

Quebec college students demand more funds

By JOSH BERNATCHEZ

MONTREAL (CUP) – Students from across the province plan to hit the streets next week to demand a reinvestment in Quebec's beleaguered college system.

The protest, scheduled for March 24, is being organized by the Coalition Étudiante Montréal-Métropolitain, the Fédération Étudiante Collégiale du Québec and the Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec.

The student lobby groups want the Parti Québécois government to direct more funds toward post-secondary education, specifically the province's CEGEP schools and financial aid system.

While many CEGEP schools are planning to participate in the demonstration that comes on the heels of the latest provincial budget, some say they want no part of the event.

The student union at Dawson College, one of Montreal's largest English-language colleges, has decided not to participate in the protest even though it wants to see a reinvestment in education.

"I can't support a protest when I don't agree with all the issues," said student Eric Hortop, chair of the school's media council. Specifically, the

student council disagrees with the demand that Ottawa transfer Quebec's share of the Millennium Scholarship Fund to the province's own financial aid system.

"Fewer students would fall through the cracks if we had a second system," Hortop explained.

The student union also disagrees with the decision to rally against so-called Mushroom Fees in the province, whereby colleges introduce additional small fees to maintain their funding.

"Students would suffer more from a poorly funded education system than a two dollar fee," Hortop said.

The three main student groups organizing next week's protest, however, want the province to ban such fees, arguing they're an other barrier to low-income students.

Student union president Derek Vincent agreed with the decision not to endorse next week's protest.

"I think they made the right decision based on Dawson and the particular situation," he said.

Although the student union voted not to support the demonstration, it will still allow posters advertising it to be placed on campus and is circulating information about the event.

Student union buys bank shares to get say on student loans

By NATALIE MACLELLAN

HALIFAX (CUP) – For a chance to say their piece about the future of student loans, Dalhousie University's student union bought about \$10,000 worth of bank shares.

The union bought 100 shares in both the Bank of Nova Scotia and the Bank of Montreal, giving them a seat at the banks' annual shareholders' meetings held in Halifax over the past three weeks.

Dalhousie Student Union president Ted Chiasson says he bought the shares out of concern over upcoming federal student loan renegotiations.

"We have one shot to make it good for students," he said. "I just needed to talk to the banks and it seemed like the place to talk to them."

At the meetings Chiasson presented his proposal that students and banks lobby Ottawa together.

"I told them I realized they were a bank and not a charity but we had to work together for the future of the country," he said.

The federal government considering harmonizing federal and provincial student loans into one program for the whole country.

Chiasson says it's important that students' voices be heard in the debate. And he says the best way to ensure that is through dialogue, not protests.

"If you go and picket a bank you will get some headlines but you won't get any clear message through," he said. "It's not going to do any good attacking the banks."

As for whether it was

wise to invest \$10,000 of student union money in the bank shares, Chiasson says it was a safe investment since the shares can be sold again at close to their current value.

Chiasson says the money was well spent. But the banks aren't so sure.

"The approach was very creative," said Shelley Jourard, senior manager of public affairs at the Bank of Nova Scotia. "But I'm not sure if the annual meeting of shareholders is the best forum for the discussion."

Although Chiasson brought the issue to the shareholders' attention, it wasn't necessarily something they wanted to hear, Jourard said.

"There is a problem with the student loan program," she said. "It doesn't work."

Bank of Montreal spokesman Rick Kuwayti agrees.

He says he doubts his bank will become involved in the Canada Student Loans program anytime soon.

"Over two thirds of students don't qualify for government funding," he said. There's a large part of the market not being served."

The Bank of Montreal is focusing on those students with its own student loan program that includes a line of credit and a student credit card, Kuwayti said.

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The *Cadre* is the official newspaper of the students of UPEI. It is published 10 times per semester. 2500 copies are distributed on and off campus on Tuesday. Deadlines for advertisements and submissions are Friday at 12:00 noon, without exception. The *Cadre* is a member of Canadian University Press (CUP), a cooperative of 50 university and college newspapers.

The opinion expressed within the *Cadre* do not necessarily represent the views of UPEI or of the UPEI Student Union Inc.

The *Cadre* is published by and for the UPEI Student Union Inc, of which all full-time UPEI students are members.

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**SM: What are you doing to my chicken?
KR: I'm making it dead.**

- Sarah Murphy and Karen Rawlines