

Protest march: a critical appraisal

by Tony N. Kelly, Secretary-Coordinator of the Atlantic Federation of Students

On Thursday, March 30, students in Nova Scotia led the way in the Atlantic region in opposing cutbacks to higher education. They did this through an open show of unity and strength by demonstrating at Province House in Halifax, and at the provincial buildings in both Yarmouth and Sydney.

The demonstrations can be viewed as successes. Government priorities were questioned. We can be certain that both the public and the government is aware of students' continued concern for the erosion of the quality of their education.

However, the size as opposed to the strength of the demonstration in Halifax has led students in other

areas of the province to question the commitment of Halifax institutions to fight the cutbacks.

Halifax had 450 out of some 10,000 possible demonstrators turn out. In Cape Breton, 75 out of a possible 400 marched while a full 120 out of some 170 students went to Yarmouth for their protest. Why was the Halifax demonstration proportionally much smaller than the ones in Sydney and in Yarmouth?

There are many possible answers to the question. I will isolate four. They are limited resources and time, the role of councils, the role of the press, and the role of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) in preparing for the demonstration here.

The march in Halifax was organized by not more than seven solidly

committed people (two of whom had to devote energy to communicating with the rest of the province) in less than two weeks. These people directed a fair amount of valuable time into asking the administrations of the universities to cooperate in fighting the cutbacks.

Not one administration was helpful. Was the time and energy wasted? No - for a myth has been destroyed. Many student unions have argued that the administrations are students' friends. It is an odd friend that won't oppose a common enemy. Students will have to adopt a more critical posture towards their administrations.

Student councils in Halifax did not see fit to make the cutbacks issue the principal item on their agendas. They all had other priorities - ranging from closing down the student press at Dalhousie to pressing financial considerations at Mount St. Vincent. It should be pointed out that the Mount council did make an effort - but it was too late.

The University of King's College students' council solidly practiced its verbal commitment to make the demonstration a success. Their positive turnout illustrated the difference strong council support can make.

The Dalhousie Gazette (the largest circulation student paper in Halifax) was severely constrained in coverage of the action by two things. The first is that the demonstration itself remained an IF as late as March 16 while the AFS office awaited the go-ahead from the various student councils.

The second is that, at the same time as the Dalhousie Student Council voted to support the

Comment is an opinion column open to members of the university community who wish to present an informed opinion on a topic of their selection.

demonstration, it voted to withdraw its financial responsibility for the publication of the Gazette. This act placed the paper in a clearly introspective and defensive posture. This led to the Gazette becoming the Gazette's principal story on March 23. The agents of social change were muffled and they further muffled themselves.

Finally, the CPC(ML) played a very opportunistic and destructive role in terms of trying to make the demonstration a large success. The CPC(ML) - Dalhousie Student Movement - leafleted the residences the night of the 29th with their politically insidious broadsheet which no doubt turned a lot of students away from participating in the demonstration.

The AFS leadership made a very serious political error in taking a hands-off attitude towards their participation in the demonstration. The presence of the "Make the Rich Pay" banners allowed the CPC(ML) to gain a political presence in the demonstration. This was totally unwarranted given their lack of clear self-identification, their non-involvement in the organization of the march, and their incorrect political line. The presence of American professors on the Dal campus is not the source of the cutbacks!

Demonstrations like those held in Nova Scotia on March 30 serve a two-fold purpose: an open show of protest against a cutbacks scenario which is strangling the quality of education in the country, and a political experience for the participants which moves them closer to a clear understanding of the source of the cutbacks crisis.

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period, ISA will continue to represent the international students on the issues affecting them. When new international students arrive on campus, ISA will assist them in finding proper housing. During the last year also, ISA executive members helped a number of foreign students in finding housing and in adjusting to their new environment.

ISA will hold a post-examination reception on April 21. Submarines, Chinese food and tea will be served. Bar service and music are also provided. Admission is free for international students and \$1.00 for others.

All international students and all other interested persons are cordially invited to participate in the activities of the ISA. In fact, the participation in this year's ISA activities has been quite enthusiastic.

Uday Jain
Raj Samra
Masahiro Ieki
Assefa Desta
Mustapha Basso
Negasa Tumsa
Chiyomi Mizuno

Microfilms in Siberia ?

To the Gazette:

The following is a reply to Susan Williams' letter published in last week's Gazette.

Dear Miss Williams:

Thank you for your letter of concern about the operation of the microform area of the Killam Library.

I have checked the matter with the responsible staff members with the following results.

1. Hours - we are open 77 hours per week with 40 hours of that being outside normal class hours. Other university libraries follow this practice of main circulation and study areas being open longer hours than specialized areas due to the cost.

2. The problem of machines in use by a large group of people is real. We check the condition of the machines daily Monday through Friday and any problems discovered (or any reported to Special Services desk by users) are handled immediately. Unfortunately repair service in this geographical area is not good

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A SINCERE THANK-YOU

MAY I SAY THANKS TO THE STUDENTS OF

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
NOVA SCOTIA TECHNICAL COLLEGE
SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY
MOUNT SAINT VINCENT UNIVERSITY

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○
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