

N.S.U.S. Brief on Education

The Honourable G.I. Smith,
Premier of Nova Scotia,
Legislative Building,
Halifax, N.S.

Dear Mr. Premier:

Re: Education in Nova Scotia

University students in Nova Scotia are concerned about the way in which the educational system in this province is developing.

We think it was essential for the Government to start its development of Nova Scotia's educational system, by encouraging primary and secondary education through the program of school consolidation. This it did. To meet demands of present and potential industry in Nova Scotia, priority was then appropriately given to the creation and expansion of vocational and technical schools. The next logical phase in the development of educational facilities was to increase university assistance.

The university grants commission has provided funds for buildings and facilities. It is now necessary to ensure that so large an expenditure of public funds does not work only to the advantage of Nova Scotia's financially privileged citizens.

That such citizens are favoured at the present time is indicated by the fact that while only 28% of Canada's university students come from the 52% of Canadian families who earn less than \$5,000 per year, 25% come from the 6% of Canadian homes which have family incomes of over \$10,000 per year.

We also find ourselves facing the fact that while in Canada 9.5% of persons between 18 and 24 years of age attend university, in Nova Scotia the percentage is 8.1%. Nova Scotia falls significantly below the National level.

These various statistics force us to converge upon one conclusion: if Nova Scotia is to maintain at least its present status within Canada, and if the poorer citizens of our province are to benefit as much from the immense public expenditures upon universities as the wealthier citizens, then various new programs must be implemented.

More particularly, what is required, is a system which will make university education a more attainable goal for the large percentage of our population which cannot now afford a university education.

It is for these reasons that the Nova Scotia Union of Students insists that university fees must go down, rather than stay at their present level.

It is also for these reasons that our Union cannot accept an increase in residence fees. Students entering university from a rural area are almost forced to spend at least one year in residence, even if they eventually hope to find other accommodations. They normally are not well enough acquainted with the university city to find lodgings while still in high school. Resident students incur a higher individual cost in attending university than do other students. The per capita income of rural families is considerably lower than that of urban families (consider, for example, the minimum wage differences between the rural and urban areas).

This means that students from rural families, who in fact have least capital at their disposal, are being asked to spend the most money on their university education. To allow this situation to worsen is unthinkable.

In addition, our university residences offer innumerable advantages to the university student. They are integral parts of the university community. It is not becoming either to the university or to society as a whole to allow the residences to become the domain of the financially privileged.

The Nova Scotia Union of Students therefore trusts that our government will attempt to reduce university residence fees, rather than allow them to escalate. This may require a change in its policy of not providing subsidization of university residences.

It is also because of the inequality of opportunity inherent in our educational system that the Nova Scotia Union of Students suggests that the time has come to establish a bursary scheme which will help to recruit new university students without attention to their financial background.

We suggest that the Government of Nova Scotia should give a bursary of \$300 to each resident of Nova Scotia graduating from grade twelve in a Nova Scotia high school, and who is accepted by any university (in Nova Scotia or elsewhere). This money should be paid directly to the university which accepts the student, part of it at the time of registration, and the remainder in January.

Money would be given to students who may be reluctant to enter university. Once there, these persons will hopefully better understand the value of a university education, will be informed on the various student aid programs, and will be more likely to borrow money to continue.

Because the money is paid directly to the University, there will be no possibility of abuse of the funds. Because the money is paid in two instalments, there will only be a partial payment to students who do not continue their studies in the second term.

If the scheme is applied to Nova Scotians attending University outside Nova Scotia, these persons will be assisted in following courses not presently available in Nova Scotian universities.

The amount of three hundred dollars may be varied according to the resources of the government.

The scheme may be extended to apply to the same students on an incentive basis. This basis would be the setting of an academic requirement, which, if obtained, would allow a student to be eligible for a further bursary. The academic requirement, of course, would vary in different faculties. For example, those students successfully completing four out of five courses toward an Arts degree in their first year might receive a further \$300 to be applied toward their second year at university and so on.

Finally, had this scheme been in effect for the current academic year it is estimated that approximately 2,000 students in first year would have qualified for the \$300 bursary. Thus, the cost to the Government would have been \$600,000. It is reasonable to anticipate the cost would be similar next year.

Neither keeping residence fees at their present level nor granting a three hundred dollar bursary to first year students will come close to paying a student's expenses completely, while he is in university. It is estimated that for a student to attend university the cost is \$1,750 per annum, and it is also estimated that the average student saves about \$400 from his summer earnings. This means that even a first year student must raise at least 1,000 dollars. In some cases he may be able to receive assistance from his parents. Otherwise, he will also require the assistance of a Canada Student Loan.

We would also, therefore, recommend some necessary changes in the Canada Student Loan Plan.

We first of all suggest that the government should attempt to bring about a change in the means test which is a part of the loan. We recognize that at the present time the Means test is necessary. Yet many parents refuse to sign the loan, or refuse to provide the financial assistance which their incomes would show that they are well able to afford. Students who are the children of such parents often have to interrupt their studies at a very crucial time simply because they are ineligible for the loan which they very badly need.

We specifically recommend that while students must be required to declare the amount of their parents' assistance to them, this assistance, rather than their parents' income, should be a determining consideration in evaluating the candidates.

We also request that the department administering the loans be enlarged, as many students now receive their loans so late in the year that they are caused considerable hardship.

It may be seen from our recommendations that while we are attempting not to drain the Nova Scotia Treasury at a time so critical to the future of the province, our scheme will offer the very needy high school graduate a six hundred dollar bursary. (The \$300 Nova Scotia Bursary now accompanying the Nova Scotia Loan, plus the \$300 bursary which we have proposed.) This in itself will help greatly to increase the probability that a student from a poorer Nova Scotia home will be able to benefit directly from the vast amounts of public money which have recently been spent on the university.

The proposed scheme would also help to rectify, at least temporarily, the unfortunate fact that in this province, where incomes are generally lower than in other parts of the country, the cost to an individual for a university education is higher than in other parts of Canada. Earlier this year, your minister of Education was provided with a table of tuition fees which indicated this very clearly.

The program of bursaries which we have asked your government to adopt is only one of the ways in which Nova Scotia Students are trying to encourage interested high school students to attend university. We have been working for several years on a program of high school visitation which attempts to stress the meaning of a university education. But when the costs of attending university are so prohibitively high, the effect we can have in these other projects is severely limited.

Another factor which hinders the full educational development of the youth of this province is Nova Scotia's whole system of high school education. The salary rates of teachers in this province are desperately low.

As long as many of our better teachers are attracted to other provinces by the wages offered them in the rest of Canada, we cannot expect that Nova Scotia will ever be able to develop its citizens to their full potential. This fact will be reflected in the social, cultural, and economic life of the province.

There is only one solution to this problem. Education must be given a higher priority in the provincial budget.

Education is not a thing which Nova Scotia can afford to fall behind in. It is of extreme importance that Nova Scotia develop its educational system at least at the same rate as the rest of Canada; otherwise, we can never hope to improve our Province's financial situation relative to the rest of this nation.

According to the Canadian Tax Foundation Report, "Provincial Finances - 1967", the percentage of provincial expenditure devoted to education is no higher than that of at least four other provinces, and is less than the average expenditure for all provinces. As well, in terms of per capita expenditure for education, according to the Canadian Tax Foundation Report "Provincial Finances-1967" Nova Scotia has declined from third highest per capita expenditure in education in 1957, to seventh highest in 1967.

In 1957 Nova Scotia was devoting a higher per capita rate of expenditure for education than the National average, for Canada. In 1967, this per capita rate of expenditure is less than the national average. In the 10 year period, individual tuition fees at Dalhousie have risen, in some faculties, up to one hundred per cent.

It is because of the great importance of Education to the future and present citizens of Nova Scotia that we have chosen to present this letter in the company of a token number of marchers, representative of our various universities. Even at a time when industrial development is so important to Nova Scotia, it is necessary to remember that Society's greatest raw material is developed through education. Not all citizens have the same educational needs or abilities; but each individual must be free to develop himself to the best of his ability and interest. This requires that all educational institutions be open to those who are qualified to enter.

Universities are no exception. In a university, it should be intellectual ability, and not socio-economic status, which determines whether or not one will be accepted. Our present university structure does not allow for this.

Those of us who are now studying at universities are obviously not affected by financial barriers. They are not our problem so much as they are the public's problem. Yet as citizens of Nova Scotia it is our responsibility to communicate our analysis of this situation both to our government and to the public. It is through this letter, our march, and the public media, that we hope to do this.

Sincerely yours,
Kim S. Cameron,
President N.S.U.S.

Member Institutions:

Dalhousie University
St. Mary's University,
St. Francis Xavier University,
Mt. St. Bernard College,
Mt. St. Vincent University,
University of King's College,
Nova Scotia Institute of Technology,
College St. Anne

Printed here is the first draft of the brief to be presented to the Nova Scotia government. The only changes will be grammatical; the brief is not to be quoted by the news media until it is officially released to them.