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SUNS

The conference that wasn't

by Cathy McDonald

Student political conferences are most effective when they are attended, but Nova Scotia student councils could not even muster quorum last weekend in Antigonish.

Three out of ten student unions sent delegates to the Students Unions of Nova Scotia (SUNS) conference, and a fourth arrived in time to hear the conference had been cancelled.

Sandy Spencer, SUNS chairperson, was none too pleased. She really is "really pissed off" that the member institutions cannot be bothered to show up at a conference.

Spencer said a meeting will be called shortly for student union presidents and the SUNS executive to reassess membership goals.

"SUNS is pretty well defunct right now," Spencer said. "It is just a few people on the executive calling themselves student representatives. I don't want to be a part of that."

Dalhousie failed to attend, as did Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Teacher's College, College of Cape Breton, Acadia University and Universite de Ste. Anne's. Saint Francis Xavier hosted the brief event for Technical University of Nova Scotia, Mount Saint Vincent University and a late Saint Mary's delegation.

Three out of the seven SUNS executive managed to attend.

Winter Carnival weeks were a common excuse for councillors to stay on their campuses, Spencer said, but she questioned whether Winter Carnivals can compete in importance with the future of post secondary education.

Out of an original eight Dalhousie delegates, the number dwindled to zero. Dalhousie student union president John Logan said job commitments would have allowed him to attend for the Saturday only while all policy decisions are made on Sunday.

Alec Grant, internal coordinator for SUNS and a Saint Francis Xavier delegate, is another person who is "very pissed off." Grant said he had no idea that people would not show up, as no one had given him any indication of their plans.

SUNS has a credibility problem at St. F.X. and this conference did not help matters, Grant said. "They're laughing in my face. Some think SUNS would be a good organization if it could get it together."

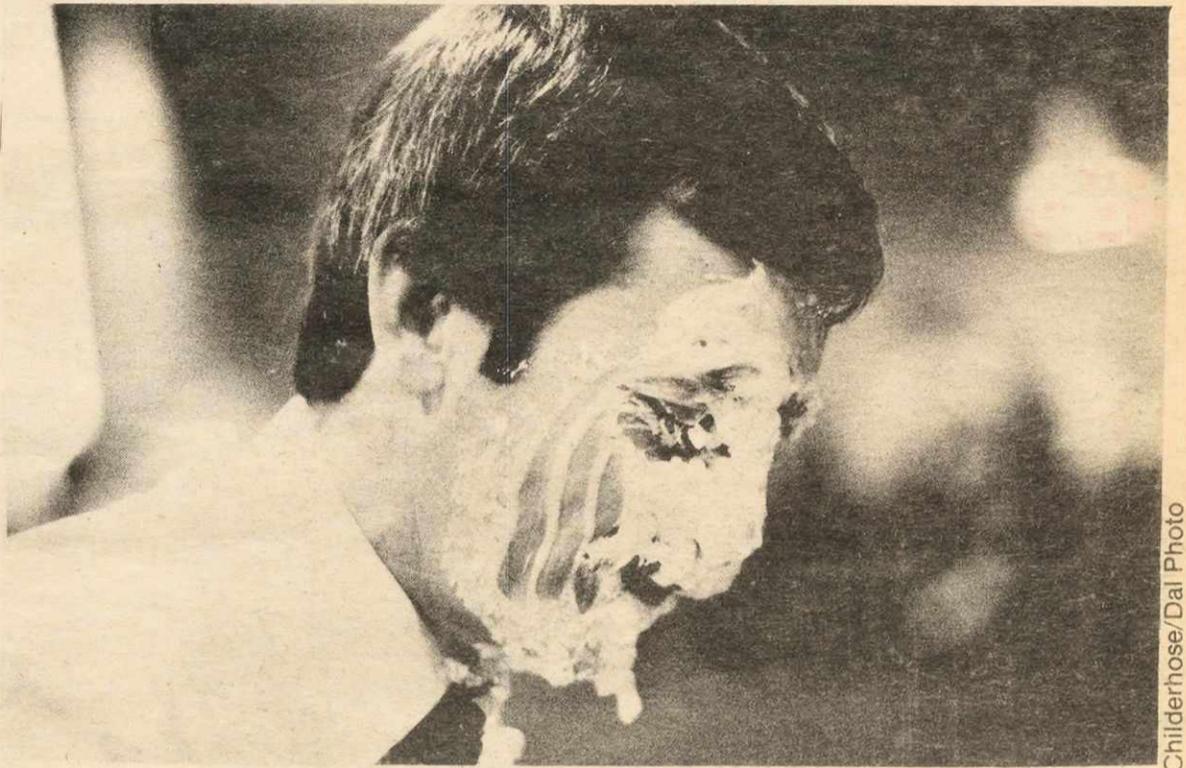
Now is the time SUNS should be active, according to Grant, referring to the recently released report by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission recommending next year's funding increases. "But the only way

we can do it is if we get together and talk."

Logan attributed a lack of interest at Dal to disillusionment with the conference held here in November. Strong divisions between institutions over the question of membership in the new national student organization, the Canadian Federation of Students, left many people frustrated.

Executives from Acadia University and Saint Francis Xavier left that conference saying a national organization is not needed, which is "fundamentally wrong," Logan said. This is the major issue which divides members and leads to disunity.

Logan suggested giving salaries to executive members would help the organization, as volunteers cannot be expected to find the necessary energy to organize a conference.



Childerhose/Dal Photo

Terry Donahoe, Minister of Education, takes the full shot

Students reject budget proposals

by Cathy McDonald

Students at the Maritime School of Social Work told Dalhousie's administration clearly they will not accept the cutbacks proposed for next year's budget.

Social Work students rejected in principle a budget that restricts increases to four per cent, at a general assembly last Tuesday, January 26.

After the support of both the faculty and students, the executive committee endorsed the rejection of the budget unanimously. A covering letter expressing this dissent accompanied the submission of the budget to the Dean of Administrative Studies.

The cuts will affect the shifting of some electives to summer session and will mean no increase in faculty and a decrease in staff. However, the measures still fail to accommodate \$27,000 of the necessary \$81,000 in reductions, a decrease in real terms of eight per cent of the School's budget.

"There are ominous signs for students," said Mary Jane White, student representative on the school's executive committee. No matter what methods Dal employs to alleviate its \$8 million deficit situation, the students will suffer. Tuition will go up, and the quality of education will go down.

"It's time that students speak up in all faculties," said Terry Myer, another student on the executive committee.

The executive committee consists of four students and four faculty representatives, with the school director as chair. It is charged with making internal policy decisions, and can be overruled by the director.

Enrollment in social work has been increasing dramatically,

from 100 students in 1977 to the present 287. The faculty is already over deployed, White said.

The social work faculty feels strongly it does not endorse the limited four per cent budget increase, said Mary Lou Courtney, a faculty representative on the executive committee.

"(The committee) tried to cut some fat out of the school. We cut and cut and cut and maybe we cut too much." Things will be very difficult next year, especially with enrollment increases, she said.

Although the executive committee rejected the budget in principle, "if we did not have a hand in (the decisions of where to cut), it could be worse," Courtney said.

Thomas Kent, Dean of Administrative Studies, agreed that meeting the four per cent budget increment will be painful for all departments. It's a difficult situation, he said, unless there is a very large increase in funds next year. "It's a question of how much money the university receives from the taxpayers," Kent said.

Kent said the current budget process is an exercise to examine the consequences of such cuts, and no decisions have been made yet.

The budget book gives departments finite budgets, or envelopes, representing four per cent more in funds, or a real decrease of eight per cent. Among its assumptions, tuition increases 12 per cent and government assistance increases 10 per cent. Department reports will be reviewed by the administration for finalization in March.

There's a lot students can do in

their own departments. They can't be caught sleeping right now, because their education

could be turned around. It is already the most expensive in the country.

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