

# Handicapped Seek Rights Equality

by John DeMont

A metro organization for handicapped people, Disabled Persons Alliance, (DIAL) recently began canvassing local university campuses and shopping centers in an effort to gain public support in their battle to amend what they deem unfair Nova Scotia Human Rights legislation.

Within the month DIAL hopes to present Ken Stretch, the minister in charge of human rights legislation, with a petition for the amendment of the Human Rights act, with respect to disabled persons, to cover such areas as transportation, education, housing, communications and goods and services.

Handicapped Nova Scotians are currently only protected from discrimination in employment under the act.

What DIAL is aiming for is at least status equivalent to that of the so-called "minority groups" in the province. As Barry Adams, the Public Relations man for DIAL said, "It is damn well time that we are accepted as equal citizens. It came as quite a shock to me that we didn't have the same rights as the rest of the people in Nova Scotia."

Disabled people are currently unprotected and unprovided for in many areas in Nova Scotia which non-handicapped people often take for granted. Even something as simple as going shopping or to a movie is beyond the limitations of a handicapped person as the situation now stands in the Province. Public transportation for handicapped people is unavailable. Most public buildings are inaccessible, having neither ramps or elevators. Housing is also difficult to find as landlords are reluctant to rent

to tenants who will need special accommodations.

Receiving an education is almost impossible. Getting to and from the institution is difficult enough, but once on campus handicapped students find many of the buildings and classrooms inaccessible. St. Mary's is adequate in this respect, but Dalhousie with its older buildings makes moving about for handicapped students an extremely arduous process.

Difficulty in obtaining fundings greatly compounds the problem of education. Handicapped students are usually unable to secure summer employment and as a result must depend upon government handouts for university expenses. Student loans and Nova Scotia government bursaries are obtainable but these make no allowances for a student with a physical handicap. The criteria for allocating these funds is identical for handicapped and non-handicapped students, the only difference being that the usual criterion for obtaining a loan is waived in the case of a disabled student. The regular loan ceiling of \$3000 still exists.

Currently there are no special concessions made for handicapped students except in the case of blind students, for whom the tuition is waived. Assistance from the individual universities varies, but at Dalhousie according to Gordon Steedman, Director of Awards, "There are no specific efforts made on the part of the handicapped student."

Additional funding is supplied by other groups and offices, such as the Department of Education, which assists disabled students

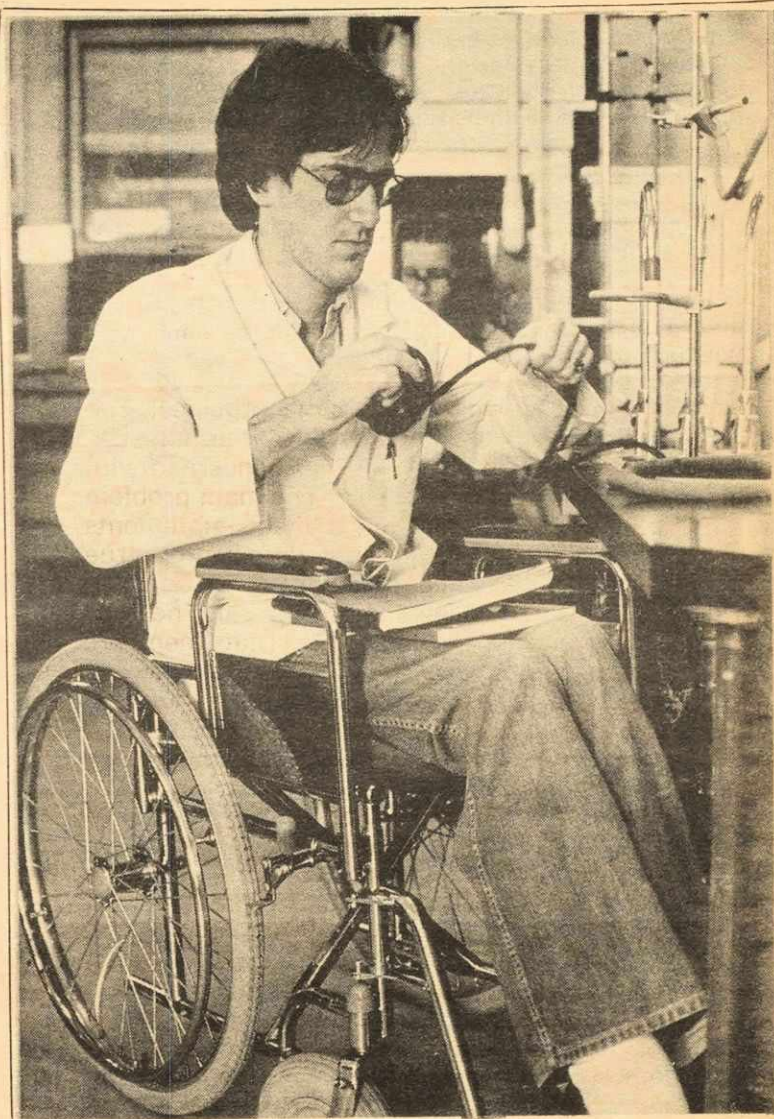
under a provincial and federal agreement. Under this agreement the costs are split 50-50% between the two governments.

Some steps are being taken to remedy this situation. On Tuesday, November 6, Dick Matthews presented a brief before the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Council recommending that extra bursary money be made available to physically handicapped students.

Taking all these things into account, Nova Scotia, and indeed Canada, is far behind other countries when it comes to fair treatment for its disabled citizens. In the U.S., legislation which assists handicapped people is taken for granted. It is something that is expected to exist. But in Nova Scotia it is necessary for great efforts on the part of groups like DIAL to acquire what should be the natural rights of any individual. Presently only New Brunswick has complete coverage for disabled persons under its Human Rights Act.

Government response to DIAL's campaign has been low. DIAL wrote to Ken Stretch several months ago and has yet to receive even an acknowledgement that he received the letter.

Barry Adams feels that the main cause for the government's seeming reluctance to change the legislation is money. The changes in the transportation systems, renovations in buildings, sidewalks etc., plus additional funding could add up to a sizeable amount. However, Adams said, "These improvements in transportation, and accessibility to buildings would enable disabled people to earn their own livings and thus



Student working in lab

Dal Photo / Ummat

make them independent, able to pay taxes and in the long run, less of a burden on the provincial and municipal governments."

Response to the plight of handicapped people from the public sector has so far been very good. DIAL workers received about 300 signatures in one day at the Spryfield

Mall and the response at Dalhousie, even on a day with poor weather, was excellent. Hopefully, this public support will ensure the fact that this important legislation will be brought to the attention of the Human Rights Commission and the present inequalities in the Human Rights Act will be changed.

## Student harassed in attempt to form gay alliance

LENNOXVILLE, QUEBEC (CUP)—A student at Bishop's University has been physically and verbally harassed for attempting to form a gay alliance on campus.

In mid-October Daron Westman published a notice in the campus bulletins of Bishop's and Champlain College (the two schools share a campus) expressing his interest in establishing a gay students' alliance.

Shortly afterwards, West-

man was approached by two students while walking home at night and his jacket ripped in a scuffle. Although Westman was uninjured, the two men shouted insults and threatened to break his legs if he continued in his efforts.

The student newspaper at Bishop's, *The Campus*, has been dragged into battle. Following the incident, the editor wrote an editorial denouncing the "strong streak of bigotry hidden beneath licen-

tiousness" at Bishop's and supported the right of such a group to exist.

The paper has since been barraged with anti-gay letters and phone calls. A letter received by *The Campus*, signed "the disciples of Anita Bryant", deplored the paper's editorial policy and the giving of space and publicity to perverts.

Westman went before the Bishop's student council Oct. 30. Council gave the group

official recognition and financial backing.

Westman says there are a lot of sympathetic people at Bishop's and they are moving in the right direction but there is a "strong minority who are

determined to be heard".

Westman says the gays on campus who have contacted him in connection with the group are afraid to admit their homosexuality.

### AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR TEACHING

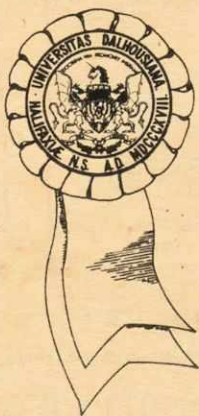
The Alumni Association of Dalhousie University will present an award for teaching excellence to a current full-time professor at Dalhousie who has taught for at least three years at this University.

You are invited to:

1. Nominate a candidate of your choice;
2. Submit four other names of students, or alumni who support your choice;
3. Explain why your nominee should be considered.

Deadline for nominations is February 15th, 1980.

Nomination Notices are available at the Alumni Office, S. U. B.



## GET YOURSELF TOGETHER

at Halifax's #1 Young Fashion Store

From casual sportswear to *Exclusive Garments*  
—all at reasonable prices



DROP IN AND SEE US!

*Foreign Affair*

1705 Barrington Street, Hfx.