

## Comments on the Royal Commission report

By DR. Y. SANKAR

IN DECEMBER, 1985, THE *Mail Star* carried a comprehensive coverage of the Royal Commission Report on Post Secondary Education. This coverage is designed to provide a forum for public debate on all issues of University governance. I will attempt to generate some comments on the Commission's report and to consider some more interesting alternatives that the Commission ignores.

The Commission observes that Nova Scotia Universities are "on the brink of a quality disaster" that can be averted only through sweeping changes to the province's post secondary education. The Chairman of the Commission declared "I would have serious concerns and fears for what would happen if the Report gets put on the back burner. The various concerns from the institutions, from students, from faculty, and from the general public, were well articulated in the submissions and various discussions the commissioners had. We're convinced changes have to be made."

Recommendation 47 of the Report states:

The Universities of the province should consider themselves as forming a provincial system and the plans and priorities of each university should take cognizance of and be in accord with the plans and priorities of the system as a whole.

This recommendation raises fields (4) relevance to sectors and priorities in Nova Scotia (5) excellence in pedagogy and research (6) program integration (7) urgent priorities for allocation of resources in health care, job creation, high tech infrastructure

(80) economics of scale for program operations.

If we are to apply these criteria in redesigning Universities and their programs and to avoid duplication of programs, some marginal universities must be closed down — a strategy the Commission ignores because of politics. In an era of affluence, Universities proliferated in Canada. A province like Nova Scotia without the fiscal capacity of Ontario or Alberta etc. simply cannot afford 15 post secondary institutions. This is a luxury that costs about 170 million dollars a year. Such universities as Acadia, St. Francis Xavier, Kings College and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design should be merged with Dalhousie, Saint Mary's or Mount Saint Vincent. Closing down the marginal universities must be explored with no political expediency as a criterion. The remaining universities should specialize in some area of program excellence. It is absurd to have, for example, an education faculty, business, sociology, psychology, physics, chemistry, philosophy, etc. at each university functioning at a mediocre level because of lack of faculty, resources, research facilities, adequate specialization and professional development. Some of these programs must be integrated with programs at two or three centers of excellence. For example, the education departments at the Mount, SMU, and Dalhousie must be integrated into one Center for Educational Studies (be it based at the Mount, SMU or Dalhousie). Similarly, this strategy can be implemented for business, economics, sociology, physics, chemistry, sociology, philosophy, languages, etc. This will economize resources by reduction

of the administrative component, also with larger class size and the computer-assisted instruction faculty resources can be reduced. A consolidation of programs, size, and specialization will provide the critical mass for excellence.

Dalhousie University has established a national and international reputation in a number of fields such as Medicine, Law, Dentistry, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Oceanography and must retain these programs for continued excellence. The other programs are and must be negotiable for transfer to other campuses of UNS (University of Nova Scotia). With continuing deterioration of resources, it is imperative that a radical change in University structure, programs, and services be initiated.

The Commission recommends that "the goal of Nova Scotia post-secondary education must be the achievement and maintenance of excellence in higher education." With consolidation of these academic programs specialization will be facilitated. Duplication of research, programs, and resources will be terminated. Centers for excellence are contingent upon program specialization. Some of the resources can be diverted to these centers and some can augment health care, job creation and high technology. Some centers of excellence will attract better faculty, research grants, and endowments, etc.

Deadline for letters to the editor is noon, Monday before publication. Letters must be typed and double-spaced and be less than 30 words. Letters can be dropped at the SUB enquiry desk or brought up to the *Gazette* offices, third floor, SUB.

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