

Student aid still needs review

Last week Youth Minister Brenda Robertson in an announcement almost as generous and humane as a shrivelled prune told New Brunswickers that yes, the nice Big Government had reconsidered its student aid program, and was going to add a whopping \$1.4 million to provincial bursary program.

The new money would be put to good use, she announced, when the province lowered its \$1,400 "base loan requirement" to \$1,100. Before, students had to first borrow \$1,400 before the province stepped in with any additional funds. Now you borrow \$1,100, and presto, you start getting a bursary.

It all depends on individual need, or so they say.

Since the announcement, several people have called on the government to review still further the student aid program. Through this editorial, we do so now.

The need for revision of the program is evident.

First: Last month, when the student aid program was on every major newscast and in every major newspaper, Mrs. Robertson said that if the bursary program were changed, then it would first have to provide more money for the poorer students. The program she unveiled last Friday does no such thing, and leaves the very poor students - granted a small percentage of the population - in the same position as before. They still end up borrowing first \$1,100, getting a bursary of \$700, and then an additional loan of \$300 for a total of

\$2,100. No difference in Mrs. Robertson's New Deal there, is there?

Second: The program proposed by Mrs. Robertson comes nowhere near the requests made by the New Brunswick Union of Students over a month ago. The students were asking for a base loan of \$500, with 60 percent of the remaining need filled by a bursary and the rest by loan. The NBUS said that this type of program would bring New Brunswick students closer to the position held by their counterparts in other provinces. But even their proposal was not consistent with programs elsewhere. Indeed, there is a different program for each and every province. Some sort of Canada-wide consistency is in the best interests of national unity. Mrs. Robertson has stated so herself.

Third: Student aid is supposed to be dispensed on the basis of individual need. Words are always good, but in actual fact it is not so. There are several arbitrary figures set up for assessing a student's need. Students are not considered individually until much later - October in fact - when they are allowed to appeal. A proposal by UNB SRC President Roy Neale that the province be divided into five districts, each with its own loans review board, is a valid one. Neale has proposed that the four member boards be comprised of two students and two representatives of the Department of Youth. Although there will be foreseeable problems in setting

up such a program, it bears looking into.

Finally, in whatever review is undertaken, student views must be taken into full account. The government in the past has shown that it is not prepared to do this - remember the bursary was cut in half in the spring without the government so much

as asking us how we felt on the matter.

Clearly, Mrs. Robertson and her department are going to have to show a greater capability for listening, rather than dictating. If not, a reference to Mrs. Robertson by the Daily Gleaner as being Canada's first woman Prime Minister will have been well off the mark.

Downtown housing deplorable

The UNB Senate has just accepted, in principle, a proposal for more Student Housing. A lot of talk has taken place in recent years regarding the shortage of student housing in the Fredericton area. Now it seems we might be getting some long awaited action.

Right now the Senate is thinking in terms of building a few apartment blocks, above Montgomery Street, for married students. At a future date they plan to have single accommodation there also.

So, the Senate thinks it's a good idea. But when, if ever, will the buildings be available? How many more years must

students in Fredericton be forced to fall prey to local landlords?

Many local residents have discovered a clever way of making lots of money by doing virtually nothing. Simply get hold of an old house, put in as many beds as it will hold and as few other pieces of ancient furniture as possible. Then fill it with as many students as possible and charge them anywhere from \$10 to \$20 a week. And that's just for rooms! Many apartment dwellers in this city receive similar treatment.

The problem is that the students are virtually forced to rent such places as there is absolutely nowhere else to go.

The students have waited too long for improved housing conditions in the city. Now that the Senate has come up with what they feel is a viable alternative to living "downtown", let us hope that they get moving quickly on the idea.

Letters to the editor are welcomed, but writers must remember to sign their names. If requested, the names will be withheld.

FEEDBACKFEEDBAC

Dear Sir:

I wish to thank you and commend you for the excellent first edition which you and a handful of dedicated people have put out.

Of extreme interest and importance was the Senate story on Housing. That is the type of thing I was talking about when I mentioned increased campus coverage. That particular story

showed depth and competent reporting in a field which has been left unattended for too long. I extend personal thanks for NBUS coverage and personal treatment in your editorial. We got off on the right foot and it should be easy to keep going in the same manner.

Sincerely,
Roy A. F. Neale
SRC President

BRUNSWICKAN

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