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Dal Legal Aid's budget cut

Gov't silences critics

By LOIS CORBETT
and MARY ELLEN JONES

THE NOVA SCOTIA GOVERNMENT'S decision to cut almost \$90,000 in provincial funding to Dalhousie Legal Aid is an attempt to silence a public voice in social activism, says Joan Dawkins, director of Dal Legal Aid.

Social services Minister Edmund Morris announced the cuts, \$70,000 from the Attorney General's office and \$20,000 from his department last Friday, giving Dal Legal Aid no notice of the decision, and failing to consult the university's law school, which offers the service.

Morris said Dal Legal Aid had become "a political training ground for NDP candidates to the detriment of the poor and disadvantaged."

Two Dal Legal Aid workers have run for the NDP in the past, but Bob Levy, one of two NDP members that holds a seat in the provincial legislature said it is "unconscionable that the Tories would ever think of Dal Legal Aid in that way."

Premier John Buchanan defended the move to cut the legal aid service by 25 per cent saying "you'd have to have your head in the sand not to realize the NDP had used it for political purposes." The premier said the government is not cutting back on legal aid services, only diverting the money to a new organization, the metro community law clinic and to the Nova Scotia Legal Aid commission.

Levy said N.S. Legal Aid won't fill the gap left by the government funding cut. "They won't provide the same type of service. They provide no attention what so ever to the type of political advocacy that Dal Legal Aid does," he said.

Dal Legal Aid workers say the government is cutting back because it doesn't like criticism.

"Anytime you attack a government, you are bound to align with opposition policy," says Dawkins.

Dawkins said Morris' description of her organization as an NDP training school was "laughable", and Morris was using personal reasons to explain the cutbacks.

"We are vulnerable because we are independent. The way to have prevented this would have been not to criticize the government. But that would have been ignoring our job," she said.

Barb Harris, a co-worker at Dal Legal Aid, said the government doesn't like the clinic because it isn't traditional.

"The work we do here is not straight legal work, straight in the sense that all you do is listen to the individual problem, deal with it and then let it go. We do

all that, but if we see a pattern in the problems, we take that on as well," she said.

Two years ago, Dal Legal Aid noticed a pattern in the cases brought to them by people with complaints with the Nova Scotia Power Commission. Harris said the Commission was cutting off people's power without giving them legal notice, and once cut off a woman's electricity because her estranged husband didn't pay the bill.

Dawkins said Dal Legal Aid helped change the "draconian policies of the Power Commission."

"Occasionally we have the opportunity to take an issue forward, attack it on a broader sense," said Dawkins.

Harris said Dal Legal Aid also fought the government over its decision to cut teen age mothers off from social assistance.

"When that was about to become law, we tried to fight it, because a lot of our clients are teen mothers. We continued to fight it after it became law. And the government doesn't like that," said Harris.

Dal Legal Aid acts as a "complementary caseload to the N.S. Law Commission," said Dawkins. "We don't get involved with people dealing with a lot of money. We do criminal and family affairs, not motor vehicle or narcotic offenses, because other things are more important," she said.

"Many of Dal Legal Aid's clients are on social assistance or people who have had their assistance cut," said Harris. "Our caseload with housing related issues has skyrocketed, so much so that over 50 per cent of our cases are now dealing with housing problems," she said.

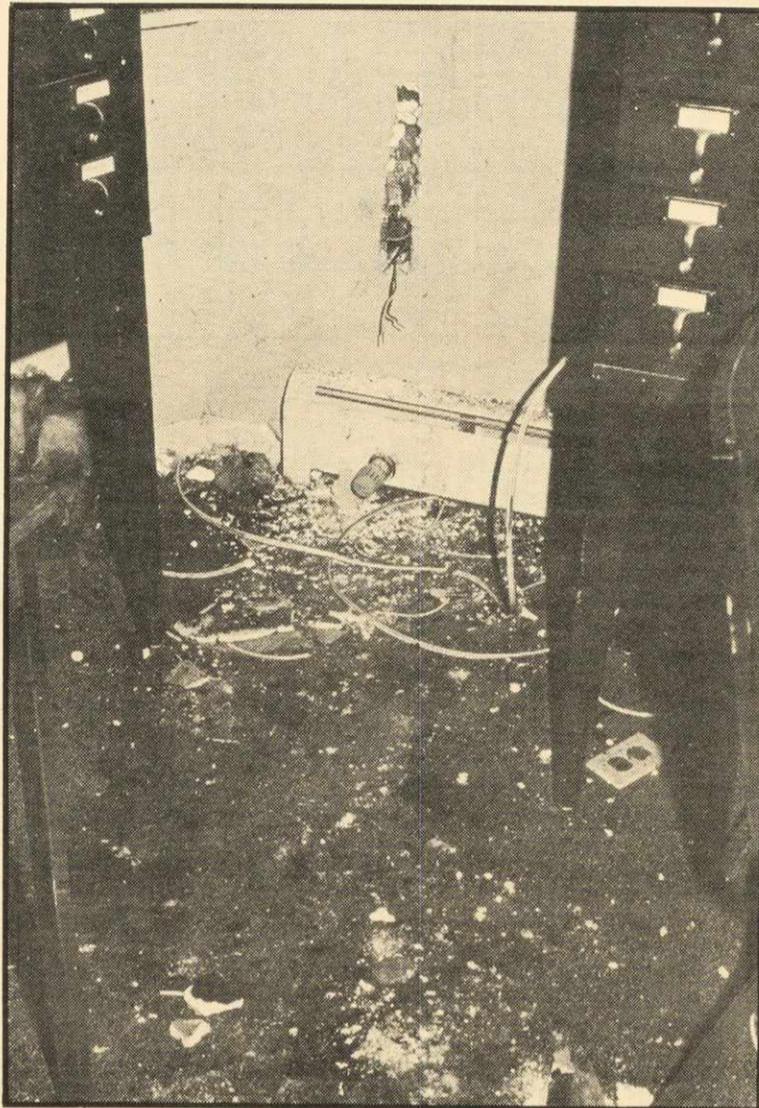
Dal Legal Aid helped organize the Housing for People Coalition, and has sponsored advocacy workshops for other community groups including the Black United Front, and Bryony House.

Buchanan denied the cutbacks would hurt poor people's access to legal aid. "What we're doing is going to strengthen it," he said. "It's just a way of making the system more cost efficient."

But Dawkins disagrees.

"My prediction is, and I can only say this without knowing what the plans are right now, is this board (the new clinic) will be nothing different than the Nova Scotia Legal Aid commission always a good Tory at the helm."

Dawkins said the cut in government funding will not close Dal Legal Aid. The organization is trying to raise money through other sources. "We've discussed it with the university, and we have achieved a supportive response in philosophical terms. Whether this will translate into dollars or not is up in the air," she said.



Electrical wiring caused the fire at the Institute of Public Affairs. Dal Photo, Scott Campbell.

Henson fire "modest"

By MARY ELLEN JONES

AN ELECTRICAL FIRE LAST Sunday morning caused minor structural damage to the Institute of Public Affairs.

The building is the research unit of Henson College of Public Affairs and Continuing Education. It provides library and office space.

"The institute's library appears to have come out of it fairly well, no water or fire damage to materials," said Steven MacDonald, research coordinator of Henson College.

Unlike the Weldon Law building fire earlier this year, the fire at Henson College was "modest", said John Graham, vice-president of university services.

MacDonald could not comment on the approximate cost of damages.

One wall and the ceiling of the institute's library was destroyed. "The institute will be partially back to normal as soon as the wiring inside the building is replaced," he said.

A recent review of fire safety protection at Dalhousie found four of the university's main buildings inadequately protected with fire safety equipment.

The Arts and Administration, Chemistry building, Sir James Dunn building and the education building were all found unsatisfactory, said Graham.

"A few of the buildings on campus do not have sprinkler systems, pull stations, or heat and smoke detectors to summon firefighters," he said.

The Institute of Public Affairs was not equipped with a sprinkler system.

Although the university cannot afford to install proper fire detection systems in every building there are plans for upgrading the fire safety standards in older buildings on campus, said Graham.

Paper staff quits

By LOIS CORBETT

THE ENTIRE STAFF OF THE student newspaper at St. Thomas University in Fredericton resigned last Tuesday, claiming the student council was trying to control the paper's editorial content.

Editor Neil Toner said he and twenty other *Aquinian* staffers walked out in protest of the long-standing dispute between the papers and the Student Representative Council concerning the *Aquinian's* constitutional rights and editorial freedom.

Toner said the *Aquinian* staff hopes to continue publication of an independent paper by appealing to students and alumni for financial assistance.

"We're not about to let this stop us from serving the students of St. Thomas," said Toner.

Toner said the walk-out was a "vote of non-confidence in the SRC's ability to responsibly represent the students at St. Thomas, who are the publishers of the *Aquinian*."

The council was trying to get more control of the paper, said Toner. "They were changing and ignoring our constitution. We were patient, we went through the system of appealing, but it didn't work. We ran into a brick wall," he said.

The SRC posted student police outside the *Aquinian* office door

the day after the staff resigned, and asked the director of the student union building to change the locks on the door. The council also disconnected the paper's telephone.

Toner said members of the SRC executive went to Henley Publishing in Woodstock, the paper's printer, to check the paper before its press run.

A letter signed by the staff members said they were tired of working under the constant threat of closure while trying to publish a paper free of editorial

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Women are test animals

By CHERYL TIBBETTS

A NEW YORK LAWYER SAYS pharmaceutical companies don't care about the lives of women, only about corporate policies.

Speaking on reproductive technology at the Killam Library last week, Shainwald said standards for contraceptives should be higher.

"Women are the ultimate test animals," she said. "(They) have to take power and control to have informed consent."

Shainwald is a major force in the women's health movement in the United States. She specializes in liability cases involving women with health problems caused by contraceptives.

Shainwald mainly discussed the dangers of Depo-Provera, a contraceptive administered to women intermuscularly at three month intervals. The drug is not approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but it is available to women who want it.

Depo-Provera has not passed the animal safety tests because it has been found to cause cancer in dogs and monkeys. Side effects of the drug include various forms of cancer, bleeding and clotting, severe depression, headaches, lack of sex drive, sterility, and damage to the fetus. Depo-Provera is manufactured in Canada for shipment around the

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