

The Dalhousie Gazette

VOLUME 108

SEPTEMBER 8, 1975

NUMBER 1

Annual Housing Crisis Hits Metro

Throughout the year Halifax has a serious housing problem. Each September it reaches crisis proportions as incoming students face the prospect of living in Dartmouth or Sackville or paying exorbitant prices for the few available dives within the Dalhousie area.

This year rents have climbed 10-15% beyond last year's prices. A one-bedroom unfurnished apartment rents from \$180/mo. to \$285/mo.; a single unfurnished room without kitchen privileges can fetch as much as \$130/mo. While this situation exists, Dalhousie University has adopted a very irresponsible attitude. During the past

average (because Halifax is all rock and because of excessively strict city building regulations). For example, in Halifax since January, there have been only 12 housing starts. It is interesting to note that during the same period 90 demolition permits have been issued by the city.

Dalhousie University, itself, is able to accommodate approximately 30% of its full-time student body. This is about par with other Canadian Universities but is well below par with other Universities in Nova Scotia and Halifax. Both St. Mary's and Mount St. Vincent are able to provide on-campus accommodation for all those students who want to live on-campus. In fact, there exists the ludicrous situation where St. Mary's is accommodating student enrolled at Dalhousie. Dalhousie has attempted to increase its on-campus accommodation capacity by purchasing Studley Apartments on LeMarchant Street and International House on South Street. Also Dalhousie has increased the housing capacity of Howe Hall by

Dalhousie Housing Office



crowding three people in tiny two man rooms and by crowding two people in tinier one-man rooms.

A study by the Residence Planning Committee in 1974 revealed

that the inability of the University to meet students housing demands had a direct effect on enrollment. Nearly 33% of non-metro first year

Cont'd on page 2



summer, the Administration of the University has pursued a policy of turning students out of Dalhousie-owned houses and converting the space into faculty offices.

Why are rents so high and why is the vacancy rate in Halifax only .5%? (The vacancy rate must reach 5% before there is any sort of consumer choice.) The principal reason is that tight money and high mortgage rates have seriously retarded construction of new housing. Although this is a cross-Canada phenomenon, it is particularly serious in Halifax, where construction costs are well above

Funding late

Students who have not yet received notice from the Student Aid office on this year's grant should not panic says Gerald Knickle, Director of Student Aid. Because of the late changes made in this year's program early applications for aid have had to be reassessed more than once. Late applications are being processed now but are behind schedule.

Mr. Knickle said the delay on processing applications will last for about six weeks but officials are doing all they can to speed up the operation. Extra staff has been hired to help clear the backlog and work is progressing as fast as possible.

Students should keep their inquiries to the Student Aid Office to a minimum if they wish to receive their loans as soon as possible. Large numbers of inquiries and students visiting the office on Fenwick St. are contributing to the slowdown in processing applications.

The problems at the Student Aid office will be straightened out within the next six weeks assures the Student Aid Director so students should have a little patience.

STUDENT AID

Living Allowance Cut

by Roger Metcalfe

Shortly after the last academic year ended the Nova Scotia Student Aid Program for the year 1975-76 was announced. There was little fanfare about it so many, if not most, students are probably unaware that changes have been made which might drastically affect their future as students. The Aid program was cut back to the point where many students dependent on government financial assistance to complete their education might be forced to leave school this year.

Under the old program students living off campus were allowed a living allowance of \$40 per week for 35 weeks, the length of the academic year. The new program cut the allowance period from 35 to 32 weeks. The government's rationale was that this was a more accurate assessment of the time students spent in school. This is true if one subtracts both the Christmas and spring breaks from the academic year, but for purposes of rent and food students still have costs to meet during those periods.

Students' summer savings contributions were raised by 20% despite the fact summer jobs were harder to come by this year than in previous years. Parents who received cost-of-living wage increases over the past year were also put in a position where they would be expected to contribute more to their dependent children's education. Parental contributions are based on income brackets, number of dependents, etc. but little or no regard is given to the effect of inflation on the average family's income. A family who might have received a 2% increase in wages over the past year could find itself in a higher income bracket for Student Aid purposes and thus expected to contribute substantially more to their child's education this year, even though they have no more buying power

than they had last year.

Until the new program was devised there existed a Student Aid Appeals Board which handled all appeals from students or parents on a student's grant. The Appeals Board was abolished as a austerity measure and appeals must now be made to the Director of Student Aid who makes the original decision on the amount a student receives.

The changes in the Student Aid Program were based on a report done on Student Aid for the N.S. Government by a Toronto Consulting Firm, Peter Bernard & Associates. The report, more commonly known as the Yuill Report, was neither made public nor available to Student Aid officials.

Among the changes which were not made were: a more realistic assessment of living allowances for students not in residence, book allowances accurately reflecting true costs and a higher miscellaneous allowance.

Shortly after the new program was approved an ad hoc committee was formed at the Dalhousie Student Union. This committee was composed mainly of Dalhousie Students but representatives of the other Student Unions in the Province were invited to join. The committee was formed to examine the Student Aid Program in depth and to pressure the government for changes. The committee members were concerned that students would be forced to quit school half way through this academic year because of extremely low student loans.

Using available statistics on last year's program and taking this year's changes into account the committee found that students in Nova Scotia would get on the average \$200 or \$300 less this year than last year. Considering that tuition, books, student fees, residence rates and food prices have all

risen sharply over the past year the committee felt its worst fears would be confirmed by Christmas.

An intensive campaign was waged in the local press to get the government to make some changes before the fall term began. \$6.1 million had been allotted by the Legislature in the spring to Student Aid but the government actually only intended to spend about \$4 million. The committee contended since the money was there it should be spent on students. An aid program which forced students to quit school and lose all academic accreditation was worse than no program at all.

It was pointed out that Welfare recipients actually are allowed more for food and rent than students. Further, the amount students were being allowed for food was lower than what the Canada Food Guide states is needed to feed a single adult. Not only was the government of Nova Scotia denying students bursary funding but the assessment methods denied most students access to the \$400 increase in Canada Student Loans passed last March by the Federal Government.

In late August the government announced it had reassessed the Student Aid Program and would make certain changes. Parental contributions were lowered and the miscellaneous allowance was increased from \$11.50 a week to \$13.50. The basic complaints of the committee regarding the unrealistic amount allowed for food and rent and the cut in the assessment period from 35 weeks to 32 weeks were ignored by the government. Dependent students, however, will fare slightly better under the changed program. Independent and married students still face a critical financial situation this year, as will many dependent students forced to pay exorbitantly high rents.