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FREE!!!

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The March on Province House

by Amy Gallan

A group of approximately 150 UPEI students gathered at the Student Union building to prepare for a march for the National Day of Action on February 7. From there, the students, carrying signs and banners, marched through campus and onto University avenue, chanting slogans such as "Education is a right, stop the cuts!" and "Education is a right, now it's time to stand and fight!"

The students marched down University avenue while motorists blew their horns with encouragement. Some high school and junior high school age students looked on, some applauding the marchers and some sneering sarcastically at them. Meanwhile, a police escort led the marching students who walked both on the sidewalk and on the road.

The procession stopped at Province House, where several speakers talked about the cuts and of the students' ability to change them, pleasing the enthusiastic crowd.

In her speech to the protestors, Mary Boyd said "Congratulations! This is a great demonstration. This is the energy we need to fight unjust cutbacks such as the CHST, which would replace the Canada Health Act, the Canada Assistance Plan, and end cash transfers to the provinces for post secondary education. On April 1, a block fund will be given to the provinces for health, welfare and post secondary education."

This block fund is a part of the CHST, or the Canadian Health and Social Transfer. It means that the money that was once given to the various government programs separately will be put into one large amount and given to the provincial government where it will be divided among the programs. It is believed that the CHST will mean less money for the various programs it is meant for.

Boyd continued "There will be no guarantee of national standards. To add insult to injury, \$7 billion will be cut from those programs in the next two years. The CHST has the potential to divide the sick, students, people on welfare, and seniors against each other, as all scramble for the source of resources. Let's say

'NO' to that division.

This is an intergenerational question.

This is about the kind of Canada we believe in.

Why should corporation and banks, in pursuit of higher profits, and paying little or no taxes, impoverish us?

While our rights to jobs, health care, higher education, EI, pensions, and housing are being eroded, there is a spending surplus in Ottawa. . . The cutbacks rob Canada of the skills and intelligence of its youth.

Together we need to keep Canada caring. That means destroying the myth that we have a spending crisis. The good news is that the Liberals are feeling the heat.

People, not corporations, elect governments. If we keep up the pressure, we can reverse the CHST. Down with the CHST! We shall overcome!"

The second speaker was Leo Broderick. In his speech he said, "Students, I am delighted to be here to offer my words of support to you in your fight for economic and social justice. It is time that you show your concern through this action in a very visible way, and you are to be commended for organizing this march and demonstration in chorus with this country. It is indeed a hopeful sign that Island students have always been leaders in social change; students have always been active in pointing out inequalities and injustices and there is no more critical time in our history than today. All Canadians, whether we be students, senior students, employed or unemployed, must raise our voices and we must be heard. You will be heard!"

We are now in this country in the midst of a social and political revolution where the political agenda has been captured by corporate interests and where the dreams and democratic rights of Canadians are being subverted. Canada is moving to rule by corporations -- transnationals -- where politicians simply end up being messengers carrying the corporate message, which is downsize, privatize, cut back, do away with public

institutions like universities and colleges, have students bear the total cost of their education (which if the CHST takes affect will mean university tuition will be at \$20,000, well beyond the reach of most students), cut out unemployment insurance for seasonal workers, establish user fees in health care, allow businesses to pay low wages to its workers, attack collective bargaining, abolish unions, privatize public pensions, but always and we saw this yesterday with the announcement of the location of a corporation in PEI, give tax dollars to corporations for creating jobs, give more powers to the provinces. In short, corporate rule says destroy the country that is ranked number one in the world by the United Nations.

We are involved in a struggle between citizen (public) rights and corporate (private) interests, and so far corporate interests are winning but not for long. You will help make a difference.

Corporate rule is an ideology, a system of beliefs and practices that are becoming invisible to us. Corporate rule is globalization; corporate rule is the profit motive entering every part of our lives; corporate rule is the newspaper we read; the news report we watch. Corporate rule is the intrusion of the private sector ideology in our universities and colleges and in our public schools. Corporate rule is the deregulation of our environment.

We must take a stand. Thank you for taking a stand."

The protestors cheered to both speeches and later cheered to the words of UPEI Student Union president Amber Allin, Holland College SU president Donna Massey, and UPEI's ombudsperson Chris Burns. After the speeches, the event was over, except for a small group of protestors who went to picket MP George Proude's office. The gathering then dispersed after receiving free hot chocolate for their efforts, and the most successful National Day of Action in UPEI's history was over for another year.