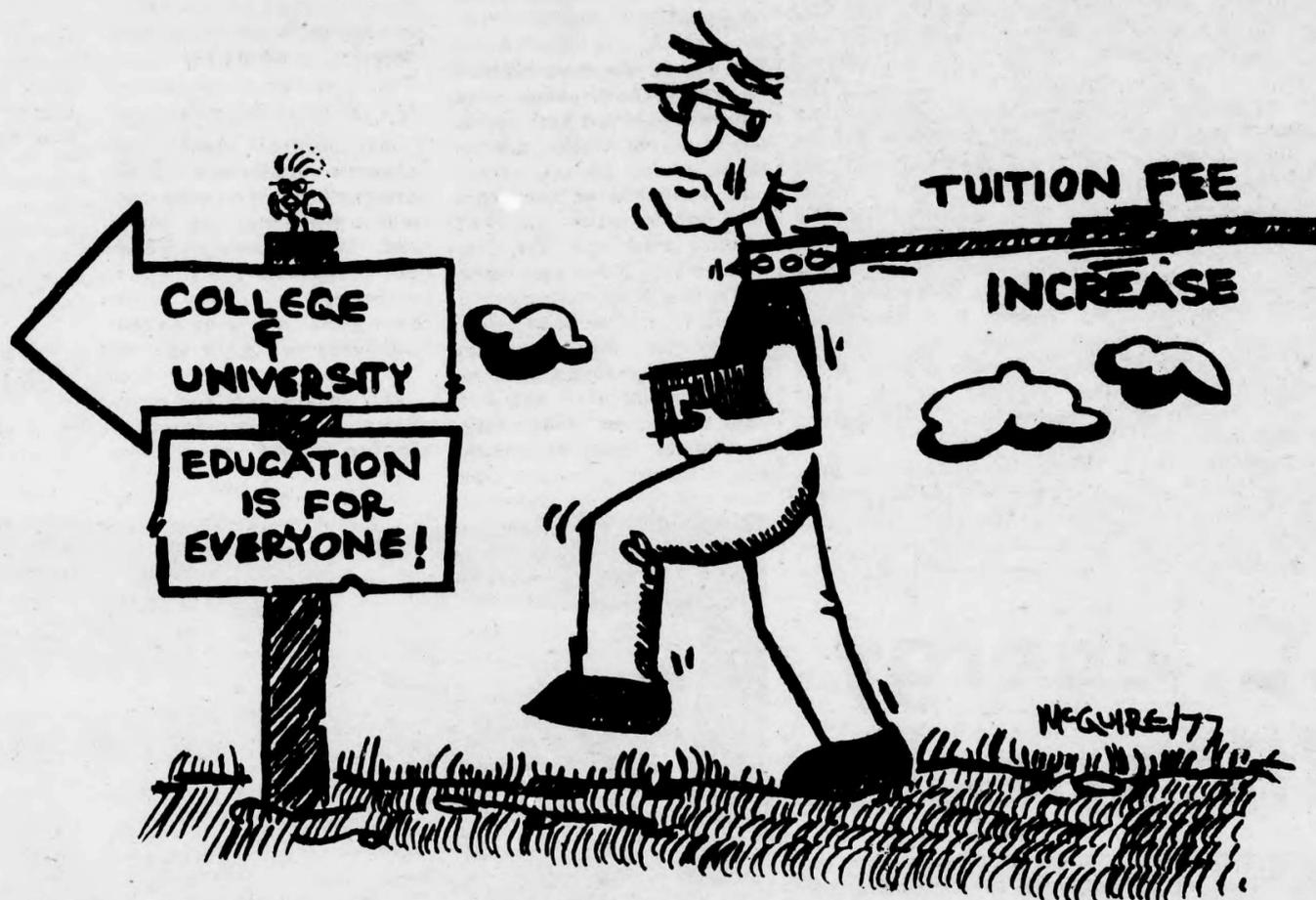


# Education grants: a government priority?



The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, in its recent report, has recommended that provincial governments in the Maritimes increase their grants to universities by 10.3 per cent for the 1981-82 academic year. A 10.3 per cent increase in tuition has been recommended by the commission as well.

There are many reasons why the provincial government must increase its operating grant by 10.3 per cent. Simply put, the New Brunswick government has been shafting higher education in this province for too long. To quote the findings in the MPHEC report "The commission is firmly convinced that post-secondary education should not continue to become a lesser priority of governments." According to the report, higher education in the Maritimes received 6.2 per cent of total government spending in 1974-75. In this academic year, higher education receives only 5.3 per cent of total government spending.

The commission says "this drop in operating assistance levels has been proportionately greater than that for comparable government departments and has taken place during a period in which enrollments have been stable." Yes folks, this is a prime example of the logic of our provincial government and its priorities.

Commission statistics also suggested "that provincial operating grants per student in 1978-79 average \$422 below the average for Canada and that this gap has widened in absolute real terms since 1974-75." We could continue to cite statistics to back up our call for increased government grants. In fact, government grants haven't even come close to matching the level of inflation in the past several years. Even if the N.B. government follows the recommendations of the MPHEC and increases UNB operating assistance by 10.3 per cent, it won't match the increase in the cost of living over

the last year which approximates 11 per cent. Simply put, if the N.B. government doesn't support higher education in some tangible manner UNB will be in a serious financial position.

Indeed if the universities may be in bad financial shape, what about university students? We already pay the highest tuition fees in Canada and the commission recommends they increase a further 10 per cent. UNB is put in the position of having to raise tuition fees, but a point in time is reached where students will go elsewhere to university because it costs too much money to go to school here. In addition, the student aid program is in need of serious revision and increased aid is certainly needed. It appears as if UNB students will have to go further into debt to finance their education. Students in New Brunswick already have the highest debt loads in Canada - some 40 per cent above the national average at graduation. These are

statistics that have been revealed to us by New Brunswick's own minister of Youth, Recreation and Cultural Resources in a brief presented to the federal task force on student aid last year. Simply put the costs of higher education are becoming a real burden on students.

The other and more serious problem is that many students may soon not have access to higher education. The cost may be so great as to discourage students from opting for a university education. Job prospects upon graduation are certainly not guaranteed today, either. All in all, many of us wonder whether it is really worth it or not.

In the next few weeks, all of us in the university community will have some idea of the priorities of the N.B. government. We will all soon see what priority the government gives to higher education in this province.