

## SUNS responds to crisis

By DAVID OLIE

AFTER TWO MONTHS OF crises, the Students' Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS) has renewed its commitment to struggle for the rights of the students of the province.

At a conference held at Mount St. Vincent University this past weekend SUNS representatives elected new members to serve on its executive, planned to spread its message to Nova Scotia campuses, and questioned the future of post-secondary education in the province.

"The provincial government really doesn't appreciate the gravity of the situation facing post-secondary education," says James LeBlanc, chair of SUNS.

LeBlanc says he is particularly pleased with the success of a panel discussion held during the conference. The panel was made up of faculty, students and government, including Dr. Peter Butler, senior advisor for post-secondary education in the provincial department of education.

Butler was in the hot seat during most of the discussion, and LeBlanc says he was not impressed with what Butler has to say.

"Butler's remarks show that Nova Scotia universities are not up to par, and his department is responsible for that situation," LeBlanc says.

LeBlanc says Butler's most remarkable comment was that he was unsure that he would send his own children to a Canadian university, let alone a Nova Scotian one.

Much of the delegates' time was devoted to discussing the recent announcement of \$6 billion in cutbacks to provincial transfer payments by the federal government.

At the final plenary session, Frank DeMont of Mount St. Vincent put forward a motion calling on the province to increase the total funding of post-secondary education in the next year,

regardless of changes in the levels of federal funding. The motion was passed unanimously.

Other business at the final plenary included the selection of new executive members. In a surprise move, Christine Soucie, a student at St. Mary's University, was elected as communications co-ordinator.

St. Mary's student council tried to leave SUNS in October. A cross-campus referendum was held, with a majority backing the council's decision. It was later found that the referendum results were invalid under the council's constitution, because less than the required percentage of students had cast ballots. Soucie, a reporter for the *St. Mary's Journal*, is currently facing legal action from council president Mark Bower due to a story she wrote alleging irregularities in the counting of the ballots cast in the referendum.

Soucie says that although not a member of council, she attended the conference as an interested student of a member institution. St. Mary's council did not send an official delegation.

Also elected at the final plenary were Barney Savage of Dalhousie as vice chair and Kamleh Nicola, also of Dal, as campaign co-ordinator.

Another topic of debate was the organization's reaction to last September's pull-out of the Acadia University student council. Delegates agree that SUNS should stay in touch with any Acadia students interested in SUNS.

However, Tom Rhymes of University of King's College went on record as being opposed to any initiative by SUNS to open a dialogue with Acadia students. Rhymes says any such move would go against the free and democratic decision of the Acadia student council to leave the organization.

"But if the students initiated the contact, then that's alright with me," Rhymes says.



When does the croquet game start? Dal delegates to last weekend's SUNS conference sit through the closing minutes of final plenary. Left to right (in background): Barney Savage, Reza Rizvi, Catherine Blewett, Andrew Blewett. Photo by Todd K. Miller, Dal Photo

## Future of education debated

By CHRISTINE SOUCIE  
of the *St. Mary's Journal*

FIVE PEOPLE REPRESENTING different sectors of the education community participated in a panel discussion — The Future of Education — hosted by the Students' Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS).

The panel discussion was part of a SUNS conference held at Mount St. Vincent University last weekend. Many issues were discussed, in particular, accessibility to institutions of higher learning and the possible ramifications of the report of the MacDonald Commission.

It was agreed by all the panelists that an accessible education is desirable in Canadian society and four of the five panelists agreed the MacDonald Commission's recommendations would prevent accessibility.

However, Dr. Peter Butler, a senior department of education advisor, said the university community need not fear the MacDonald Commission. He said the province has already reacted to the Commission's report by not giving any copies of it except one for the legislative library, which had apparently been misplaced.

He further added that, "the Commission is not generating much enthusiastic interest except for the segment on free trade. It (the Commission) is not unsettling the nation and certainly not Nova Scotia."

Dr. Janet Maher, a researcher for SUNS' counterpart in Ontario, said she disagreed with Dr. Butler's dismissal of the MacDonald Commission. She listed a series of commissions and reports, ie. Ontario's Bovey Report, and said they were adding legitimacy to new notions like an income contingency plan. "There is a new debate in education — Who should pay?" Maher said.

Students pay only a small percentage of the total cost of educa-

tion. Both levels of government support the major costs of education. The federal government has threatened to cut approximately \$25 million from its Established Program Financing (EPF) transfers to the provinces for health and education.

SUNS representatives are concerned that if the EPF cuts are implemented, students will be required to pay much more for their education. This would prevent many people from attending a college or university.

James LeBlanc, chair of SUNS, said he has not run across any student organization that supports an income contingency plan such as that recommended by MacDonald.

"Students will be required to pay back loans depending on their salaries upon graduation. After a number of years this could lead to governments giving student aid to students that take a 'hot' degree that guarantees employment," said LeBlanc. SUNS is concerned that this will not lead to an accessible post-secondary education system and that the number of students in liberal arts degree programs will decline.

Dr. Helmut Schweiger, a representative of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, also disagreed with Butler. Schweiger said as one report after another appears they add legitimacy to recommendations consistent in all of them.

Though Schweiger disagreed with plans that inhibit accessibility he said he believes "the scariest thing on the horizon" is the threatened \$25 million cut to EPF.

Om Kamra, president of the Nova Scotia Confederation of University Faculty Associations, raised other issues that pertained to accessibility. He said he believes strong undergraduate programs are necessary for successful graduate programs. As well, institutions should not have

to starve for equipment.

Kamra suggested the Nova Scotia government "pocketed money" from EPF allocations to health and education for the 1985/86 years. "EPF funds increased 7.3 percent this year while provincial funds only increased 3.9 percent," Kamra said.

Kamra said the quality of education is also suffering due to cutbacks. "While enrolment has increased, there has been no increase in funds," and this is coupled with inflation.

"I think it is going to get worse. In GNP terms Canada spends the least of all (developed) countries," Kamra said.

LeBlanc said the safety net for students has been eroded. "The bursary portion of student aid should be at 1981 levels, and if inflation is included, the amount should be \$12 million," he said.

LeBlanc summed up by saying, "Accessibility should not be sacrificed for excellence — make accessible institutions as excellent as possible."

## Sit-in ends with charges pending

**KELOWNA, B.C. (CUP)** — Fifteen students at Okanagan College in Kelowna ended their occupation of BC premier Bill Bennett's constituency office last Sunday night.

Kelly Whitehorse, one of the occupiers, says the building owner attacked him and "started beating me on the top of my head" during the occupation. The students have notified authorities and expect the crown prosecutor to lay charges of assault.

The students entered the office on Oct. 29 after being frustrated in their attempts to meet with Bennett, their local MLA.

Heather Gropp, chair of the Okanagan student council execu-

tive committee, says Bennett hasn't been to the college, which is in his riding, for at least four years.

"In light of what he's done for education, it's time he got on the other end and answered some questions," says Karen Cschild, one of the occupiers and a member of the student association at Okanagan. "We want a public meeting where he can defend himself in front of all the students," she said.

In addition to the meeting, students want an all-grant student aid programme, a reduction of tuition fees to their pre-restraint level and a promise of no cuts to the colleges' 1986-87 operating budgets, she says.

The students were offered a pri-

vate meeting at Bennett's constituency office at 7:30 on Nov. 11, but continued their occupation in the hopes of securing a public meeting with the premier.

Cschild says Bennett told the students "it would be better if we were at home studying. Bennett's office is an excellent place to study," she says.

A press release issued Monday says that with no further action on Bennett's part, the students ended their occupation "to allow their MLA to reconsider" his decision not to hold a public meeting at the college.

They hope to establish a time and place for a public meeting with Bennett within the next week.