

# SOCIAL REFORM: Axworthy gets egged by angry students

By David Chokroun  
(CUP)

(Source: The Varsity, University of Toronto)

MORE THAN 14,000 STUDENTS DEMONSTRATED ON Parliament Hill Nov. 16 against the federal government's proposed social policy reforms.

"They say cut back -- we say fight back," chanted the protesters, who occupied the grounds of Parliament Hill for the day-long event.

The protest was organized by the Students' Federation of the University of Ottawa and the Canadian Federation of Students. It was attended by students from 25 universities and colleges from Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes.

Under reforms proposed by Human Resources Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the government would cut \$2.6 billion in federal transfer payments to Canadian universities and colleges. These reforms have been condemned by student leaders, who claim that cuts to federal funding may drive tuition up to \$4,000-8,000 per year.

Axworthy emerged from the House of Commons to address the crowd. But protesters pelted him with macaroni, eggs and litter when he reached the podium.

"I'll send you the bill," Axworthy joked, brushing egg from his suit.

Axworthy defended the proposed cuts to the crowd, saying that students must take a greater financial responsibility for their education.

"This idea that [students] are exempt from broader reforms is ridiculous," he said.

But students did not take well to Axworthy's implications that only the elite attend university, according to University of Toronto student union president Gareth Spanglett.

"Axworthy referred to that fact that why should 80 per

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cent of Canadians fund 20 per cent of an elite group? He came out really aggressively and made it clear this is going to happen one way or the other," Spanglett said.

Over chants of "bullshit" and "Axworthy, c'est pourri," Axworthy said the proposed reforms have not yet been adopted by the government and the proposal is still open to discussion.

"There is no government policy at this point," Axworthy said.

"Come around the table and work with us to find solutions," Axworthy said. "Do you have the guts?"

But time to negotiate with the minister over the proposed cuts is running out, Spanglett said. "To go out and tell people to come out and get to the table, he's got a five-week period, and we're already into week number three. The figures will be done for the February budget," he said.

Progressive Conservative Leader Jean Charest also appeared at the rally to condemn Axworthy's proposals.

"There's one problem with the Liberals' speech: it wasn't what they were saying when they were in the opposition,

and it wasn't what they were saying in the last campaign," said Charest.

But the crowd wasn't fooled by Charest's sudden interest in post-secondary education, Spanglett said.

"Everyone pretty much realized Charest was just trying to get what he could out of the moment," said Spanglett.

The protesters were also addressed by MPs Svend Robinson from the New Democratic Party and Antoine Dube from the Bloc Quebecois, who both denounced the federal government's cuts.

Many were ecstatic about the large number of students who took the day off to protest in Ottawa.

"This is the biggest student protest since 1968," said Spanglett.

Sonia Garcia, a student at the Heritage College in Hull, said she and several friends planned to camp out in front of the Parliament buildings. For Garcia, this protest is far from over.

"I want to prove to them that we're still fighting; that we're not giving up," Garcia said.

"How are we supposed to make a future for the generation that comes after us with \$60,000 of debt?"

Student protests are planned to run until Jan. 25, when a national student protest will be held against the cuts.

Spanglett said the Ottawa protest, if nothing else, will help build student momentum to oppose Axworthy's proposal.

"I think we accomplished a lot. The main idea behind it was to communicate that this is something very real. It will help build momentum as it will be a combination of things, both by student politicians and activists, in order to stop the cuts," he said.

# EDUCATION: Axworthy's two-day Atlantic leaves students frustrated

By Jana Kutarna  
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(Source: The Xaverian, St. Francis Xavier University)

SOCIAL REFORM SALESMAN LLOYD AXWORTHY wrapped up a two-day tour of Atlantic Canada last week, leaving behind many unanswered questions and much frustration with the political process.

A panel discussion at St. Francis Xavier University was billed as a chance to "come out and learn about as well as share your views" on the government's green paper on social reform. But many in the audience felt there was no time for this after the human resources minister had spoken. Axworthy's comments centred around eliminating the social "safety net" structure that exists in Canada.

He said education programs could use more money in order to be effective, but this money will have to come from the students themselves.

Axworthy spoke for about 20 minutes, followed by four panellists, who spoke for 10 minutes each.

Axworthy, in what he referred to as "good university style," also requested additional time to respond to the panellists' comments, leaving little time for questions from the audience.

Many of the 300 students, faculty and members of the community who prepared questions before hand wondered whether or not Axworthy wanted to hear their views.

"They did the same thing with the constitutional issue," noted education student Gerard MacLellan. "[Axworthy] made

it seem as if he was legitimately asking for the voice of the public."

Political science professor Rod Haddow was one of the panellists. He said the forum was not designed to get public input on the green paper.

However, Haddow added that it was supposed to enable discussion within certain parameters already set by the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development, which is travelling the country for five weeks.

"The notion wasn't so much that we would be having input through that particular session on the document, so much as we would be clarifying its significance and debating its merits," Haddow said in an interview. And I think Axworthy

*He [Axworthy] said education programs could use more money in order to be effective, but this money will have to come from the students themselves.*

prevented that from happening, to some extent."

Economics professor Marilyn Gerriets, another panellist, agreed.

"It really is a struggle when he's trying to get as much time to himself, and it's very difficult to stand up and say, 'Mr. Axworthy, sit down.'"

But others were less critical of Axworthy's eagerness to capture the limelight.

John Gillis, vice-president of the Young Liberals, said the session could have been based less on the panel and more on student participation, but felt that Axworthy's comments were worth listening to.

"Not everybody agreed with him, but he listened to people's concerns, and I think he made it apparent that he's trying to do something positive. He didn't come in there with a high and mighty attitude."

There were other concerns with the forum. Some believed the process offered little opportunity to learn about the actual nature of the government's proposed reforms.

Haddow said, "I think it would have been better for his own purposes had he made a briefer statement, and then let people ask questions.

"He's a smart guy. There's no question about that. He could have answered the questions. There's nothing anybody could have thrown at him that he couldn't have answered."

Axworthy was in the Atlantic region for just two days last week, appearing on CBC Radio's Maritime Noon in Halifax before going to Antigonish.

Other commitments during this time included a community gathering in Bridgewater and meetings with student leaders, university presidents and politicians.