

NEWS

Textbook Prices Soar

by NUJMA

Textbook prices are exorbitantly high, a fact to which most any student on campus will attest. When one begins spending close to what amounts to a quarter of regular tuition fees on textbooks, one wonders, and one begins to question.

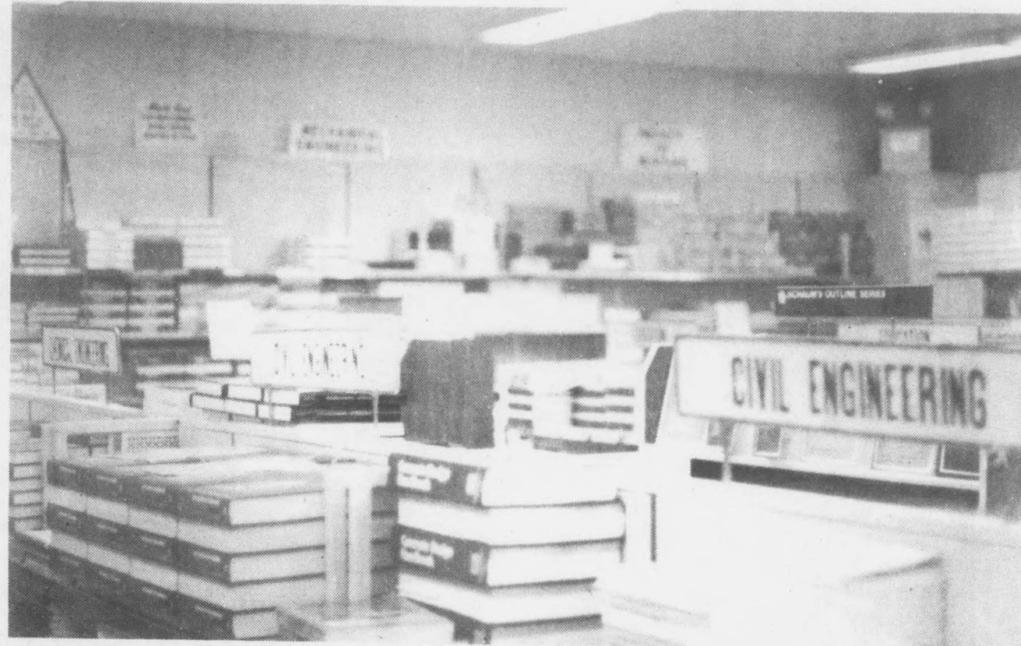
Mr. Doug McConnell is the manager of the UNB Campus Bookstore. He was able to provide some details concerning the whole issue of book costs that will make it all somewhat clearer. According to Mr. McConnell, the bookstore has no real say as far as prices go. "The publisher sets the price, and we increase this price by 20%." This 20% is the bookstore's "gross margin" received from each book it sells; meaning for example, that on a ten dollar book, two dollars would go directly to the store. Most books are much more expensive, however, and it is not hard to imagine that for any given year, the total number of dollars brought in would be fairly large. In fact, last year's total sales for the store amounted to around \$2 900 000 - but the total product cost itself was over 2 million. Mr. McConnell stresses the fact that the bookstore does not actually "profit" from sales because the 20% obtained from each book is more than used up by shipping costs and salaries for bookstore workers. "We're lucky if we can break even," he says, "traditionally we don't. Often we can lose on shipping and handling of books that have to be returned to the publisher because a professor changes his mind about a text. And if some are non-returnable then we're stuck with books that we end up selling for three, four, or five dollars."

So obviously there doesn't seem to be any room to reduce the price of books by reducing the store's gross margin. No, says Mr. McConnell, "UNB would have a bookstore with a deficit unless it could somehow offset the losses taken. (That's part of the reason why) we are diversified to sell other things in order to offset losses in other areas. There is twice as much gross margin on clothing, but that offsets areas where we don't make as much, and hopefully it equals in the end."

Woe for Science students because Science texts are generally more expensive than any others. Mr. McConnell suspects, on behalf of the publishers, that it is because of the "level of content in the books." The least expensive seem to be the Arts books presumably for the same reason. While Arts students may have it easier, the bookstore gets no breaks because "a \$2.95 paperback gets the same handling as a hard-cover, and has the same cost per unit."

So if the bookstore isn't rolling in riches, someone must be... But Mr. McConnell firmly believes that no-one is really profiting. "This is not a lucrative business to be in, unless you can work out all costs or can manage to get a title everyone wants and then strike it rich! There is no "gouging" in the publishing industry in Canada at any level."

He emphasizes that he is not trying to defend the publishers, and that really, anyone doing only Canadian publishing is not making money. "The cost of producing is what makes the prices so high. Publishers have warehouses including real estate tied up too. No sector makes a lot of money. They



might make on one but lose on others." So if we can't blame Canadian publishers, who is responsible? "In the USA, many more books are produced, so the cost price per unit goes way down. Therefore, most Canadian publishers will sell books for American publishers and make money that way," explains Mr. McConnell. In fact, 80% of the books we're buying are "made in the USA" material.

Are there crooks amongst

Canadian publishers, or are our southern neighbours cashing in on the millions of dollars being generated from the sale of their books in Canada? More information is needed before anyone can start pointing fingers, however until then we'll have to expect a 10-15% rise in book prices from year to year, as the trend now goes.

In the words of Mr. McConnell: "No doubt about it, books are expensive. I only hope you

get use out of them. Everything else (you buy) is margined far greater (than books). So I guess you have to ask yourself that books are expensive, but compared to what?"

Perhaps the only consolation, although long-term, is that for the majority of us (hopefully) it will be worth it in the end. After all, a good education and a satisfying career are priceless things.

Emergency Relief Group Formed

by MARK STEVENS

Victims of the recent natural disasters in Jamaica and Bangladesh may soon be receiving aid from UNB students.

Chris Nakash, a third year business student from Jamaica, is trying to organize a relief program here on campus. "Originally, we had decided to help the hurricane victims in Jamaica," said Nakash. "However, after a meeting on Monday night, we realized that we couldn't ignore the plight of those affected by the flooding in Bangladesh."

Taking its name from the title of a Bob Marley song, "Jammin' Aid" hopes to raise money for relief organizations who have depots in Jamaica and Bangladesh.

"Initially, we'd planned on

shipping food and clothing to Jamaica without burdening the Red Cross," said Nakash. "But it soon became apparent that this was unrealistic," he added. "The logistical problems were too much for us to cope with--particularly with such limited resources."

Instead, "Jammin' Aid" will be staging a number of fund raising events. According to Nakash, the Social Club has agreed to co-sponsor a reggae night next Wednesday. The cover charge will go to the relief fund.

"Jammin' Aid" also has plans to bring a live reggae band to UNB. But nothing is definite yet. "We've got a number of fund raising events in the pipeline," he said, "but at this point in time it's too early to give any details."

Representatives of "Jammin'



Aid" hope that their initiative will encourage small businesses in Fredericton to get involved. "The larger corporations have already donated money and materials to relief agencies," said Nakash. "But smaller businesses can still do a lot to help."

The situation in Jamaica is

critical," continued Nakash. "A quarter of the population is homeless; there's no electricity, and this year's crops have been completely ruined. It's estimated that Hurricane Gilbert caused over nine billion dollars (US) damage. And from what I understand, things are even worse in Bangladesh."