

Submitted by John Hutton - April 30th, 2015
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Hello, and thank you to the honourable members for having me here today. I have copies of my presentation with recommended amendments summarized at the end for your consideration. My name is John Hutton, I'm a 5th-year student in economics and international development studies at Dalhousie and I'm the incoming VP Academic and External of the Dalhousie Student Union. In the past I've sat on Dalhousie's Board of Governors and its Budget Advisory Committee. It's in the perspective of the last two roles I mentioned that I'd like to speak to the government's goal of increasing accountability and sustainability for Nova Scotia's universities.

I'm the first person who'll tell you that university administrators need to be more accountable. The public deserves to know that their tax dollars are being spent properly, and students, faculty and staff deserve to be able to meaningfully participate in the governance of our institution with full access to information. Together, students, faculty and staff have called for better reporting, for more representation on university boards and committees, to be part of MOU negotiations, for meaningful consultation, and for greater democratization of the university. Students, faculty and staff are the best resource available to government for making university administration more accountable. We have every reason to want the limited funds going into universities to be used for delivering top-quality teaching, learning and research in an environment of academic freedom. We are watchdogs at the institutions, speaking out when we see spending being wasted on administrative bloat, needless duplications, or exposing the university to financial risk in the drive to build ever more buildings.

A university is its students, faculty and staff and they should be empowered. That is what accountability looks like.

This bill makes a few tiny changes to require better financial reporting- which is excellent- but the majority of the bill is not related to accountability. In fact, it gives the people with financial decision-making power considerably less accountability. Universities these days are under considerable financial challenges: because both the federal and provincial government choose -yes, choose- not to adequately fund universities, their budgets are pinched between funding cuts and rising costs. In such a context, you would hope the university administrators would prioritize the academic mission, but what we've seen is a growth of administration and spending sprees on new buildings, which is what has put our universities into much of their recent troubles. NSCAD's ill-advised Port campus purchase comes to mind. Dalhousie scandalously discovered very late in the construction process of the LeMarchant Place that snowloads blowing from its roof would collapse the hockey arena roof, forcing it to be demolished, and the university exposed to financial risk in having to plan a new arena site. It goes on- several years ago the president of King's purchased property on Coburg road without even getting board approval. These multi-million dollar, high-risk endeavours are what will put universities in precarious positions. Not students,

not faculty, not staff. But what this bill does is, in the case of significant operating deficit, is it suspends collective bargaining rights. This makes no sense.

It wasn't workers that brought NSCAD to the brink, it was mismanagement by administration. Bill 100 will only give administration a tool to make faculty and staff pay the price for poor administration. Paired with the government's tuition deregulation, they've give administrators a wide range of options to make everyone but themselves responsible for the messes they create. I agree with the CFS' position that this government is giving administrators a "get out of jail free card" rather than new accountability expectations. It gets worse: those that dispute these so-called revitalization plans are liable to be fined hundreds of dollars per day, be they organizations or individuals. I refuse to pay for mismanagement in the form of higher tuition, program cuts, and fines for doing my job as a student advocate. A further point is that it's just plain unconstitutional. Rulings from BC and Saskatchewan have shown that collective bargaining and striking is a charter-protected right. No amount of anti-union ideology from this government can take that away. So save yourself the embarrassment and taxpayers the lawyer fees and drop the anti-union provisions. Section 8 cannot remain in this bill. **Amendment: Section 8 should be deleted entirely.**

Another unintended consequence of the law is its threat to academic freedom. Collective agreements are what enshrine academic freedom in the university, and the bill lets that be suspended. This is unacceptable, especially given the mandated Outcomes Agreements to have greater ties with the private sector. The valuable thing about university research is that we can do socially useful work that isn't necessarily profitable- for example, restoring Nova Scotia salt marshes. Shifting universities towards corporate research puts academic freedom at risk because corporate money comes with strings: it's no secret that Shell, which Dal just signed a \$600,000 contract with, isn't the biggest fan of climate science. When cash-strapped universities are approached by corporate donors to alter curriculums for funding, and academic freedom provisions can be suspended as this bill allows for, I see great reason to be concerned. The university exists for the people of Nova Scotia, not so corporations can get the taxpayer can fund their for-profit research. **Amendment: Section 12 of this act should be amended to include language recognizing the overriding importance of academic freedom. Sections 12 (c), (g), and (h) should be deleted as they conflict with academic freedom principles.**

University accountability is about empowering the public and motivated stakeholders. This legislation does not do that. This legislation in its current form is an illegal violation of workers rights and puts academic freedom at risk. The committee must take this seriously and seriously amend this legislation.

Summary of Recommendations:

- **Delete all of Section 8 and clauses referencing it [Section 6(1)(b); Section 13(1); 13(4); Section 23].**
- **Amend Section 12(1) to: "Subject to the overriding importance of academic freedom and university autonomy in academic matters, A university's revitalization plan must include"**
- **Delete Section 12(c), 12 (g), and 12(h).**