

McInnis grilled in mini-forum

by David Deaton

A panel discussion on "Financing Post-Secondary Education" attended by representatives of the three major political parties quickly turned into a ceremonial roast of Tom McInnis, Nova Scotia's Minister of Education.

This event was the headline act of an all-day conference organized by the Students' Union of Nova Scotia on post-secondary education. The theme, however, clearly revolved around university accessibility — or the increasing lack thereof for many Nova Scotians.

The other panelist, Vince MacLean, leader of the N.S. Liberal Party, and Alexa McDonough, leader of the N.S. New Democrats, assailed the Conservative government's neglect of post-secondary funding.

MacLean, speaking first, observed that students and their families were acquiring ever-heavier debt-loads under the Tories' parsimonious bursary program. He called for substantially increased bursaries and a "cleaning up" of the Student Aid Office.

Next to speak was Alexa McDonough, who picked up where MacLean left off. Without referring to a prepared text, she cited a flurry of statistics as evidence of a "dangerous erosion of post-secondary funding". Merely to restore current funding proportionate to 1979-80 levels would require, she claimed, \$85 million in government grants. She too decried the fact that Nova Scotia, of all the provinces in confederation, allows the highest tuition fees yet offers the most meagre bursary programs.

McDonough warned that inadequate post-secondary funding would further widen the great inequalities already existing in the province. "Apart from university students staggering under a mortgaged education are those who can't afford to enter the system in the first place." First among the financially strapped, she asserted, would continue to be members of minority groups and people from outlying regions.

Last to speak was Tom McInnis, Minister of Education. He expressed regret that Premier John Buchanan could not attend. McInnis came, he said not so much to speak as to listen, especially to suggestions from the student body. "We want your views," he said.

The honourable minister launched into a prepackaged speech. He declared his commitment to "education, purpose and focus" in post-secondary education. He confessed that he had been amazed to learn that 18 per cent of Nova Scotia high school students go on to university, but protested that post-secondary funding was "more of an issue that it should be".

McDonough said this very statistic proved how Student Aid fell short in encouraging young people to further their education. Part-time and mature students are even more inadequately provided for, she added.

Funding from the private sector was also discussed. While McInnis welcomed deeper private involvement, McDonough spoke of universities being turned into corporate handmaidens.

In another instance, McInnis lamented, "We don't have the wealth of Ontario — we can't dole out funds the way rich provinces can."

"Then why," asked McDonough, "was John Buchanan the only premier ready to accede to Mulroney's infamous proposal to cut back federal transfer payments?"

So the debate raged, with McDonough and McInnis clashing on every point — while Vince MacLean looked on forlornly.

A brief question period followed the speeches by the three representatives. The most astonishing question for the audience was put forward by McInnis: "Does anyone here know of individuals who aspire to attend university but cannot because they lack the wherewithal?"

The honourable minister seemed genuinely surprised when the audience responded with a resounding "YES!" "I didn't know," McInnis mumbled. "That's what I came here to find out."



PHOTO: ROCHELLE OWEN

Vince looked suspicious, Alexa looked bored, and Tom looked pretty tight-lipped. The mini-forum on post-secondary education took place on Tuesday, October 20th in the Dal SUB.

No names, no funding

MONTREAL (CUP) — A school policy requiring student groups to submit the names of their members has come under attack from gays and lesbians at Québec's largest public university.

To receive funding, undergraduate groups at l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) have to submit the names of at least 200 members so the university can verify their student status and collect their member-

shipfees. Only departmental associations are exempt from this policy.

Gay and lesbian UQAM students have charged that such a policy would force their members to make their sexual orientation public.

"The problem with this method is that the university asks for the names and ID numbers of students who want to become members," said

Raymond-Paul Joly, a member of l'Association des gays et lesbiennes de l'UQAM (ALGUQAM).

ALGUQAM has applied for funding this October. The association has to gather a list of 200 members by January 5.

"There are hundreds of gay students at UQAM but people are afraid it will be noted on their record," Joly said. "Besides, who would want to go to the registrar to pay their membership fees and risk being recognized?"

Joly also added that straight students who would want to join ALGUQAM as sympathizers might also be discouraged by the current funding policy.

UQAM official Joanne Babin, who works for the university's community services department, says the group never told her of their criticisms.

"The university is ready to listen to them," she said. "But I can't argue their case with my superiors if the students don't tell me what the problem is."

Babin said the university was not likely to make an exemption to the policy because "every group would want to be treated in a special way."

"The problem for us now is to find 200 members willing to go public," said Joly. "We really don't know what to do."

"If people don't want to make themselves known, they won't be members," said Babin.

Money limits disabled access

HALIFAX (CUP) — A woman in a wheelchair was trapped in a Dalhousie University elevator until three passers-by managed to lift the chair up to the level of the floor.

The incident, reported in Dal News, the university's public relations department newspaper, prompted a member of the Dalhousie Board of Governors to complain about accessibility for the disabled on campus.

"She accepted it — what can one do? But I'm not about to," Maxine Tynes told colleagues at last month's board meeting. "I feel so strongly one has to lobby for changes."

Dalhousie President Howard Clark is reported as saying he "appreciated all (Tynes') concern."

Clark said the elevator will be investigated, by added that renovations to older buildings are expensive.

According to the Dal News, Tynes said money shouldn't be the determining factor. "My contention is some problems don't take money — they take sensitivity and awareness," she said.

Tynes also pointed out that many Dalhousie buildings were constructed at a time when accessibility for the disabled was not considered essential.