

Grits take Tory loan policy

by Neil Donald

University students in Nova Scotia can expect to have their debt load doubled by the changes to the provincial Student Assistance Program as presented in last Thursday's provincial budget.

The changes were first proposed by the previous Tory administration last April 7 and were subsequently announced as Liberal administration policy in the weeks preceding the budget.

Previously the maximum amount of debt a student depending on student loans and bursaries could incur was \$3,360 in a school year and \$13,440 in a four-year program.

The announced changes mean that even if a student passes five credits in each year, they will have a debt load of \$6,500 in a single school year and \$26,000 by the time they graduate after four years.

"Before the changes, \$5,600 was the maximum available from federal and provincial sources, and this sum did not cover the real costs of attending university for a school year," said Donna Macdonald, Information Officer for the

Department of Education in the new Liberal administration.

According to MacDonald, the new program effectively raises the funding available to students by \$2,500 dollars to \$8,160 per year. She said that the loan remission and interest relief provisions of the program "are examples of our commitment to help post-secondary students."

However, New Democratic Party Education Critic John Holm disagreed. "These changes are not intended to improve the economic situation of students. The provisions and changes to the student aid system are primarily aimed at saving the province money," Holm said.

He pointed out that in 1992-93 there was \$15,117,100 in the operating budget for bursaries and other related costs, and in the 1993-94 there is only \$3,277,900 in the operating budget for the same area; a decrease of over 78 per cent.

"If you look at the 'commitments' of the Conservatives and Liberals, there is more talk than action," said Holm, who pointed to a notice of resolution

he tabled in the legislature recently to support his statement, which read:

Whereas four weeks ago the Premier told a theatre full of actors, directors and producers that his government was "going to direct some major efforts with limited finances to foster cultural expression in the province" and

Whereas the Premier added that governments have considered the arts a societal burden and educational frill for too long; and

Whereas the Premier and his Minister of Education were consulted before Dalhousie announced plans to eliminate most of its cultural programs, and the minister then praised Dalhousie's courage;

Therefore be it resolved that this house condemns the two-faced approach of his government towards the role of the arts in society, the economy and education and urges the government to get its 'frills' right before it again prides the great courage of those who would slash and hack.

PC leader Terrence Donahoe could not be reached for comment on the budget.

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