

MPHEC NOT ON THE LEVEL

The Council of Maritime Premiers has recently announced its decision to fund post-secondary institutions in the region at a level well below the rate of inflation.

Last November, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission - the government's own advisory body - recommended a 14% increase in funding. They asked for an increase of 11% just to keep up with inflation. They also asked for 1.5% to equalize the region with institutions in the rest of the country, and an extra 1.5% grant to equalize institutions within the region.

The Council of Maritime Premiers rejected these recommendations. Campbell offered an increase of 7.7% in P.E.I. He agreed with the regional equalization grant, but that it be spread out over ten years rather than the five suggested by the Commission. He completely dismissed the equalization grant to increase the quality in the region to a level comparable to the rest of Canada.

Because government funding, on the average, accounts for only 75% on an institution's revenue, Campbell's decision means a global increase in the operating grant of 6.1%.

It's not as if the governments don't have the money. The province is receiving substantial yearly increases in federal funding for post-secondary education. But the money is not specifically tied to education, so the province can use it as it pleases. It's becoming obvious that education is not the province's priority - our institution is not getting the federal funds.

When Campbell's government fails to provide our institution with enough money to meet inflationary increases in the operating budget, two things can happen. Administrators can reduce expenditures by cutting salaries and programs, thus reducing the quality of education, or they can raise tuition fees. In fact, we have seen the two things happening at the same time.

Cutbacks mean that facilities deteriorate more rapidly. Libraries can't afford new books and students must put up with fewer hours in which to read them. Obsolete lab equipment can't be replaced, and research and study suffer. Fewer courses can be offered and new programs must be shelved. Classrooms get larger and learning gets harder. (Refer to MPHEC Financial Plan 1978-79, pages 2,3,8)

We already pay the highest tuition fees in Canada. Increasing them can only mean that fewer people, especially those from low-income families, will be able to attend university. Residence living, books and supplies continue to cost more, adding further financial burdens.

- The quality of our education is in jeopardy.
- The cost of that education is soaring out of reach.
- The priorities in spending set by our provincial government are wrong and must be challenged.

The refusal of our provincial government to recognize the urgency of the problems facing our institution is deplorable. By offering less than one half of the 14% stressed by the MPHEC as the figure necessary to the operation

of our university, the government has placed the administration, faculty and students in an impossible situation.

We, as students, recognize that this is a time of serious economic restraints, but belt-tightening at our university has reached crisis proportions. Our universities are forced to outprice themselves.

Students are more than willing to pay their share of a university education, but when costs reach such a level that they cannot bear the burden, then those students must seek alternatives. For our students, this means dropping out of university or Going West for their education.

The government of this province has a responsibility to its citizens. The most valuable natural resource that we have is the young people of this province. Investment in education is investment well placed for the future of P.E.I.

We are appealing to the government of P.E.I. to protect its resources especially in the area of education.

It is the mark of enlightenment and progressive governments to firmly establish higher education as a public service, available to everyone who

wishes to make use of it and who is capable of doing so.

The benefits to be gained from a post-secondary education are not to be reserved for a privileged minority who can afford it. From the individual point of view, it is one's right to have access to a higher education, both for the purpose of personal and professional fulfilment. In the larger perspective, that of society as a whole, it is also to its benefit to support equality of opportunity. As post-secondary education becomes the reserve of the privileged or those who are prepared to assume enormous debts, both the individual and society will suffer. The price we shall ultimately pay in terms of social costs are far greater than any budgetary savings.

We feel that the additional funding that our universities need can come from at least two sources. Funds could be diverted from other government departments or the provincial government could raise the funds through a percentage increase in its debt financing, which is an approved policy of the Trudeau government.

The P.E.I. government has been called upon to reconsider its funding decision and increase its operating assistance to our university for the year 78-79. Our request was refused on the basis that the government could not justify increases above 7.7% to our Island residents.

Premier Campbell explained that if we are to receive grants as per our request, then we must adjust our university priorities by extending our services to other areas of the Island other than Charlottetown.

Now is the time to organize and plan for the future of our university. Meetings will be held in the next few weeks regarding these issues. If you are concerned, contact your Student Union and express your views.

Ray Shalala

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