

O'Connor and student problems

by M.P. MacKenzie

On Monday, September 29 Dan O'Connor, past president of the Dalhousie Student Union, spoke to a national conference of university information officers on student aid. Mr. O'Connor, who is presently employed by the National Union of Students, explained the problems and inequities in the present government aid program in terms of how they affect three groups: students, possible students, and ex-students.

Mr. O'Connor pointed out that in the Maritimes, one of the most economically depressed areas of the country, students are forced to take out higher loans than anywhere else in Canada. With the exception of Newfoundland, regional disparity is a fact of life in the present student aid system. Alberta is also an exception to the aid system. In that Province there is no provincial government assistance for students. Albertan students must rely on federal loans, but it should also be pointed out that tuition in Alberta is much lower than tuition in any Maritime university.

Part time students suffer more from the present aid program than any other group, said O'Connor. They are ineligible for loans or bursaries in all provinces but two. One of the two existing programs is in Ontario and to be eligible for student aid there a part-time student must be either on Welfare or have an income even lower than that provided by Welfare. In other words one would have to be destitute.

One of the gravest inequities of the loan system is that lower income students are faced with the highest debt load. According to Mr. O'Connor this means that even before they finish high school many low income students decide against university because of the enormous debt load involved after graduation. The present system may well be keeping many qualified students out of university. Since the whole point of student aid was to provide equal opportunity for all Canadians to attend university if they so desired the present program is falling far short of this aim.

Repayment of Canada Student Loans is another area of the Student Aid Program which is in desperate need of review. According to O'Connor the government has refused to publicize the available methods of adjusting repayments to suit individual needs. Upon grad-

uation from university many students find themselves in a position of high debts and little or no income. For unemployed graduates there must be some method of deferring payments, and for low income graduates there should be a system of long term repayment in small amounts. The present system of repayment practically encourages graduates to either declare bankruptcy or leave the country in order to avoid the pressures of repayment.

Several alternate programs of repayment are being studied by government and student organizations. One such program is based on assumption of income. That is, the government would assume that a person graduating in a particular program would earn a certain amount according to his/her degree. The graduate's student loan repayments would be based on what the government assumes is the level of income. Another method under examination is the graduate tax program. Under this program graduates of university would pay higher income taxes than other Canadians and forego actual repayments of student loans.

Mr. O'Connor said that there are now 600,000 post-secondary students in Canada who are organizing at local and national levels. These organizations are developing to help protect student interests in dealings with government agencies. Only Manitoba and Saskatchewan have no "self-defense" organizations at the present time.

Mr. O'Connor warned, however, that government is not often affected by "persuasion". He said governments may very well go one way publicly while privately reverting to old practices detrimental to student interests. He pointed out that students now seem to have a more "leftist stance" on aid issues and this is a good thing.

Dr. James Davies, Dean of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, spoke to the gathering of university information officers immediately after Mr. O'Connor. In 1974 Dr. Davies presented a report to the Atlantic Association of Universities on student aid and scholarships for undergraduate students.

Dr. Davies agreed with the remarks made by Mr. O'Connor on student aid and pointed out that in the report made to the A.A.U. in



Dan O'Connor, NUS secretary, shoots from the hip

1974 it was recommended that the student aid maximum be raised to \$3000. Dr. Davies said that the present maximum of \$2800. falls far short of that recommendation, especially when one considers the present inflation rate.

He accused government of insensitivity to students' real needs and said there should be more flexibility in the aid program to allow for summer programs, students with dependents and unusually expensive academic programs. He did say that the government had some reason for pride in its present program but there is still a great need for change.

Dr. Davies agreed with O'Connor's assessment that the repayment program had serious defects and that the high debt load offered serious psychological impediments to low income students wishing to attend university.

In the 1974 report to the A.A.U. scholarships were a matter examined in conjunction with student aid. Dr. Davies pointed out that scholarships are disproportionately awarded to high income students and have actually outlived their

usefulness. He said they are used by universities to recruit better students to improve the image of the universities, not to help students. He said they are not aids but "perhaps bribes" to attract good students to one university rather than another. Further, vast amounts of money are spent to get students to attend a university they would have gone to anyway - scholarship or no scholarship. Most scholarships are wasted in competition between universities and are a "scandal and disgrace" to the university community. He said the scholarship system actually treats students as "fodder" for the universities.

Dr. Davies accused universities of not caring about student aid as it affects students, only as it affects universities. He excused universities to some extent for not examining student aid more closely on the basis that universities' primary concern must be university aid but said they should spend more time worrying about the fate of students as well as the fate of universities.

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availability of housing to students? Where are the tangible benefits earned for the student body that have enabled Mr. Russell to consider his preferential treatment by housing authorities justifiable?

"Since 1971 Dalhousie has been faced with a decreasing number of housing places, and a trend towards increased enrollment." [John Graham, Director of Housing Services - February, 1974]

In 1971 the University provided a total of 2,070 housing places for a full-time student population of 6,003. By 1974 the places numbered 1,964 and the students 6,350. This year has seen an increase in housing facilities so that 2,153 students can be accommodated. This gain was not without its costs however. Of the 189 extra places, 105 were provided by doubling and tripling in Howe Hall and Sherriff Hall. One need only take a quick look around Henderson House to see the substandard conditions students have been forced into by the housing crisis. Crowding three students into rooms that are barely adequate for two, with washroom facilities that have not been

expanded with the population, is hardly acceptable.

It can be argued, of course, that the inconvenience is necessary on a temporary basis in order to provide the extra accommodation. But would it be rash to suggest that the Administration, in arriving at its final solution, had more in mind than the plight of 105 homeless waifs. Last year a double in Howe Hall rented for \$1,207 per person. This year a triple, the same room with an extra student, is \$1,270 per person-an increase! Food costs increased \$86 per person during this period, and food constitutes \$700 of the total fee. This means that the total rent (without food) accruing to the Administration from a "Triple" rose to \$1710 from \$1186 last year when the room was a double. This represents an increase of \$524 per room - achieved by cramming extra students into the same space.

One might reasonably have expected the Union to have organized resistance of some kind to this plan, but the extent of its effort was to fearlessly negotiate to prevent the same rate being

charged for normal doubles as for doubled single rooms. In this they were successful. Why have they not done more? Bruce Russell says that the situation is understood to be temporary, but cannot say when the extra beds are to be phased out. When asked, Mr. Russell said that a rent strike, in which Howe Hall residents would withhold their second installments until rents are reduced, is "worth considering". However, he could make no commitments with regard to Union leadership of such a strike.

Other new sources of accommodation were found with the use of International House and the conversion of Studley Apartments. Mr. Russell says that the Union would like to see more walk-up apartment buildings of the Studley type purchased by the University. This policy might be appropriate, but policies are pointless without action. Mr. Russell says that he is "encouraging the University" to this end. Clearly, more than "encouragement" is needed; someone must bring real pressure to bear on the Administration.

when asked by the Gazette, Mr. Russell agreed to hold an open forum on the housing problem, in

which he and others will participate. The tentative date is October 22 at 11:30 A.M. in the McInnes Room, with the participants to be announced. If you're homeless, interested, or just pissed off, turn up. If you don't, you'll have little cause for complaint when you find yourself paying \$200/month for a manhole next year.

Libraries open arms

by N.G. Allen

Two public libraries and several smaller ones welcome Dal students.

Halifax City Regional Library, near the foot of Spring Garden Road, and Dartmouth Regional Libraries, Saint Mary's Mount St. Vincent, and N.S. Technical College libraries accept Dal library ID cards, while the two regional libraries have their own cards. A patron can borrow on his first visit.

Students can borrow from most other libraries by Inter Library Loan, arranged through the information desk of the Killam library. Each library sets its own loans and fines policy.