

Martin gets failing grades, flying colours from students

BY ALEX BUSTOS

OTTAWA (CUP)--Canada's two largest student groups have given radically different assessments of the federal government's commitment to post-secondary education.

The Canadian Federation of Students gave Finance Minister Paul Martin a straight-F report card for the Liberals' record on education.

"We are calling for [Paul Martin] to reinvest and restore funding for social transfer payments to 1993 levels," federation president Elizabeth Carlyle told a news conference Tuesday.

"We are calling for a tuition fee freeze. We are calling for the transformation of the Millennium Scholarship foundation into a system of grants," she added.

The CFS, which represents 400,000 students in 60 colleges and universities, says funding -- designed to give about 100,000 students \$3,000

a year starting in the year 2000 -- should be administered only according to need.

Government officials have said the \$2.5-billion fund will be administered based on academic merit as well as financial need.

Carlyle also criticized recent legislation prohibiting students who declare bankruptcy from discharging their student loans for 10 years after leaving school.

But Hoops Harrison, president of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, says the federation's report card is seriously flawed.

When asked to grade Martin, Harrison said he deserved an A-minus.

"In the realm of reality, there is no way Paul Martin can be given an F for his role in post-secondary education," said Harrison. "Last year, \$3 billion were given to students. Not to governments, not to

institutions, but to students."

Most of that \$3 billion can be accounted for through the \$2.5-billion Millennium Scholarship Fund.

The rest was given through a series of federal initiatives, Harrison said.

For example, under new federal regulations students have more time to apply for the interest on their loans to be forgiven. A student who has difficulty paying back a loan can now avoid paying interest for five years, instead of the previous 30-month period, he said.

And interest on student loans is now tax-deductible, he said.

Harrison, whose organization represents 275,000 students in 18 colleges and universities, also pointed out Martin has handed out \$100 million in grants to students with dependents.

APEC panel seeks federal cash for complainants

BY DOUGLAS QUAN & SARAH GALASHAN

VANCOUVER (CUP) -- The panel investigating complaints of RCMP misconduct during last year's APEC summit have agreed to send another request to the federal government that it pay complainants' legal bills.

Complainants have asked for their legal fees to be covered from the start of the RCMP public complaints commission hearings, which are expected to drag on for at least another six months.

The government rejected their initial request last month. The RCMP officers involved in the hearings are represented by publicly-funded lawyers.

The three panelists also said Monday they were willing to examine the role the Prime Minister's Office played in security arrangements at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation conference if evidence warrants doing so.

"In our opening statements, we made it clear that we have jurisdiction to deal with these issues," said panel chair Gerald Morin.

Complainants said they want to subpoena Prime Minister Jean Chretien and other senior government officials to the hearings after documents surfaced last month suggesting Ottawa directed police to limit protests at the conference in order to save embarrassment to then Indonesian President Suharto.

Lawyer Cameron Ward said the panel's affirmation of jurisdiction to probe the government's role in APEC security will help his application to have Chretien appear at the hearings. "I'm going to keep trying," he said.

But government lawyer Ivan Whitehall said calling on the prime minister and other key officials to testify is unnecessary. "I don't think any of those people have any relevant evidence to give," he said Monday.

Earlier in the day, Whitehall denied allegations the Mounties and federal government conspired to suppress the rights of protesters to avoid embarrassing then-Indonesian president Suharto.

Other developments Monday included granting intervenor status to the City of Vancouver and the Attorney General of Canada.

Up to 120 to 130 witnesses are expected to appear before the commission starting as early as this week, including University of British Columbia President Martha Piper.

APEC protesters requested her testimony because they say she had advance knowledge of the Indonesian delegation's concerns about campus protest and their potential impact on security measures at the summit.

They say Piper failed to act in the interest of students. "We believe she had full knowledge of the Indonesian concerns and did not act on it," said complainant Jonathan Oppenheim, a UBC student.

But Stephen Forgacs, a spokesperson for the university, said it wasn't of "special security concerns regarding [then-Indonesian President] Suharto."

Piper has declined to speak to the media about APEC until she is subpoenaed.

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