

# Report rips students

By CATHERINE BLEWETT

AFTER SPEAKING WITH several students and attending many forums on the Royal Commission on Post-secondary Education, I have come to several conclusions about the report and its implications for the future of post-secondary education.

The question of accessibility, while of great importance to students, was only given three pages of consideration in the commission's report. There was a total of 400 pages. I hope it is not an indication of the government's intention in that area.

Clearly, one of the commissions' terms of reference was to determine present and probably future needs for post-secondary education in Nova Scotia. In securing an education for students in the future the commission was also charged with finding sources of funding to support those needs. One of the acknowledged targets at to supply more dollars for education are the students.

The commissioners, citing students as the main beneficiaries of their education, recommended that students contribute more to the cost of running a university. Thirty per cent of the operating cost of education is the recommended amount students should fund. The Commission cites that currently students only pay approximately fifteen per cent of the cost. What they manage to exclude in their calculations is that students currently pay an additional eleven per cent of university income through subsidiary operations.

Therefore, the amount which the commission recommends students should contribute is very close to the amount which students already do contribute. Does this mean that the commission

would concede that students already provide the recommended portion of university income?

Students are also concerned with the specific recommendations which deal with tuition differences for foreign students and Nova Scotian students.

Recommendation thirty-six applies to foreign students. It states that students should pay the full instructional costs associated with their programme except for students from countries defined by OECD as the twenty-five least developed nations. This is curious because the report recognizes that differential fees are detrimental.

Without proper levels of assistance, students will have difficulty paying fifty per cent of the cost of their instruction, let alone those who will, by virtue of their nationality, have to assume 100 per cent of the cost of their education.

All of the recommendations, which deal with students' tuition, have the potential-if implemented—to seriously impair students' accessibility to post-secondary education.

The commission does move into a discussion of students' support as it recommends the creation of an **Educational Opportunity Fund**. The fund is intended to provide loan-only assistance for students. The Bursary element is to be eliminated.

Students are concerned about the prospect of having to mortgage their future to have access to post-secondary education. The creation of the opportunity fund alone will not address that concern.

Currently the bursary system entails an appeal mechanism which allows need to be calculated in individual cases. The

Commission perhaps could have been clearer about students'

access to such appeal process, if indeed it will continue to exist under this plan. There was also no discussion about the maximum debt load a student can incur.

While a loan-only scheme will provide funds for most students if they meet the criteria for attending university, it may seriously impair access to further education for students from low-income backgrounds. Students from such financial circumstances will be hesitant to undertake such a large debt load, and it is most unfortunate that university entrance will be based on financial, rather than intellectual ability.

Perhaps it would have been constructive on the part of the commission to recommend that, if implemented, the opportunity fund could work in conjunction with the Bursary fund ensuring low-income students access to university.

The commission does attempt to make the impact of a loan-only system more palatable for students by introducing an income-contingent repayment plan. Similar to the MacDonald Commission's recommendation, this appears to be designed to make up for the elimination of the Bursary system.

However, the province could afford to be more generous with the proposed loan scheme. If the system is approved the provincial commitment to education will be reduced. With the federal government reducing its support for post-secondary education it is certainly disappointing to see the provincial government curtailing its support as well.

For example, we are being told that tuition may double. This will not happen but they obviously plan to increase tuition by a substantial amount. They may increase it by 15, 30 or 50%. What I'm worried about is a large increase in tuition and the students feeling as though they have won a victory. (at least it's not a 100% increase). The reality of the situation is that we pay higher tuition than anyone else in the country. We must demand lower tuition. For starters, we should demand equality with Quebec. Then maybe, we will ask

for equality with some of the poor countries of the world where post-secondary education is free.

The right wing preys on what they see as weak sectors of society. The unemployed, the pensioners, the students, etc. They haven't yet learned that students can become very powerful when it is necessary. They must forget the student movement of the 60's.

Well, it's up to us, the students. We can stop them and we will stop them. It's just a matter of doing it. So let's do it. Let's get militant.

Archie Kennedy

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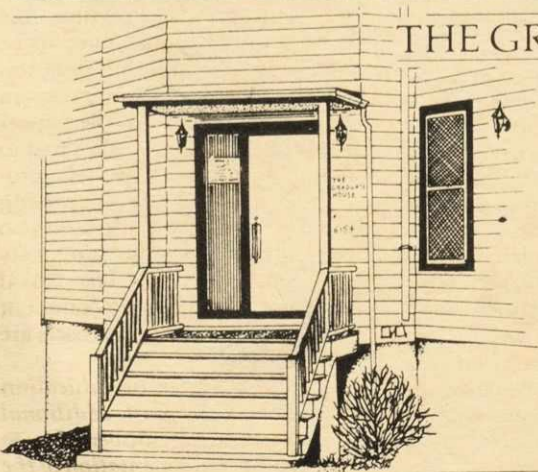
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## Letters

### Militant ink

To the editor,

The McLellan Commission report on post-secondary education is an attempt to define the battleground between students and the government.



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