

S.U. Executive and CFS-PEI Chair meet with PEI M.P.s

Student organizations lobby government for student aid reform and end to transfer payment freeze

TARA O'CONNOR, UPEI STUDENT Union Vice President External, Andrew MacPherson, UPEI SU Vice President Internal and PEI Representative on the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) National Executive, and Bruce Davison, Chairperson of CFS-PEI recently met with PEI members of parliament Wayne Easter and George Proud.

O'Connor, MacPherson, and Davison met with Easter and Proud to attempt to obtain their support on the need for Canada Student Loans (CSLs) to better reflect the needs of students. The point was made to the members of parliament that the maximum allowable personal amount available through the CSL Program has not increased over the past ten years - a period during which UPEI tuition increased 83%. Both M.P.s agreed that the levels available are unrealistic and needed to be changed. The "secret" talks that the previous

federal government had undertaken to privatize Student Loans (allegedly with the Royal Bank) were also discussed. Both MPs agreed that

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privatization would be a very negative move for the program and agreed to work to ensure it was not proceeded with. Both M.P.s also agreed to work to bring about the re-

instatement of the six-month "grace period" students used to receive after graduation before they had to start repaying the interest on their Student Loan debts (this period was eliminated in a highly unpopular move by the Conservative government about a year ago). The promise to reinstate the grace period was a promise made by the Liberals frequently during the federal election campaign.

The problem of federal transfer payments was also discussed. The student representatives made the point that if the Liberal government continues to keep transfer payments for education virtually frozen, then UPEI tuition could be expected to continue to rise at rates far higher than students can reasonably be expected to keep pace with.

The meeting with Wayne Easter took place on December 21 and the meeting with George Proud on January 13.

Corporate control of universities

NAFTA could turn schools into private companies

BY CHRIS SHERIDAN (CUP)
CANADIAN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IS IN for a rough ride as the North American free trade agreement takes effect, analysts say.

Under the terms of NAFTA, universities could be free to become profit-making corporations with no limit on tuition fees, as is the case in the United States.

"It [NAFTA] increases the Americanization of Canadian universities," said Duncan Cameron of the Ottawa-based Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Canada has already begun to import American ideas about education, said John Calvert, who co-authored the recent book *Pandora's Box: Corporate Power, Free Trade and Canadian Education*.

NAFTA will make possible a "user-pay" education system by shifting the bulk of funding from the public to the private sector, Calvert said.

"Because NAFTA is strongly pro-market, it circumvents existing education regulations and practices."

As a result, Calvert predicted, public funding from provincial governments will diminish.

And because NAFTA permits cross-border sale of services without any local presence, Canadian markets will be open to private profit-making education firms from the States.

Free Trade might also give large

corporations increased opportunity to push their agendas in universities, said Larry Kuehn, who co-authored *Pandora's Box* with Calvert.

Using new communications technologies, the private firms could offer their services without ever coming to Canada.

"The system would be much more commercial in its orientation...Tuition would be increased toward US levels. And public

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funds would be shifted to provide much greater support for the research and development needs of business."

In the book, Calvert and Kuehn point to the Montreal-based Corporate-Higher Education Forum (C-HEF). The C-HEF consists of 32 Canadian university presidents and 38 presidents of major corporations like IBM, Imperial Oil, and General Electric.

"It [C-HEF] has pushed for market principles in the operation of university programs," the authors write.

According to Kuehn, the ideas proposed by the C-HEF form the cornerstone of NAFTA's approach to post-secondary education. "NAFTA reinforces the connection between corporations and the university," said Kuehn.

The Americanization of Canadian universities will be felt in the classroom, said Duncan Cameron. In order to maintain a level of Canadian content in university curriculums, there has to be a stronger publishing and artistic community, he said. But NAFTA prohibits government aid to domestic publishers, forcing many academics and writers to move south.

"The possibility of doing research on subjects that are Canadian and finding a Canadian outlet for it is just not going to be very high," he said.

"We're a country which is already dominated by US movies and books and the universities are as a part of that," Cameron said.

Without a strong Canadian-based academic community, Cameron said more provincial and federal governments will turn to American academics to tell them what to do about Canada--"how to make our country more like theirs."

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