education stands to lose \$25 million if the cutbacks go through.

"If we lose \$25 million out of that system," provincial minister of education Terry Donahoe says, "the system just falls apart. There's no question about that." Donahoe made the remarks to *the Chronicle Herald*.

Donahoe says the only way the system can be maintained is to take the money from other areas of the provincial budget, though he is uncertain what those areas might be. "We just simply have to find those dollars," he says.

Donahoe says he plans to fight hard to maintain education funding at current levels. "I'm not

going to be privy to a series of decisions that I believe is going to result in the system falling apart," he says.

The minister says he is still in favour of an \$80 million construction program for the universities funded by the province, in spite of the proposed cuts.

The Gazette was unable to reach Donahoe for further comments.

The Students' Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS) has come out swinging against the federal plan.

"The students of the province must be not only aware of, but ready to fight the wide-sweeping changes that are being proposed for the education system in this country," says James LeBlanc, chair of SUNS.

"With the federal government talking about \$6 billion in cuts and our minister of education making statements that the education system in Nova Scotia will fall apart as a result of those cuts, once again students have to step in and make both levels of government understand the importance of education to the future of Canada," says LeBlanc.

LeBlanc says the cuts will be a major topic of discussion at this

weekend's SUNS conference.

Professors at Nova Scotia universities are also angry about the federal proposal.

The cuts constitute "an attack on the quality of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia," says Om Karma, president of the Nova Scotia Confederation of University Faculty Associations.

Kamra is particularly worried about the precedent that will be set by the cuts.

"In the last few years, we have been able to point to the federal government's increasing support for post secondary education as a model the province should follow, but the province has chosen to take a free ride," says Kamra. "Now the federal government plans punitive action against the provinces and the universities will end up being hurt even worse."

Kamra says, "During the election last year Mr. Mulroney's party said, 'We are committed to sustaining the current federal financial commitment, according to the formula set out in the 1977 Agreement.' This will be another broken promise for the Progressive Conservative government."

Meanwhile, the federal government appears confident the provinces will be able to deal with the cuts.

"I am quite confident that the matter will be resolved, as will other questions relating to education," says secretary of state Benoit Bouchard.

"We make the transfer payments to the provinces, and they make the decisions," says Bouchard. "We cannot guarantee, as the federal government, that these funds will be increased or reduced."

Bob Richardson, an aide to Ontario's colleges and universities minister, disagrees. He says if the cuts mean the quality of education goes down, it will be the federal government's fault.

"Education comes under provincial jurisdiction but the money comes from the federal government," says Richardson. "So any cut is going to affect the quality of education."

Nationwide, the provincial contribution to post-secondary education has fallen from about 30 percent to 20 percent since 1977.

With files from Canadian University Press.

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Cuts may mean tuition hikes

By JANICE TIBBETTS

NOVA SCOTIAN STUDENTS could be facing radical tuition fee increases if the federal government follows through with its plan to reduce financial aid to the provinces.

And Dalhousie students, despite their agreement with the Board of Governors to hold tuition fee hikes to a maximum four percent, are no exception.

"I think the province realizes that universities are already on a bare-bone budget," says Mary Moore Uhl, assistant to the presi-

dent of finance and planning at Mount St. Vincent University. "Funding is so low now that there isn't any room to cut back. We have nowhere to turn."

If universities suffer a cutback, says Uhl, then raising tuition at the Mount is an alternative that will have to be considered.

"If the government cuts back on financial aid, it would have to compensate in another way, such as giving grants directly to students," says Uhl.

Tuition fee increases are also a hot topic at St. Mary's University. "Raising tuition at St. Mary's would definitely have to be consi-

dered," says the president of the university, Dr. Kenneth Ozmon. "Tuition is the only source of income we have other than government funding."

St. Mary's has reservations about raising the tuition too much, says Ozmon, because returns could diminish if enrollment declines. This has not been the case in the past, he says.

At Dalhousie, where students voted last year to trade a \$750,000 gift to the Campaign for Dalhousie for an agreement to restrict tuition fee increases, prospects may not be much brighter.

In the case of "a significant change in the source of funding," says DSU president Catherine Blewett, the university is entitled to renege on the deal to control tuition fee hikes.

"Tuition cannot be raised more than roughly four percent," says Dr. Alan Sinclair, VP Academic and Research. "However, if the cuts were drastic enough, both the Board of Governors and students would have to reconsider the agreement."

Blewett said earlier this year she doubts the University would risk damaging public relations by backing out of the agreement.

Dalhousie's ability to cope with a decrease would depend on how much early warning it gets, says Sinclair.

"The less time we have to react, the more trouble we're in," says Sinclair. "Unfortunately the federal government doesn't take this into account."

"I'm surprised it's happening so soon."

As well as the timing, the magnitude of the financial loss concerns Sinclair.

"If the cuts are small enough we could probably eat them up somehow, but if it's a large amount we're in big trouble," says Sinclair.

Sinclair doubts that a decline in enrollment would result from a tuition hike, if Dalhousie were to decide to go for fee increases.

St. Mary's council returns to SUNS

HALIFAX (CUP) — At an angry and tense student union meeting, the Saint Mary's University student association decided that it was a member of the Student's Union of Nova Scotia after all.

Mark Bower, president of SMUSA, told Canadian University Press two weeks ago that a referendum the union sponsored showed SMU students want out of SUNS.

He said the union would "probably stay out of SUNS this year and take the time to re-evaluate our role in the organization."

The council disagreed with Bower's interpretation of the referendum results, but just barely.

On a motion to declare the referendum invalid because it did not garner the 10 percent student response the union's constitution says is necessary, the council split.

Seven members voted in favour of the motion disallowing the question's results, and seven thought the results should stand.

The SMU council chair, Colin MacMillan, cast the deciding vote, in favour of the motion, for "constitutional reasons," he said.

In the Sept. 30/Oct. 1 election, 284 SMU students voted to withdraw from SUNS, and 133 wanted to remain a part of the province-wide student lobby organization.

Some SMUSA councillors wanted to take the question back to the students, including Bower.

He urged the council to consider an early November referendum.

"We haven't signed a contract with SUNS so in my mind we aren't members," said Bower.

Bower's suggestion was narrowly defeated, but his opinion about SUNS hasn't changed.

Before the council overturned the referendum, Bower said SUNS was an ineffective lobbying force and not financially accountable.

"We came back after a summer of looking at SUNS, and we weren't impressed. I don't think we should lay out any money," he said.

Peter Murtagh, SUNS vice president of communications, said SMUSA dealt Bower a major political upset. "They usurped his authority, although I suspect it may be on good grounds," said Murtagh.

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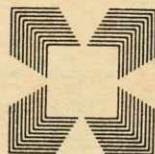
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