

Summer council wrap up

by Bernie MacDonnell
and Brian Duggan

September, for most of us, speaks of beginnings. It means new courses, new living situations, and for some even a new city. However, for those involved in Dalhousie's Student Government, the coming of autumn signals the close of what, theoretically, should have been a major period of planning and policy formation.

At this point, four months since the beginning of the Neal-Gillis administration, a mid-term assessment is certainly in order. What has been accomplished to date? And, perhaps more importantly, what does the first quarter suggest for the remainder of the 1976-77 student administration?

The greatest problem that faced the Student Council this summer was the absence of the majority of its membership. Recognizing the fact that only the President, Vice-President and Treasurer receive salaries from the Union, it is not surprising that most Councillors returned to their homes to seek employment. Due to these economic dictates the general operations of the Union were carried out by the Executive triumvirate and a handful of resident Halifax Councillors.

Grants Committee

One of the interim functions of this Executive was to act as a Grants Committee. That is, to screen all applications to Council for funding from various university and community organizations. The committee functioned under self-defined guidelines which limited the number of grants to two per month, and further stipulated that no single grant was to exceed \$200.

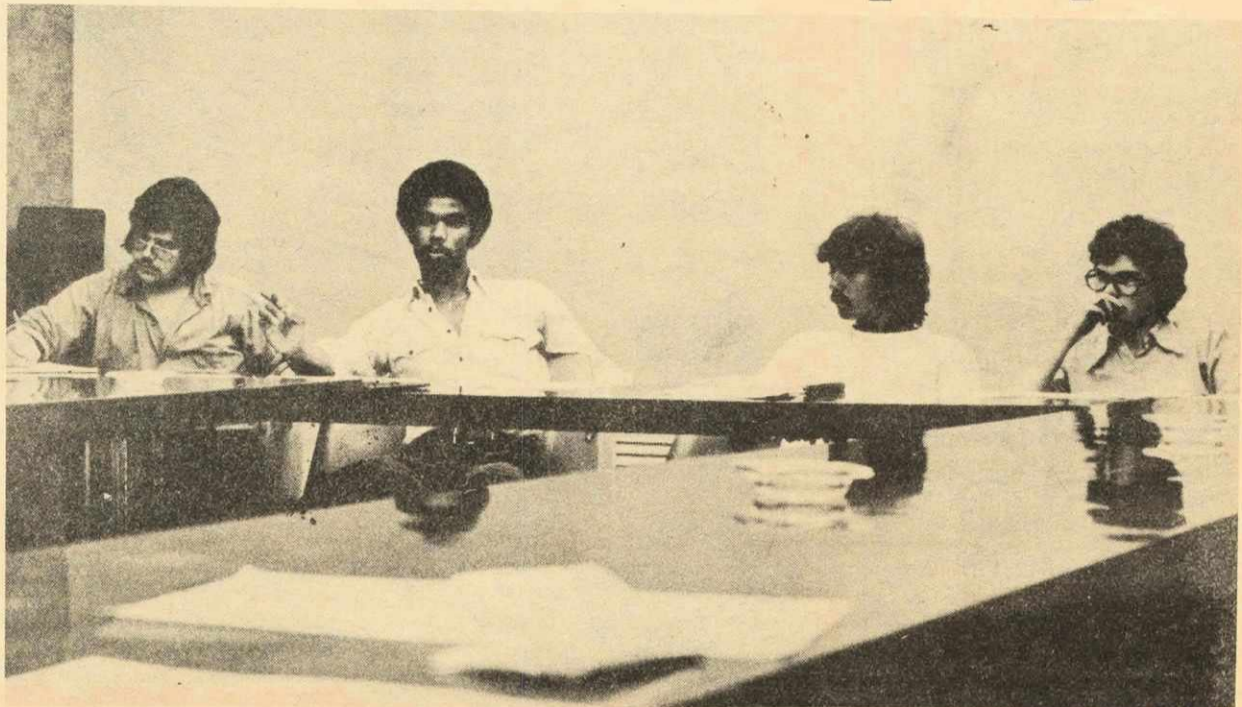
The result of these guidelines was that several proposals had to be tabled until September when they will be scrutinized by the formal 1976-77 Grants Committee. The rationale for placing the above limitations on the Executive was to assure that the formal body would not be left with a shortage of funds at the time when all major groups will be soliciting financial support.

In total, \$1,125 was allocated in grants during the summer, and a balance of \$6,875 remains in the Grants Committee's budget for the remainder of the year. The reduction of the Grants Committee's budget from last year's figure of \$15,000 (down to \$8,000) is explained in the re-structuring of financial support to major societies (i.e. Art's Society, Commerce Society, etc.). These structural changes were handed down by the Russell-Smiley administration and are simply being carried out by the new Executive.

Employment Changes

During the summer, the S.U.B. Operations Committee issued job descriptions for the posts of Operations Co-ordinators, S.U.B. Attendant Co-ordinators, and S.U.B. Attendant Staff. In this, the committee changed the names of some positions (i.e. Night Manager to Operations Co-ordinator) but the basic purpose was to define the duties of the respective student employees.

Although job descriptions for these posts were needed, the primary reason for the changes at this time was to facilitate the dismissal of one particular employee, Night Manager Ken MacDougall. The Executive charged that MacDougall repeatedly overstepped his authority as Night Manager and was generally a nuisance.



Student Council President Gordon Neal, flanked by Summer Council Recording Secretary Dave Grandy (left), Summer Council Chairperson Alan McHughen (right), and Vice-President Anne Gillis (extreme right). *Dal Photo / Grandy.*

In the course of events that followed, a grievance committee was struck, which concluded that MacDougall was improperly fired by the Union. The amount the Union will pay MacDougall as compensation has not yet been determined. Yet, regardless of the amount of the settlement, the entire episode is a major example of poor administration. As always, the students will be forced to pay for this mismanagement.

Saga Foods

Probably the most important internal problem to face the Student Council this summer was the negotiation of a new contract with Saga Foods. The Russell-Smiley-Executive had handled the preliminary discussions in March and had given approval "in principle" to an overall average increase of 15% in a la carte prices. In other words, it was understood that some items would increase by a higher percentage than others while certain goods would not rise at all; but, on balance, the average increase would stand at 15%.

Yet, when Saga handed down the new detailed price list, in June, they had weighted the increases on high volume grill items (i.e. unionburgers, quarterpounders etc.) to such an extent that, in terms of the average student coming into the cafeteria for lunch, the increase would be in the area of 20-22%. For example, one 2.2 oz. cheeseburger was to increase from \$0.60 to \$0.75, or a rise of 25% while less popular breakfast cereals showed no increase whatever.

Initially the Executive appeared willing to accept Saga's quick sleight of hand, suggesting that the matter was a fait accompli due to the previous administration's approval in principle. Union Treasurer, Pat Stewart, further noted that since the approval in principle had been formalized in writing by President Neal, any attempt to greatly alter the tenor of the agreement at this point could, conceivably, be construed as breach of contract.

Irrespective, or perhaps disrespectful, of the Executive's stance, an ad hoc committee comprised of two Councillors, along with Heather McQuarrie, Allan McHughen and David Grandy) came together to oppose the price hikes in whatever manner practicable. The committee, using Art's Representative Bernie MacDonnell as a spokesperson, passed a motion through Council instructing the Executive to

maintain the then current price levels in the cafeteria until Saga had offered a detailed explanation of their pricing method.

In the meetings with Saga that followed, the corporation's chief representative admitted, after much prodding, that in many cases the prescribed new price levels did not bear any direct relationship to the increase of Saga's costs.

Rather, it would appear that the primary criteria in Saga's pricing policy was to achieve the level of profit which the company's directors sought from its Dalhousie operations.

Allan McHughen et. al saw large discrepancies in Saga's approach to pricing and suggested that Council not allow the price of any single item to rise above the 15% level. The result of this move was to decrease the proposed prices of the popular grill items which allowing Saga the option of increasing some of the lower volume items to the 15% maximum.

In keeping with their desire to minimize price hikes on high volume items, McHughen's committee argued that due to the nutritional value of milk and yogurt, and the popularity of coffee, that the prices on these three items should be held constant.

Realizing that McHughen's committee understood the shuffle which the Executive had been prepared to accept, Saga declared that they would operate within the 15% price ceiling.

It is difficult to determine how much students will save as a result of this rather impromptu action by a handful of concerned students; however, it is clearly a disappointing state of affairs when an ad hoc committee must come together to act upon an administrative issue which the Union's Executive was either incapable or reluctant to handle.

Student Aid

As every student in Nova Scotia realizes Student Aid is a very crucial problem. During the summer President Neal participated in two meetings between the Minister of Education, Maynard MacAskill and a committee of representatives from Nova Scotian Universities. The committee was clearly unprepared for much of the debate and lost ground in a number of areas of student concern.

The student leaders did hold the line on one point however. The Minister wanted to class all students as dependents; meaning that

any student applying for standard government assistance in post-secondary education would, be expected to receive a prescribed sum of money from their parents, unless they were married. This proposal would have sizeably decreased the government's expenditures on bursaries while making it much more difficult for students from lower income families, to complete their education. It was a ludicrous demand that could not have been accepted.

The portability of bursaries across provincial lines was also brought into question in the discussions between Union Presidents and the Minister. MacAskill noted that new guidelines restricting the use of Nova Scotian bursaries to the Atlantic Provinces would be put into affect. The student representatives were visibly unprepared for this move and made little attempt to counter the Minister on this point. Because of the government's policy it is now much harder for students, who want to study outside of the region to do so.

Another proposal that by-passed the student representatives concerned the number of classes that one must take in order to receive aid. Under MacAskill's new scheme no student will be eligible for government assistance if they failed two or more courses in the previous year of study. Although these regulations do not apply to second year students and while some move by the government to place restrictions on student aid should be seen as a forward step, it must be recognized that the present scheme unjustly discriminates against students from lower income families. In a program such as this, flexibility must be built-in. If we are to have a program such as this, and we are opposed to it on principle, then it must have the maximum amount of flexibility to allow for the varying state of individual students.

The student aid program was created so that a student's purse string would not control his/her access to university; so that all students regardless of their financial background would be able to pursue Post-Secondary Education. Education Minister MacAskill proposes to use students' purse strings to control their access to university. The Student Aid program is poor enough and riddled with weaknesses; yet, the actions taken by MacAskill serve to further weaken an already inadequate system.