

Atlantic Institute of Education, dead.

by Ken Burke

A decision by the Nova Scotia Provincial Government to completely cut off funding to the Atlantic Institute of Education has thrown the future of the Institute's students and staff into question. It's also a precedent of sorts - the first time in Canadian history that a post-secondary Institute of education has been shut down due to funding cutbacks.

On Friday, August 20, Dr. Bill Hamilton, Director of the Atlantic Institute (AIE), was informed via telegram that the entire allotted provincial funding had been withdrawn. All \$945,000 of the AIE's budget had been terminated due to results of a budget review of the Nova Scotia Department of Education. The Institute was already five months along in their operating year. Hamilton was also told to begin immediate cessation of all Administrative and Academic activities of the Institute.

Peter Butler, an assistant to Education Minister Terry Donahoe, claimed the shut-down was necessary due to the Province's financial problems. "The province had less money coming in (due to changes in EPF) so it was entirely understandable we had to get it somewhere," said Butler. He added that, "The New York bankers made it crystal clear," referring to the New York exchange banks' lowering of the province's credit rating one grade during this summer.

"There wasn't any malicious intent," he explained. "We didn't sit down and look at what Universities we could shut down. We looked, explored, and explained to Cabinet several options, and this was chosen." Of the other options,

Butler would only say that they were "completely confidential cabinet material".

"They said they wanted things wrapped up as soon as possible," said Joe Murphy, an Instructor at the Atlantic Institute. "That could mean transferring credits to other Universities or wrapping up courses."

The Atlantic Institute of Education is a small, highly specialized degree-granting Institution operating out of Halifax, with a staff of 25, and 69 students enrolled in its programs. The AIE was unique, as it offered students the possibility of obtaining a PhD or Masters degree in Education while continuing to be employed in the Education field. Most of the AIE's students were simultaneously teaching, either at or nearby Nova Scotia and Maritime Universities. By hiring a qualified Professor from a local institution to teach an AIE student, the students enrolled in the AIE would be able to work towards and receive their Doctorate or Masters degree without being forced to quit their current teaching job to leave the Atlantic for schooling. After the Institute's closing, this form of education will no longer be available.

The abrupt closure of the Institute has left its students wondering anxiously what their fate will be. Students who have spent up to \$8,000 each on course fees and textbooks are in the position of not knowing the status of their programme. Terry Donahoe is "looking at arrangements so that the students who are part-way through Masters or Doctorate programs could be taken in by other Institutions in Nova Scotia".

However, the unique nature of

the AIE has complicated the transfer of students. The University was set up under an Act of the Provincial Legislature which stated that the AIE must not duplicate courses offered elsewhere in the Atlantic Provinces. According to faculty, staff, and students of the Institute, this mandate has been filled. This also means that there are currently no comparable courses for AIE students to transfer to in the Maritimes.

The Minister's Office disputes this claim to non-duplication. Peter Butler claims that, "The last I heard, some of the work could have been handled by other Universities in the Province." He added that it was "obviously in the interests of any Professor to say what they do isn't duplicated elsewhere. It's in everybody's interests to do that."

Dalhousie University, the only other University in the Atlantic to offer a PhD course in Education, has a two-year residence requirement for the course which would force AIE students to quit their current jobs in order to complete their degree. And according to Joe Hrestak, an AIE student, Dal simply cannot supply many of the courses which the AIE offered and were instructing students with.

Dalhousie University President Andrew MacKay said he had been approached by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) to "look into ways Dalhousie could assume responsibility for the AIE students". However, he seemed wary of the idea. "I don't think it's possible to pick up the students without more funds. The same kind of work still has to be done."

In the meantime, the students are still awaiting word on their fate. Joe Hrestak is one of the lucky ones. His thesis was just completed and he has recently undergone his PhD oral exam. But he knows what other students are going through. "They don't know what to do - those at the thesis stage don't know who'll handle their work and whether to finish it or not. Everything's at a standstill." Hrestak still worries about how valuable his degree will be. "If I look for employment elsewhere, and somebody looks at my PhD, they'll see 'AIE' and notice it's no longer there. It might prejudice people."

The AIE's Professor Murphy is also pessimistic about the students' fate. According to Murphy, "There are few Universities who would look favourably on transferring the bulk of a program, or someone who was working on a thesis. Those who have the most invested in the AIE have the most to lose."

The staff of the Institute will also be especially hard hit by the closure. All the Professors and other staff will be fired as soon as the Institute has been permanently shut down. As of press date, the payroll was still operating normally for staff and there were no layoffs as yet. But people are not expecting a miracle. John Knight, the Atlantic Institute's Director of Communications, indicated that the staff were definitely not looking forward to the prospect of sudden unemployment. "They (the staff) don't know what's going to happen to them. It's too late in the school year to get

hired elsewhere."

"There are people here who just started paying off mortgages; some just had children," said Knight. "They're really going to be in a bad situation."

Although the professors are threatening to sue the AIE Board of Governors for breach of contract, the provincial government seems unconcerned. Education Minister Donahoe claims that this will have no effect on any actions of the Provincial government, as the contract is between the faculty and the AIE, not the faculty and the province. "All that happened," said Peter Butler, "is that the province withdrew its funding from a private institution, and that Institution, which is the employer, made the decision."

Kenneth Ozmon, president of Saint Mary's University and president of the Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents, had words of cold comfort to the staff and students at the Institute. "We'd be sympathetic to hire someone, if we had openings, but we don't. We're very sympathetic to staff, who'll lose their jobs, and the students, who are caught up in the system." Peter Rans, Dalhousie Student Council president and interim chairperson of the Students' Union of Nova Scotia, was particularly angry that the closing had occurred. "I would say it's a government completely misreading a situation," he stated. "The Institute was closed with little or no consideration given to the teachers and students."

Housing situation is bleak, residences full

by Bruce Galloway

September is here and once more the annual scramble is on as students try to find a place to live. This year low vacancy rates, high rents and an increased student enrollment have all combined to make the housing picture in Halifax a bleak one.

As of April, the vacancy rate in Halifax was .4 per cent (based on buildings with more than six units) while the South End's rate was a startling .1 per cent. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) considers a vacancy rate of two to three per cent a healthy rental market.

Hilary Hambling, director of the Dalhousie Housing Office, feels that this year is the second worst in her seven years at the office. "Apartments and flats are very scarce this year and tend to be very expensive," noted Hambling.

However, on a more optimistic note, Hambling points to the increased number of single rooms listed with the office. "We have more places available this year," explained Hambling, "however, the demand is also much greater."

The South End's low vacancy rate and students' desire to live near campus inflate the price of housing. At the same time, the large demand at the beginning of the school year permits landlords to rent even the least desirable accommodation without any problems. Arnold Fineberg, vice-president of the Investment Properties Owners Association of Nova Scotia and a landlord, conceded, "You can almost rent anything in Halifax in September."

If this wasn't bad enough, students often suffer discrimination at the hands of landlords. Many landlords view students as poor tenants and either refuse to rent to them or demand "safeguards" such as extra months' rent. Fineberg does not feel this is discrimination but rather "sound business procedures". For his part, Fineberg finds that today many young people are "irresponsible" and therefore poor tenants.

Hambling of the Dalhousie Housing Office has noticed a real shift in the last few years in landlords' attitudes to student tenants. "A lot of landlords consider stu-

dents poor tenants mainly because of trouble they have had with them in the past," she said.

The bleak off-campus housing situation has also spilled over into residences this year. Howe Hall, Shirreff Hall and Fenwick Towers all have long waiting lists. Dean of Men Pat Donahoe explained that in previous years those on the waiting list could expect some openings as people found off-campus housing and cancelled their reservations. "This year, because of an increased demand and a larger holding deposit, we have had almost no cancellations," Donahoe said, adding that, in some cases, people are becoming desperate.

