

# EDITORIAL

## Student Movement coming of age

Tuesday night's question and answer period in the Green Room with Education Minister Terry Donahoe may not alter by one iota the level of funding the government allocates to higher education in Nova Scotia, but it was promising nonetheless. Donahoe, a consummate politician, came out looking less hardline than the Gazette usually portrays him. More important, with their incisive but level-headed questions, student politicians from Dalhousie and the Student Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS) displayed an unprecedented degree of awareness and credibility. The Nova Scotia student movement, it seems, is finally coming of age.

About three weeks earlier in a debate in the same room involving MLA Ron Giffin, Dalhousie President Andrew MacKay, ex-DFA President Robert Rodger and Student Union President Gord Owen, the student movement appeared to fall flat on its face. Owen's presentation was unfocused and uninspiring and student questions from the floor had no more pluck than a bowl full of wet noodles. Tuesday night was different.

Owen, for one, came out punching. After Donahoe had made his opening lecture, Owen presented him with 400 postcards protesting declining funding and tuition hikes that had been collected in a six hour period at Dalhousie. "It is important for you to realize that insufficient funding to university will inevitably mean... a decline in the quality of education... (while) tuition fee increases will inevitably lead to a decline in accessibility," he said. These policies are "misguided and short-sighted", he said, reading aloud from a postcard which succinctly encapsulates some of the students' major grievances toward the government's present policy on post-secondary education. He went on to justify his claims with statistics from this year's MPHEC report. So much for the waffling of January!

Dalhousie Student Council member and SUNS representative Peter Rans captured the limelight, however, when he interrogated Donahoe over his appointment of two "student representatives" to government committees on student-aid without consulting or even informing SUNS, the democratically elected representatives of Nova Scotia students. Donahoe did the nearest thing to admitting he was wrong when he answered that he would "have to take the full shot" from Rans and perhaps he had "blown it". He then promised (and we advise all students to clip this historic quote from the paper) that he "will not make future appointments without consulting SUNS." Victory! Of sorts anyway.

Donahoe later received a wicked

tongue-lashing from Rans when he refused to ask the two student appointees to resign from their positions in order to be reviewed by SUNS.

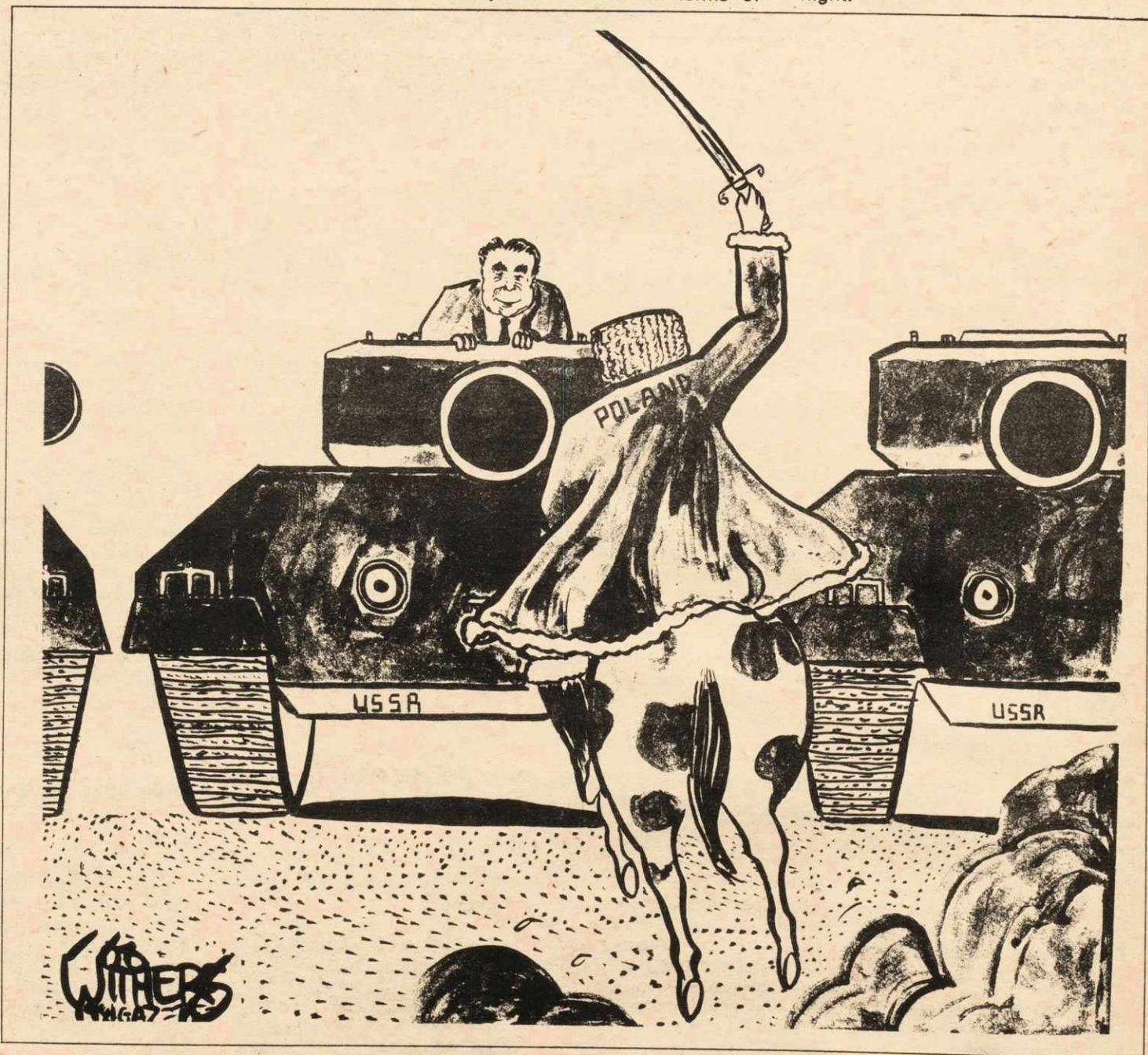
Despite the many excellent questions posed by the student politicians, they still have a ways to go before they can trip up a politician like Donahoe. The allegation that the province receives more from the feds for higher education than it actually spends on it was torn apart in a few easy blows. Neither were students able to provide arguments to show higher education should be any more of a priority for the government than hospitals, nursing homes, the fisheries, small businesses, or any of the other areas where their money is spent. These arguments certainly exist, at least to some extent, but SUNS certainly hasn't mastered

them.

What it comes down to is that SUNS is going to have to further solidify its position in the province by settling down to some serious, pragmatic politics. Sporadic campaigns launched a couple of months before the government's funding announcements are not going to be enough to win student demands. Sex, drugs, rock and roll might provide some student support for SUNS, but it won't make for support in public and government eyes. SUNS needs a well-articulated educational philosophy based upon comprehensive research and study into the state of and the desirable goals for higher education in Nova Scotia. And this, as other provincial organizations have discovered, only comes after the necessary commitment in terms of

time and resources has been provided.

As SUNS continues to mature it will discover, just like the labour movement, that its constituents are not always in opposition to one another. There is some room for tripartism in student politics. Through sitting on government boards, if Donahoe's promise is kept, student representatives will provide government with input which will better enable it to profit from its programs while at the same time better benefitting its student recipients. Student and government interests will not always be in harmony, however. In that case a solid Student Union of Nova Scotia will be able to provide a strong, credible opposition to it, some of which we saw on Tuesday night.



### the Dalhousie Gazette

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