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Dal students chant on their way to Province House to protest underfunding of education.

DALPHOTO: MIKE DEVONPORT

Minister pledges dialogue on cuts

by Neil Donald

Education Minister John MacEachern sees a dialogue on the proposed cuts to the Performing Arts at Dalhousie, but there are only roadblocks according to Dalhousie Student Union President Jefferson Rappell.

"We have said again and again that our direction is towards transparency; we want everything done publicly," MacEachern told the *Gazette* last Friday.

"The Education Minister and Premier... are committed to student consultation on these issues," added Department of Education Information Officer Donna MacDonald.

According to Rappell: "We would like to believe the Minister is being honest when he says that discussion and dialogue with all parties is desired, but the difficulty we have run into along the way does not bear this out."

Rappell said that a meeting between MacEachern and the Student Union leaders of a number of universities, including Dalhousie, that had been scheduled for October 1 was cancelled immediately after the program cuts were announced on September 22 by Dalhousie President Howard Clark.

MacEachern also said that it would be "a bit premature" to enter the debate while "the different channels for discussion within the university are being followed. The Faculty Association, the Student Union, the Board of Governors, the Senate, and each department are all in active discussion."

However, according to Rappell: "So far there has been no constructive dialogue about 'rationalization' and the proposed cuts, just heated exchanges in reaction to the unilateral decisions proposed by President Clark. Our meeting with the Budget Advisory Committee was, in retrospect, a joke. We feel we have no input now and will have to fight like hell for any input in the future."

Rappell's assertion of the unilateral nature of the cuts was echoed by Dalhousie Senate Chair Ken Dunn, who issued a press release quoting a Senate Academic Planning Committee motion solely aimed at reassuring students that "program closures cannot be ef-

fecting unilaterally by the president, but only by the Senate."

Rappell pointed to the administration's silence about what will happen to the Dalhousie Arts Centre if the Performing Arts Programs are evicted as typical of the roadblocks that prevent meaningful dialogue about the cuts.

"We have been asking the Administration what they plan on doing with the Dal Arts Centre since the cuts were announced," said Rappell. "They say they don't know. If this is true then the Dalhousie Administration is guilty of bad planning. How can they make these decisions without any foresight whatsoever?"

According to MacEachern, the administration's plans for the Arts Centre "did not come up in a specific way, only in a general way" when Clark informed him of the proposed cuts a month before they were announced. He did not elaborate.

DSUTreasure Fraser Matte believes that the Administration does have plans for the Arts Centre. "If the performing arts programs vacate the building, the only logical use of the building is to house 'rationalized', that is extremely large, undergraduate programs traditionally considered 'cash cows'."

Matte said that this use of the Arts Centre would allow the administration to increase students in a number of departments where the only restriction now is the availability of professors.

"They could move 1,500 to 2,000 students an hour through that building with minor renovations," said Matte. "This 'rationalized' approach has been done nationally at almost any university you could name."

MacEachern denies any knowledge of a plan to put "cash cow" programs with huge first-year classes into the Arts Centre.

"I would not like to see anything happen behind closed doors," said MacEachern. "I am watching the situation at Dalhousie very closely to see how the community, which involves all the partners at Dal, works their way through this."

Dalhousie President Clark could not be reached for comment.

Protestors challenge Savage

by Robert Drinkwater

"I want to know how the hell you can allow what is going on at Dalhousie to go on," demanded Rene Clairmont when she confronted Premier John Savage on the steps of Province House.

"You've got students hoping food banks go up on campus, and you put a shower in your office. Is that to wash off the guilt?" Clairmont continued. She challenged the premier after he was booed by a crowd of 300 provincial government employees and students who had gathered outside the legislature on Friday, October 8 to oppose to the recent provincial budget.

"What do you suggest we do, give more money to the universities?" Savage asked Clairmont, over the crowd's chants of "Johnny is a liar". He defended installing the shower in his office, saying it had cost far less than the media reported.

Clairmont was at the demonstration with Fight the Cuts Collective, a group opposed to the recent program cuts at Dalhousie. They marched from the SUB with the Dalhousie Staff Association to the legislature for the protest, organized by the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union.

Savage had just told demonstrators, many of whom were

opposed to a proposed five-day layoff for provincial employees, that his government had inherited "one hell of a mess" from the previous Tory government. He said he would not allow Nova Scotia to slip off the edge into bankruptcy, and that the alternative to the five-day layoff was slashes and cuts to the civil service.

Speaker after speaker at the demonstration accused the Premier of breaking promises. Savage was present for much of the criticism, standing just feet away.

Greg Blanchard, President of the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union, told the crowd it was unfair for the government to use legislation to break collective agreements with its workers.

"It's wrong to cut anybody's salary. It's wrong to break a contract. It's wrong to break a promise," he said.

Allison Young, Chair of the Students' Union of Nova Scotia, reminded the crowd of one of Savage's election promises.

"This government promised to cap tuition fees," she said, "but our fees are going way up."

The demonstration ended shortly after the Premier left. Blanchard ended by telling the crowd the demonstration probably set a record for being the soonest experienced by any government.



Members of the government employee union joined several dozen students in picketing University Hall on Tuesday before the Board of Governors meeting.

DALPHOTO: MICHAEL GRAHAM