

EDITORIAL

By Karen Burgess

The Bubble Gum Brigade rides again. No wonder the BoG has demonstrated such confidence in the SU this year. What is that you're playing boys and girls? Hopscotch? Four squares? Oh... hot potato.

Yes, the tender digits of the naive yet beneficent council have been scorched, and they have dropped the ball. The SU council has dissolved the Student Union Emergency Loan Fund which it established last year. It has given the funds involved to the university, which will administer the funds to students who need assistance in paying their second-term tuition. (See page one for details.)

This is nice, but wait a minute. Why was there an SU Emergency Loan fund to begin with? Oh, I remember, because the University's Emergency Loans were tied up with all the bureaucratic, necessities which made them inaccessible to students facing emergency situations. I believe that the situation was very aptly summed up in a Bruns article on the issue last year: "if the student was eligible for university assistance, they wouldn't have needed the loan."

The SU's loans were interest-free for two months, and would be subject to a monthly interest penalty if not repaid, but not much was said about what might happen after that. The words "trust" and "faith" were thrown around a lot though.

More importantly, while the Student Union admitted that because they had no fail-safe there was a risk involved in administering loans, it was a risk that they would be willing to take for the good of the students. Wow, what a nice, beneficent, generous, caring, kinder, gentler Union. What? Did I hear someone say "Collections agency"? And all of a sudden, the collections process is too "time consuming."

Under the new changes, the loans would be administered by the Financial Aid Office. Like UNB's loans, the SU's would be interest-free until a student's graduation, and, according to the handout given to councillors at Wednesday's meeting, "marks can be withheld as a form of *repayment insurance*."

There seems to be a fundamental flaw in the logic here. On the one hand council wants money to provide funds in emergencies—*money for students, administered by students*—that couldn't be accommodated by University Admin. Now, they're handing it all to that same body. The SU Council has stipulated that the loan amount will increase with tuition, and that there will be no consideration of academic standing, but this, boys and girls, is still *money for students administered by administrators*. The question here is what makes this loan any different? I didn't hear any answers to this question at Wednesday's meeting. But then, nobody from council asked.

I have no problem with the SU admitting its defeat and gracefully conceding the loans to someone more equipped to handle them, but there is a disturbing pattern emerging here—a bottom line, one might even say.

Witness President Elect Estabrooks' response when asked if the SU was planning to provide subsidies for positions in the new daycare. The answer was no, it would not be, because they didn't want to "take money from the poor to

give to the poor."

For a council which originally proposed raising student fees by five dollars per student next year, and has asked for \$25 per student for the SUB expansion, and \$100 per student for the health plan (plus the \$25 which we still have to pay out to the Admin), this statement seems a bit strange. These students, presumably, are "poor" too.

The SU's about-face on the emergency loans administration issue may have everything to do with the tough economic times, but it seems unlikely that a year and a half is long enough to make a program such as this work in any climate. The council must recognise that such initiatives have to take time; after all, they are shelling out indeterminate amounts of money to take over a pub which was never successful to begin with, and have gone on record as saying they don't expect to break even for at least three years.

A cynic might say that this is because any business venture is, in the long run, hoped to be lucrative. That cynic might also point out that loans to people who are in desperate need won't make anyone a profit. While I can't believe that the council is guilty of such vulgar motives, it will lose face over giving this program over to the university, because it was intended to be an alternative to the university's loans. Perhaps the 'time' constraints which supposedly pose such a problem would not have been so great next year with the hiring of the new General Manager for the SU. (The monetary ones certainly would be, though, especially considering that the GM, who's sole duty would be to take over some of the "administrative headaches" currently handled by the Prez and his VP's, will be paid a \$30,000 salary out of fees collected from students.)

The main problem is that there's no middle ground. Perhaps it could have worked better with the new managerial position, but perhaps they would have lost more money. Perhaps it could not have been made more efficient. These prospects certainly haven't stopped them from funding Campus Entertainment.

The swing from extreme naivete to litigious penny-pinching is just too much. The Bubble-Yum Bunch seems to want it all—on the one hand they gave out loans to *everyone* who asked this term, and yet they think they have to get tough now. This whole dynamic is doomed to fail: it's Jeckyl and Hyde, cotton candy with ground glass, warm fuzzies with teeth.

If any controls had been implemented to begin with, the program might have proceeded with more success, but the University wouldn't offer to withhold marks for those defaulting on SU loans. The SU still chose to play by their own rules, and they found out that administering the program wasn't all swings and recess. In this case their reaction was to decide that a program which was implemented solely to provide a student touch to an inadequate (in some situations) university program, was too much of a burden. Providing further funds for UNB to administer to students is admirable, but its a long way from the altruistic motivations which spurred the program's initiation. One can only hope that in the future the bottom line will not always be the party line.

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MUGWUMP BY JAMES ROWAN

Where to begin... this is one of my favorite columns of the entire year, the column after second reading of the budget. The budget meeting is one of only two I show up for, along with the honoraria meeting—I always show up for the bloodsports.

This column is difficult to write, because I can't really remember in any great detail what happened—after five and a half hours of circular, often incoherent argument (debate would often be too kind), I had lost my will to live, let alone to write this column.

At any rate, some surprising things happened. First of all, Larry Fitzgerald (Pillar guy) presented a well-thought out, well written, thoughtfully considered proposal; it went through. (I don't know which is more surprising, the thoughtfulness of the proposal or its success—but kudos, Larry. You may have nailed our staff, but you did it in an honorable way and fair way—if the Other category had been left at \$6500 or so, I would supported you.) Other Councillors verged on total incoherence, their arguments essentially coalescing into a general mentality of "Kill them all and let God sort it out!" or rather, "Cut them all and let the General Administrator figure it out!"—with the occasional Ultramar analogy.

Summer Executives—always a contentious issue—came up again. If we're talking about value for money, summer executives can be the single best outlay of money that the SU makes (or the worst). As dedicated volunteers, our executive make amazing contributions to the students. As paid employees who don't have to worry about starvation or academics, they can do tremendous amounts of work. Can they really find sixteen weeks of work to do? If they can't, why do we have their positions at all? We've had some of these positions on the books for

Budget time— my favorite bloodsport

decades—if they finished their work in sixteen weeks or less, the last twenty-seven VP-Externals have been really successful in pulling the wool over the students' eyes.

The main argument seemed to be the effect of the new General Administrator, seen as the great cost saver in the sky who will singlehandedly do the job of two or three vice-presidents. Look folks, this person is going to have better things to do during the first summer than worrying about which students are putting in the most work and who is fifteen minutes late getting back from lunch—things like getting the now SU-owned *Pub in the SUB* and Health Plan up and running. If he or she spends time doing administrative work that could best have been handled by a VP (say, the VP-Finance), that is time that isn't going towards the most important part of his or her job—ensuring that the Pub in the SUB doesn't become the biggest financial sinkhole in the history of the Student Union.

There are legitimate concerns—centred around getting another member of the executive who uses the position for a free summer job and then quits, leaving their replacement four months of work (Whoah, take the money and run...)—despite having had four months of being paid forty hours a week to do the work. If this becomes the rule rather than an absolutely appalling exception, there will have to be changes to the summer employment system, but until there is a definite problem, let them do their job. And if they don't, then my successors will let you know about it—that's why we're here.

Still, with five summer executives upstairs, I wonder why there isn't even one summer editor at the Brunswickan, or a paid position to help in the administration of the paper...ah well, that's the budgeting process.



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