

Of Protests and Cutbacks

by Marko Peric

Last week, UPEI students marched to Province House. Although the numbers were not spectacular, one hundred and sixty students is high by PEI standards. Even the national media took notice -- the *CTV Evening News* had a clip of the protest in Charlottetown sandwiched between reports from Toronto and Montreal.

All across the nation students marched to their provincial legislatures to voice their concerns as part of a National Day of Action. Although there was some violence in Toronto, the protests were generally peaceful. Even so, the message was very clear -- students are fed up with government cutbacks, particularly to the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST).

Governments are not the only object of student ire. Big business, especially banks, were also under scrutiny. Since many large corporations are paying an inordinately small amount of taxes, they are partially responsible for the deficits that have provoked cutbacks. One

aim of the protest was to encourage fairer taxation laws. By increasing tax rates or by more efficient collection, cutbacks could be substantially reduced or even eliminated.

Since all of the major banks have made extravagant profits in recent years, these institutions are clear targets. When companies make billion dollar profits and still raise charges to customers, something is wrong. Most banks require a minimum balance before waiving service charges. Few students can afford to keep hundreds of dollars sitting idle, and now banks are slashing student banking packages. Canada's big banks are screwing over students. If we don't speak up, the situation can only get worse. Banks serve the public. They must be held accountable for such things as high service charges and preferential tax treatment. Events like the National Day of Action are one way of doing this.

This was the most successful march held by UPEI students in recent years. Hopefully it won't be

the last. It's high time that students here spoke up about cuts to education. Tuition has been creeping up every year, and now rumour has it that fees will jump by twenty percent in the fall. Should this happen, all of the marketing done to bring in new students will be to no avail. What's more, those students who are just barely getting by might not be able to continue their studies. How many students can carry an ever-increasing debt load?

The February 7 march was a good first step. If the government didn't know that students were angry before, they surely know now. But one protest isn't going to change anything. If we want to prevent tuition from going through the roof, students have to keep the attention of the government. Whether by writing letters to Members of Parliament (postage to MPs is free), by using petitions, or through staging more marches and protests, we have to keep this issue in the public eye. If we don't, hundreds of students may not be back next year.


Letters to the Editor

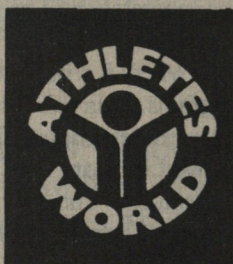
On the morning of Feb. 8, I was both amazed and appalled by what met me at the Belvedere Avenue entrance to the university -- an angry bunch of Marriot employee protesters using physical force to keep any vehicle from entering or exiting the campus. Might I ask why? I cannot see that we students are to blame for the pitiful low wages paid to Marriot employees. When students are paying upwards of \$3000 per year to attend this institution PLUS another \$50 in parking fees, we SHOULD NOT be barred from entering the parking lot for any reason. I'm sorry, but after that ridiculous display, the respect and support I had for the protestors in the beginning is now gone.

Yvonne Campbell

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