

cross-canada briefs

Native hunger strike ends

VICTORIA (CUP) — Four University of Victoria students have ended a 20-day hunger strike. It began as a protest against cuts to funding for post-secondary education for natives. The hunger strike was triggered by a memo from the federal government suggesting that the level of funds for aboriginal education would be frozen at current levels in the federal budget.

On Feb. 16, the strikers erected tents in the student union building of the University of Victoria to start a diet of herbal tea, juice, and coffee.

While the budget doesn't specifically mention changes to post-secondary education funding for natives, it does cut back growth in spending by the department of Indian affairs. In the context of a projected increase in tuition fees and cost of living, a funding freeze would further erode the accessibility of education for aboriginal students.

"280 aboriginal students won't be able to afford spaces at the university," said one striking student, Mansell Griffin.

The group has stopped their hunger strike, said another striker Penny Katzel, but they have not given up their fight.

"We're really sore and in pain today," he said. "We need to quit for our health. Any further and we would be risking our lives."

After a meeting on March 2 with Ovide Mercredi, chief of the Assembly of First Nations, the group decided the strike should end and a new phase of protest should begin.

NWT students upset at relocation

BY JAENY BAIK

TORONTO (CUP) — Students at Arctic College in the Northwest Territories walked out of their classes over a decision by their administration to move two departments from the main Nunatta campus in Iqaluit to Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet.

The two-year process of decentralization would be comparable to moving departments from Toronto to Halifax.

Students are upset that the relocation decision was made without any student consultation, said student Tonya Lindsay.

"The problem is that the process [of deciding to relocate] was completely flawed," said Lindsay. "[The administration] did not include students in the consultation process."

However, Arctic College President Greg Welch disagrees.

"I beg to differ," he said. "[Students] were consulted in the corporate planning process and last fall in a detailed study [to determine the impact of the relocation]."

But in a survey done earlier this year, 64 per cent of currently enrolled students said they would not have enrolled in their program if they had known about the plan beforehand.

Despite the dissatisfaction of current Arctic College students, Welch does not believe the move will affect future enrolment.

"[Relocating the departments] will be better for students of all regions," he said. "I predict [enrolment] will go up. There's a pent up demand in the other two regions."

According to Welch, the move is being implemented in order to increase public access and services to the smaller campuses in Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet. But Lindsay said she believed improving public access to the college is not the primary motivation behind the relocation decision.

She said there has been a struggle between Rankin Inlet, Cambridge Bay, and Iqaluit regarding the distribution of resources within the territory, which is slated to become autonomous in 1999.

Lindsay also said students are not alone in their disapproval of the decision. She said the local business community also registered objections.

MUN admin rules against mystic prof's religious beliefs

BY DAVID COCHRANE

ST. JOHN'S, Nfld. (CUP) — Memorial University administration has ruled that a professor's religious beliefs cannot interfere with a student's right to free and equal access to education.

In early January, Dr. Raneer Panjabi refused to wear a microphone to assist hearing impaired student Nancy Parsons during lectures in Panjabi's 20th-century history course.

Panjabi, a self-described mystic, said wearing a microphone violates her religious beliefs and would disrupt the balance she tries to maintain between her inner soul and her outer self.

Parsons, unhappy with this explanation, dropped Panjabi's course and filed a complaint with Memorial University administration claiming that she was discriminated against on the basis of her impairment.

Dr. Terry Murphy, Memorial's dean of arts, handled the complaint and decided that the student's rights must come first.

"While we were dealing with an apparent conflict of rights, first consideration has to be the student's right to free access to courses," said Murphy. "We expect all of our faculty members to assist students with special needs."

Panjabi did not receive any reprimand, but was officially informed of Murphy's decision. In the future, Panjabi, or any other professor, will be expected to accommodate students with special needs or disciplinary action may result.

Dal, TUNS talk amalgamation

BY DANIEL CLARK

The issue of the amalgamation of Dalhousie University and the Technical University of Nova Scotia has again become a heated debate in the Dalhousie Senate.

Dalhousie President Tom Traves explained that if amalgamated, the two schools would remain as independent entities under a common leadership.

"In my view, an amalgamation of the province's two leading research institutions, with our many complementary strengths, would provide considerable mutual benefits to enhance our teaching and research efforts and enable us to better serve the evolving needs of students and our region," he said in a report to Senate.

For a decade, the province has been putting pressure on Metro Universities to eliminate duplication in the services they offer. An amalgam of Dalhousie and the Technical University of Nova Scotia (TUNS) has been proposed as a solution to prevent an overlap of programs that occurs between the two universities. Both TUNS and Dalhousie have engineering and computer science departments.

In his report to Senate last Monday night, Dr. Traves mentioned that the Minister of Education, John MacEachern, was considering the proposal from the Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education to unite the two schools and was increasing pressure to realize rationalization.

"President Rhodes of TUNS and I reported [to the Minister] that we have been looking at this proposal and appear to be mak-



The face of the future?

ing progress with it, although there are many points to be considered further," said Dr. Traves.

According to the president, this is the third time in the last ten years that this issue has come forward, but financial cutbacks facing both the government and the university have made this, to date, the most serious consideration of an amalgam.

The last time this issue came forward was in November 1989, when President Howard Clark made a special report to the Senate. The report stated that the Board of Governors of both Dalhousie and TUNS had agreed to study the implications of moving TUNS to an 11-acre area adjacent to the Dalhousie campus. Public outcry prevented the shift from taking place.

At Monday's meeting, the mention of the union lightened what had otherwise been a tense atmos-

phere. When asked about the movement and transfer costs which in the past have been placed as high as \$250,000, Dr. Traves said, "There will be no transfer costs. Our campus would expand down to TUNS, and TUNS would expand up to Oxford Street."

The issue of the new name for the combined university brought forth some interesting suggestions. Informal chatter during the meeting revealed such ideas as "The Dalhousie University of Nova Scotia," "The Technica University of Dalhousie," and "The Technical Dalhousie of Nova Scotia."

Although unwilling to comment further, a spokesperson for the Dalhousie Engineering Department expressed concern about the department's future.

"This has been ongoing for several years, and we are watching it very carefully," she said.

Faculty Association, BOG at odds over debt restructuring

BY DANIEL CLARK

A report to the Senate presented last Monday, March 11 by the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) highlighted that the \$17.4 million of Dalhousie's 'problem debt' is owed internally.

In effect, Dalhousie owes \$17.4 million to itself. "[This]...type of debt is typically referred to as 'problem debt,'" revealed an independent report prepared by KPMG Peat Marwick Thorne (KPMG), Dalhousie's external auditors.

Dalhousie's 'problem debt' peaked in 1982-83 at \$39.7 million. In 1990-91, it stood at \$33 million, but since 1990 when the Board of Governor's (BOG) Financial Strategy Committee identified debt reduction as a key objective, the 'problem debt' has been reduced to \$17.4 million.

'Problem debt' is a combination of unfunded capital debt (due to a lack of full funding for major construction projects) and operating debt.

With the exception of mortgage debt, all of Dalhousie's debt is held internally. The \$14 million in unfunded capital debt is managed by loans from the Dalhousie Endowment Fund and Operating Funds. The remaining accumulated operating debt is financed by "loans from the cash flow of restricted funds such as trust, research and operating."

The DFA's presentation on Monday was in response to a BOG report which insinuated that \$1.9 million in interest was owed to other institutions.

In fact, the \$1.9 million is explained in KPMG's official external audit as \$1.2 million owed in interest each year to the Dal Endowment Fund, and \$700,000 in lost revenue.

The DFA report argued that the \$700,000 would be earned only if the money was sitting in a bank account earning interest, but if "...[it is] spent to support academic programs which are being terribly squeezed by one-time restructuring costs, then

[it] can't earn interest."

Dalhousie's VP of Finance, Brian Mason, responded in a report to Senate.

"The Board wishes to use the bulk of its share of the pension surplus to pay off debt so as to free up permanently Operating dollars now spent on interest payments," he said. "These base budget dollars would be allocated every year in accordance with the priorities of the University."

Andrew Wainwright, president of the DFA, proposed an alternative.

"With their plan they are only interested in paying off the debt, and offering us a promise," he said. "We want a fixed amount of money to protect the operating budget and fund special programs. With our plan we have the guarantee of paying off the debt and maintaining these funds."

Mason found fault with some aspects of the DFA's plan.

"The DFA has proposed to use the bulk of the board's share of the pension surplus to pay the one-time costs of faculty buy-outs and severance for laid-off staff — these costs are spread over three years under current policy," he said. "These dollars would be distributed amongst faculties and units on the basis of the number of buy-outs (usually early retirements) and lay-offs rather than in accordance with priorities or relative budget share."

"What if I borrowed \$20 from my left pocket, or \$20 million, and put it in my right?" said Employee Negotiator Paul Huber to the Senate. "I would put an IOU in the original pocket. Not only would I have to pay back the \$20 million, but I would also have to pay interest on the money."

Betty Sutherland, associate university librarian-health services, advocated a more centralized money disbursement system. To prevent the loaning of funds between departments, more monies would be paid directly from the operating budget to individual departments.