

# EDITORIAL

## A matter of priorities

by Kwame Dawes

On Monday of this week, the Student Union hosted a banquet which was billed as a special gift to all those students who have worked hard in extra-curricular activities all year, and who would normally get no recognition for their activities. This was the first banquet of the kind and it cost the students over five thousand dollars to hold it. A local band was hired to give live entertainment to the event after the formal festivities were over. It was described as a semi-formal event although many who attended made a special effort to dress well for the occasion. It was quite a gala do. About thirty people were honoured at this event including the two out-going presidents of the university and the student union: Dr. Downey and Wayne Carson respectively. The traditional gold and silver awards for excellence were handed out at this event. Graduating students were the recipients of these awards as is traditionally the case. The turn out for the event was quite impressive. Most student groups that were invited sent a representative or two to the event ensuring that a fairly broad cross-section of the university community was present. All in all, the night was rated a success. The Student Union Executive managed to step out with quite a splash this year.

Of course, they would be quick to point out that this event was not in any way intended as a boost for their public image, but that their primary interest was in the students attended. My innate suspicions of the motives politicians have not been allayed in any way by the actions of this years executive and so I find it very difficult to accept that the banquet was planned as primarily a gift to the students. My disquiet with the entire premise of this banquet has been further exacerbated by the recent news I received that the International Night hosted by the Board of International Students was cancelled because of lack of funds.

If the lack of funds had arisen as a result of poor handling of a budget on the part of the BIS I would sympathise with the actions of the student Union in declining to offer financing for the event. Unfortunately, the Board of International Students was not granted an operating budget this year. The money that may have gone into the organization was withheld by the Student Union to pay off a debt owing to last year's Student Union. That debt emerged after money had to be borrowed from the Union to fund last year's International Night because the Student Union had frozen the budget of the BIS that year. The rationale for that action was simply even if questionable. Returns from the International Night of that previous year were stolen from the home of the treasurer. The Police were brought in but the investigations did not lead to any action. The Student Union chose to "reprimand" the BIS by withholding funds for the following year. Hence the reason that the Board was forced to borrow money from the Union for last year's International Night.

When approached this year for a grant to hold the night, the Student Union declared that it did not have sufficient grant money to allocate to the Board of International Students. Council mandated the finance committee to get the other International Student organizations to jointly fund the International Night from any surplus in their operating budgets. By taking this action Council acted with obviously no understanding of the constitutional position of the Board of International Students at this university. The Board is recognized as an independent organization equal in its autonomy and its rights to funding as any other club and society affiliated with the Student Union. Asking the other International Clubs and Societies like the African, Malaysian and Chinese societies to put money into the budget of the Board of International Students is tantamount to asking the Arts Society, the Business Society, AISEC and the Brunswickan to take money from the budget to place into the budget of another organization. These autonomous international groups are under no obligation to partly fund the BIS and the BIS should not be forced to suffer because these groups chose not to submit money to this end. It is irresponsible and misguided for the Student Union to say to the Board of International Students that if the related groups are not willing to come up with the money then no money would be made available. I commend the other groups for deciding against allowing money to be taken from their budgets and placed in the BIS budget for it at least prevented the setting of a seriously problematic precedent from being set.

The BIS is the political voice of International students at this university and its role is distinct from the more myopic agenda of the individual cultural societies. The Student Union recognized this role some years ago when it chose to regard the BIS as a valid organization on this campus. Over the past few years this decision has been increasingly eroded by a combination of ignorance and sheer disregard. This last action combines both things. The Student Union complained about not having enough funds to assist the BIS in putting on the International Night yet it was able to discover over five thousand dollars to host a banquet that was not a traditional part of Student Union activity. Some would argue that the banquet was catering for the majority while the International Night wasn't. This is untrue. The International Night is carefully planned to cater to the entire student population. It fits the criteria that guides the viability of funding from the Student Union. It is culturally and educationally beneficial to this university. It is an event that is patronized by people from the university community as well as the Fredericton community in general. It is therefore a sad indictment on the Student Union that it has failed to assist this organization from carrying out its mandate.

I congratulate the recipients of awards from the Student Union - they deserved these awards, and I suspect that the students who enjoyed the expensive dinner were deserving of such recognition. However there is a question of priorities and principle of work here. The Student Union has failed in its response to the needs of the International Students on this campus. This is unacceptable as it places an ugly blemish on what was a good year for Student Government.

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Canada's oldest official student publication

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The Brunswickan, in its 124th year of publication, is Canada's oldest official student publication. The Brunswickan's offices are located in Rm 35 of the University of New Brunswick's Student Union Building, P.O. Box 4400, College Hill, Fredericton N.B., E3B 5A3. Tel. 453-4983.

The Brunswickan is published by Brunswickan Publishing Inc. and printed with flair by Global Printing & Binding Inc., Fredericton, N.B.

Subscription is \$25 per year. Second class mail is in effect - #8120.

Local Advertising rates are available from The Brunswickan, (506) 453-4983. National advertising rates are available from Youthstream Canada Ltd., 1541 Avenue Road, Suite 203, Toronto, Ont. M5M 3X4, Tel: (416) 787-4911.

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