

*This Week
At The
Panther
Lounge
Wednesday
Trivia
and Buttonfly
FREE!
Apr. 10th - 12th
Glengarry Glen
Ross
\$5.00
Saturday
April 15th
Year End Pub
with Uisce
Beatha
\$5.00 Wet*

310% Tuition Hike Possible at UVIC

Students Take over Education Ministers Office

By SHARON BENNETT

VICTORIA (CUP) — Eight University of Victoria students staged an impromptu overnight occupation of the deputy Minister of Education's office last Friday night to protest a proposed 310 per cent tuition increase for international students at the University of British Columbia.

The demonstration began at 3 p.m. on Friday, March 21, with over 20 students storming the office. Once inside, activists took over two desks and began phoning media outlets around Victoria and sending out press releases by e-mail.

Deputy Minister Don Avison was in session at the legislature but assistant Deputy Minister Shell Harvey met with three of the protesters to hear their demands.

UVic student leaders expressed their outrage about the UBC tuition increase, as well their concerns about the mounting funding pressures at UVic.

"Our position is that there shouldn't be any differential fees for international students because what happens is only the wealthiest students from other nations are able to attend," said UVic student councilor Leigh Phillips. "This flies in the face of accessibility, which this government is supposed to be in favour of."

Harvey said that although the UBC tuition increase was large, it only brought the international students fees up to par with the rest of Canada.

"It's not the position of the provincial government to get into commenting on the decisions of the boards,"

Harvey told protesters. "But there's two things I would note. First, the percentage increases that are reported at UBC certainly appear extremely high.

"Second point is, the absolute level, however, probably is right in about the national average," said Harvey. "The B.C. fees were the lowest in the nation by quite a dramatic amount, apart from Quebec."

Phillips also expressed concern that the UVic administration would, like UBC, try some sideways moves to slip out the tuition freeze.

"Our own university, to get around the tuition freeze, has tried to increase ancillary fees," Phillips said. "They're looking to introduce an Athletics and Rec user fee, they have increased class sizes in English and biology, and now arts and science as a faculty is going to be cut nine per cent in each department.

"This is unacceptable; our education is suffering," Phillips said.

Harvey agreed that ancillary fees were not to be used as substitutes for tuition fees, and that the education ministry's guidelines on this point were quite clear and specific.

Unlike the Victoria protesters, who brought no provisions for an overnight stay, the 25 students who marched into UBC President David Strangway's office on March 20 were equipped with sleeping bags, cooking facilities and food. Ten of those protesters occupied Strangway's office for five days.

The UBC Graduate Student Society says students there are protesting a recent 310 per cent increase in tui-

tion fees for new international graduate students and a 200 per cent increase for returning grad students.

They also oppose new technology and athletics fees that they say go against the provincial government's tuition freeze.

"These students are the highest quality researchers from around the world who have been educated at their home country's expense and who are coming here to produce the highest quality research on behalf of UBC," said Makoto Fujiwara, a Ph.D student from Japan.

"These students cannot be looked at simply as a source of revenue."

The UBC protesters are demanding that tuition increases for international students be revoked and that all new ancillary fees and increases be revoked. They also demand that a binding student referendum be held on all such fees in the future. Both the UBC and UVic protesters demanded that all protesters receive amnesty from legal or academic discipline.

After several of the angry UVic students met with assistant Deputy Minister Harvey, eight of the protesters decided to continue the occupation overnight in solidarity with the UBC occupation.

Harvey made it clear that if the protesters chose to stay, they risked arrest and would not have access to phone over the weekend. However, ministry officials opted to hire security guards to watch the protesters overnight, warning them they had to leave by noon on Saturday.