

# Spare change for the Women's Centre

BY TAMARA BOND

Students will once again be faced with a possible increase in the fees they pay to the university, but unlike recent tuition hikes, they will decide whether or not they want to pay the additional sum.

The Dalhousie Women's Centre is requesting a 35 cent increase from every student enrolled at Dalhousie. Currently, part-time and full-time students pay \$1 and \$2 respectively.

The proposed increase will take the form of a referendum question on this year's DSU election ballot. Voting will take place around campus from March 11-13.

The Women's Centre has been operating on the same budget for five years. And according to the centre's director, Patricia Thompson, "there are a lot of prices that have increased [while] funding hasn't increased."

She stresses that the requested funds are to help the centre maintain and improve its current services, and that the centre is in no way threatened with closure should students vote against the increased levy.

"Things will improve. Our resource library will be able to update some of the material it lacks — buy a couple of new videos, we haven't had a new video this year or last year.

We need new journals... [the old ones] are extremely dated," says Thompson.

Events such as the Take Back the Night March, Women's History Month and various workshops — all Women's Centre initiatives — would also be improved.

As a rule, the Women's Centre does not aggressively fundraise. Instead they offer everything for free excluding their annual variety show.

"We don't have the time [for fundraising]. When you only have one paid staff person, and you try to fundraise what happens is it takes away time from actually working here and it puts me out there. If I leave, the door



has to be shut and locked," explains Thompson.

And when the door is shut, the myriad resources of the centre can not be accessed. Although Thompson and the volunteers are not allowed to give advice or counselling to those who come to the office, they provide comprehensive referral services. They can also help students in research.

"Our assistance includes referrals to various agencies and professionals

in the surrounding Metro area, including physicians, sexual health practitioners, legal services, abuse support and political or cultural organizations," says Thompson.

Women go to the centre for a variety of reasons. Some inquire about sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives or the options available to pregnant women, some want to know about eating disorders and others are simply looking for a confidant.

Men are also welcome at the Women's Centre.

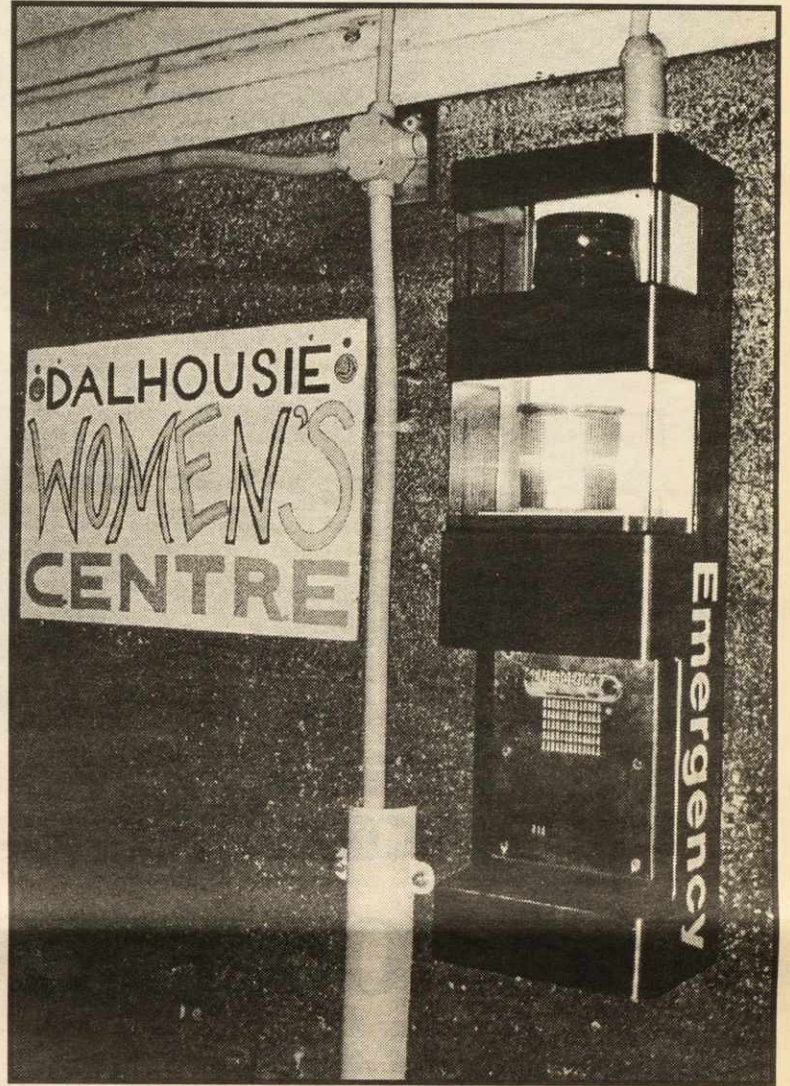
"Men use the resource library and they use our referral services. We receive a lot of calls from men — more so than [men] coming in — about referrals on AIDS, condoms, you know, where 'we heard ya have free condoms, is that true? Do I have to send my girlfriend to come get them?' or whatever," explains Thompson.

So many services and so few personnel makes those involved very busy.

"The phone is ringing and on the other end is a young woman who needs help finding a support group; a young man is coming through the door seeking assistance finding information to help him deal with family violence; a fax is being received asking if we have a schedule of events available outlining the Week of Reflection, and someone is sitting in the office needing to chat about the horrible day they have had because their student loan has not yet arrived.

"We are the only Women's Centre in the Metro area and therefore fill a need that is not met anywhere else."

*The Dalhousie Women's Centre is open Monday to Thursday, 9am-5pm, and is located behind the SUB, near the Security building, at the back of 1229 LeMarchant Street.*



The blue light outside of the Women's Centre: necessary because they are hidden in the back of a building. (Photo by Danielle Boudreau)

# Burma's constant struggle

BY STEFFI CONANT

"Until we have a system that guarantees rule of law and basic democratic institutions, no amount of aid or investment will benefit our people. Profits from business enterprises will merely go toward enriching a small, already very privileged elite."

The elite that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, is referring to is the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Burma's ruling military regime. Burma has been governed under the gun since 1962. What followed was decades of extreme economic mismanagement and decline, as well as oppressive measures to keep the masses in check.

In 1988, the regime, formerly known as SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), staged a brutal and violent crackdown against peaceful protesters. What began as a gathering of university students and Buddhist monks calling for social and economic reforms became a nationwide appeal for the return of basic rights and political freedom. The military responded by massacring as many as 10,000 women, men, and children — on the city streets, and later in hospitals, crematoriums,

torture rooms and prisons.

It was during this time of mass repression and violence, martial law, and general unrest that Aung San Suu Kyi emerged. Daughter of General Aung San who brought about Burma's independence from colonial rule, Suu Kyi, along with her political colleagues, founded the National League for Democracy (NLD).

In 1990, the SPDC, believing the party of their choice would win, held "free" elections. Though the NLD won by a landslide victory of 82%, the SPDC refused to transfer power. Suu Kyi was already under house arrest (and would be for six years) and thousands of NLD members were arrested, killed, or driven into exile.

There are currently over 150,000 refugees in Thailand and other neighbouring countries. They have been fleeing SPDC-sanctioned human rights abuses since 1985. The SPDC continues to be internationally condemned for these violations which include forced labour (no food, pay, or medicine), arbitrary arrests and executions, rape, torture, and forced relocation from and destruction of villages.

Tourist projects and infrastructure are largely built by forced labour. Also, thousands of civilians have been forcibly relocated to make

room for hotels and beautification projects. Presently, the oil companies Total (France) and Unocal (California), are constructing a gas pipeline with SPDC; oral testimonies from refugees reveal that villagers are routinely rounded up and threatened with torture or death if they do not comply with the regime's demands.

The Karen and Shan, two major ethnic nationalities in Burma, continue their armed struggle against the SPDC. The Karen have been fighting for autonomy and freedom from the oppressive rule for fifty years. Until recently, there were twenty armed groups demanding similar rights.

Not many of us in Canada know about what happened in Burma in 1988, and what tyranny and fear continues unabated today. Perhaps it is because there were few foreign diplomats and journalists in the country at the time to inform us.

Indeed, even as the SPDC still refuses to hand over power to the legitimate political party, even while Suu Kyi's movements and rights are severely restricted and thousands rot in infamous prisons for their political beliefs; even while civilians daily are facing flagrant violations of their human

dignity and rights, Burma's despots continue to be legitimized by international governing bodies and business ventures. All types of investment must go through or involve the military regime, thereby encouraging and entrenching SPDC's control.

The time to listen to Burma's people was yesterday. The legitimate leader Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly urged international leaders and representatives of multinational companies to divest from Burma.

All is not futile. There are ways in which we can help. Very simply, we have choices, unlike the people of Burma. We can choose to boycott Canadian companies who do business in Burma, we can choose not to buy "Made in Myanmar/Burma" clothing and we can choose not to visit Burma until it is ruled peacefully and legitimately. Please contact the Burma Support Network at Dalhousie University's Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group, to receive information about Burma and Canadian investment in the country. You are also welcomed to come out to a benefit this Saturday at the Bike Shop to support the struggle for freedom in Burma.

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