

EDITORIAL

Student bursaries: "Monkey see monkey do"

by Allan Carter

'Monkey see, monkey do' appears to be the strategy being used by the McKenna government with their continuing financial cuts to post secondary education. Following in the footsteps of Bob Rae and the Ontario government, Minister of Advanced Education Vaughn Blaney announced this week that the provincial government is planning on making "changes" to the student loan bursary program. However, given that the Ontario government just eliminated their program, the UNB Student Union has assumed that the New Brunswick government has the same plans in mind. Such an assumption is justified. The McKenna government just recently announced that universities in New Brunswick should not be expecting a hike in government grants next year.

As Tammy Yates, Student Union VP External, pointed out in a recent news arti-

cle (see page one), the provincial government "has no mandate to make this kind of decision." Yates remarked that the McKenna government "campaigns on a platform of education as a top priority and they've spent over a quarter of a million dollars on a Commission to study excellence in education." Thus, ending the bursary program "would be a complete violation of their promises."

Indeed, the news about the bursary programs could not have come at a worse time for students. Currently 46% of UNB students are receiving student loans, and approximately 1/3 receive a provincial bursary. The bursary program supplements the loan program and allows certain students to receive a maximum amount of \$2700.00 a year. Ironically, the present maximum bursary amount will probably not even be able to cover a student's full time tuition fee next term. Presently, it has been speculated that there is a good chance that full time students will be

shelling out over \$2800.00 for tuition next term.

As New Democratic Party leader Elizabeth Weir stated in a recent press release, it is unfortunate that the McKenna government is basing access to post secondary education on income rather than on a student's desire and commitment to learn. Weir drives home her point by saying "What you're looking at is not who gets to go to university based on ability and hard work but rather, on whose families can afford to send them."

Students are now faced with a tuition increase looming in the near future, plus an unstable economy that will probably leave many students jobless this summer, and a provincial government meddling with a bursary program that has not been adjusted since 1984. If all these factors are combined, one cannot help but speculate that the McKenna government's campaign mandate to make education a top priority was nothing but a lot of hot air and empty promises.

Bridging the gap between CHSR and the Student Union

by Allan Carter

Last week's Student Union meeting illustrated that both the Union and CHSR need to bridge the gap which has widened between the two organizations ever since the Union began questioning CHSR's mandate as a student radio station. The UNB finance committee proposed to council that a referendum be called during this year's spring election to ask students whether or not they wish to continue funding the station through student fees. The proposed wording of this referendum questions was: "Do you wish to continue funding CHSR-fm, UNB's campus/community radio station at a projected cost to the Student Union for 1993-94 of \$76,071 (\$10.88 per student)?"

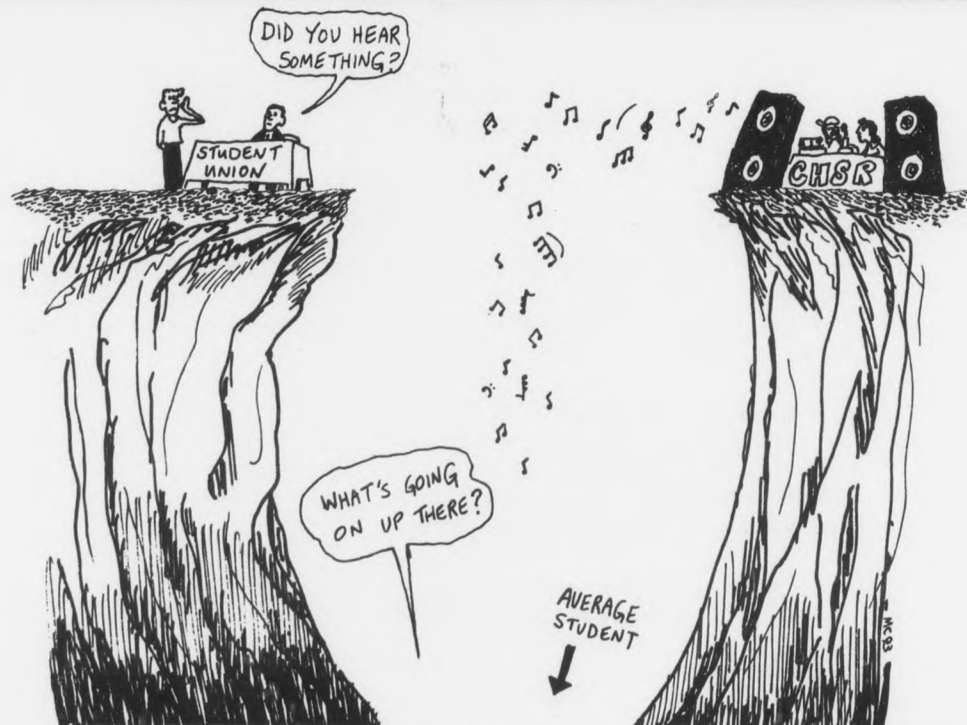
While the wording of the question was quite disturbing, what was even more perplexing was the fact that the call for such a referendum came as a surprise to not only the organization it directly involved, CHSR, but also council. Is it safe to assume that the Finance Committee did not want CHSR to know about the referendum call so that such a proposal could then be easily approved at the council meeting with little opposition from the station? Surely student listeners and CHSR members, particularly the 80% who are students, had the right to know what some of their elected representatives were planning to propose con-

cerning funding for the station. Yet the item never made it on the meeting's agenda announcement and apparently anyone who asked certain Student Union executive members about whether or not funding for CHSR was to be discussed never received an answer either way. While the intent by the finance committee may not have been to stifle discussion on their referendum proposal, one has to seriously question their motives and indeed many people at the council meeting did.

Several councillors had major problems with the wording of the proposed referendum call and the fact that the proposal was put forth by the finance committee without there ever having been any discussion with the radio station. During the debate at the meeting, councillor Gordon remarked that at one point in the past, council had decided to do a student survey in conjunction with the station to see what students liked and disliked about CHSR. I remember council approving that project and even seeing a draft copy of the survey, yet the survey never did make it into the hands of the students. Finally, after some sharp words were spoken, it was moved and tabled to change the referendum question to a non-binding plebiscite question and Councillor Martha O'Sullivan and CHSR member Roy Nicholl were appointed to change the wording of the plebiscite question. Thus, the debate will continue at next week's council meeting.

The whole situation has become frustrating for both sides. What is apparent, however,

is that the call for a referendum by the finance committee without any formal notice to the station or even any discussion on the idea at a previous council meeting was inappropriate. The Student Union apparently has some problems with the station and concerns about whether or not students are benefitting from the station. For instance, does the structure of the radio station's board of governors allow the general membership of the station to have the final approval on decisions made by the board? The Student Union needs to formally sit down with CHSR and state their problems. Further, the survey which the Union and the station jointly created should be used to pinpoint students' concerns with the station. A referendum or a plebiscite is simply an easy and dangerous way to solve a problem that goes far beyond whether or not we should fund our student radio station. The finance committee should spend more time and energy in putting for a call for a referendum on SUB expansion during the spring election than a referendum call on CHSR which risks the future of our radio station and does not even begin to address the various concerns that many students have about CHSR. Perhaps the decision to have Councillor O'Sullivan and CHSR member Nicholl to work jointly on a new plebiscite question will be the first step in narrowing a gap between two organizations which should have been bridged long ago.



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