

EDITORIAL

STUDENTS
SCREWED

Students are a beleaguered lot, and two political developments call on quick and efficient action on our part to protect the quality of our education. One is the revelation of an apparent (and deliberate) disenfranchisement of thousands of student voters in Nova Scotia by the Conservative government of John Buchanan. The other matter is a warning that tuition hikes of up to 300% may be in store for Dalhousie students if federal monies to the universities are either cut or redirected, as recommended in the Axworthy report. It is ironic that the Conservative government responsible for student disenfranchisement (a government that may itself in future be casting its eagle eye on post-secondary education as a sacrificial lamb for its own bankrupt policies) should be the one advocating our case federally. In both matters then it appears we are being screwed.

It would of course make sense politically for the Buchanan government, never overly sympathetic to students, to defuse any political mobilization on the part of students by precisely those methods that NDP candidate Michael Coyle has accused them of. Because the Election Writ was issued during summer vacations, students who live up to eight months a year in their university riding but were understandably absent at the time of enumeration could only be enumerated at 'home'. Fair enough, despite the inherently illogical sentence in Section 27(5) of the Nova Scotia Elections Act which states "...only students who are registered and in attendance at an educational institution on the day in which electoral writs are issued are eligible to vote in their university constituency." What this says in effect is that a student who is on vacation is no longer a student. Why call them students then, and make extra provisions in the Election Act? It appears the act should be amended on this point.

Still, student enumeration was theoretically possible, if somewhat more complicated than usual. One Gazette staffer happened to be home in Truro at his parents when the enumeration officers came by, and was told that since he went to King's College in Halifax, he would be enumerated there. He wasn't. The voter lists here at Dal reveal an appalling fact: the total number of people registered at Dalhousie's two on-campus residences, Shirriff Hall and Howe Hall, adds up to a grand total of 2.

That's right. Two students, out of almost 1,000. The only way the other 998 or so students can vote (if they are enumerated at home) is by proxy, another complication in the registration process. At present proxy forms are sitting in Student Council offices but have been picked up by only ten students. John Logan is organizing a distribution campaign and at last Sunday's Council meeting he nominated the entire students' council to do the work. Fully a third of the councillors didn't care to help Logan in his campaign to get students registered, and became the deserving objects of the first dressing-down of the fall political scene.

As for the cutbacks, they loom, (as the Halifax Herald would say,) on a troubled horizon, and no one around Dal in the administration, faculty or student body, quite knows what to do about the coming financial disaster. Dalhousie could suffer cutbacks of up to 40% of its governments monies, or almost 30% of its total budget. As of now no one dares even consider that possibility or its horrendous consequences. For now we students, joined by others from Dal can march on September 30 to the grand parade, and join the thousands of other students from across Nova Scotia decrying eroding government commitment to accessible and quality education. A march alone, of course, will not bring instant results, but any sort of mobilization now is essential if students are really concerned about the coming crisis in education. Too often the lobbying of such institutions as SUNS, the Dal Gazette, and the Dalhousie Student Council has been ineffective and fallen on deaf ears. Now is the time to promote our interests by a combined effort.



the Dalhousie Gazette

The Dalhousie Gazette, Canada's oldest college newspaper, is the weekly publication of the Dalhousie Student union members, and is a founding member of Canadian University Press.

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The deadline for articles and letters-to-the-editor is noon on Monday. No unsigned material will be accepted, but anonymity may be granted on request. Letters should not exceed 500 words and must be typed on a 64-character line and double spaced. Local Advertising is handled by DAL-ADS — the advertising department of Dalhousie Student Union: Tel. 424-6532. Ad copy must be submitted by the Friday preceding publication.

Our office is located on the third floor of the Dalhousie Student Union Building. Our mailing address is the Dalhousie Gazette, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S. You can reach us by telephone at (902) 424-2507.

The subscription rate is \$10. per year (26 issues) and our ISSN number is 0011-5819.

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Beyond the march, students can still vote, if they get their proxy forms, or, if they are not enumerated, by calling the chief returning officer in their riding (this Thursday and Friday in Halifax Cornwallis) who will initiate the process of getting them on the voters list, allowing the student, if necessary, to pick up a proxy form etc., etc., . . . It is a shame that the many thousands of students in Halifax cannot cast their vote where they live and where their voice would make the most difference: right here in Halifax Cornwallis, represented in the legislature by none other than Terrence Donahoe, Minister of Education. The machine seems well-oiled: (acting on the advice of enumerators) one confused student phoned up the chief returning officer on Spring Garden Road, and was directed to another number for information. That number? You guessed it — the campaign headquarters of Terrence Donahoe.

