

While an effective AFS/FEA can benefit Atlantic Students in a number of ways, perhaps its greatest service to students lies in its abilities to voice our concerns and promote our interests to Atlantic governments. Certainly, the driving motivation to establish and build the AFS/FEA has been to provide this service. To provide an opportunity to identify our common concerns and to express these concerns to government bodies and related agencies associated with post-secondary education in the region.

Many common concerns outlined below have already been identified by the AFS/FEA as common problems facing all Atlantic students. It must be stressed that only through unity among all students can we hope to influence the policies of our governments on these matters.

Financing Post-Secondary Education

The financing of post-secondary education is probably the single most crucial issue affecting both the quality of and the accessibility to education in the Atlantic. Government decisions relating to the degree of public financial support to our trade schools, colleges and universities will determine, among other things;

- The degree of curriculum development;
- The extent of graduate programs and research projects;
- The teacher-student ratio;
- The quality of libraries and other auxiliary services;
- New building facilities and other capital projects;
- The level of tuition, residence fees and food costs to students.

During this current period of "fiscal restraint", both federal and provincial governments are siezing upon the opportunity to cutback public support to higher education and other social services. Many of these are far out of proportion to the cutbacks imposed in other sectors of public spending. In the short run, our governments may consider post-secondary education an easy target for financial cutbacks. The long term effects of this withdrawal of public support may have disastrous consequences for post-secondary education in this region and in Canada as a whole.

Post-secondary students in the Atlantic are already paying higher tuition fees than anywhere else in Canada. Further increases in costs to individual students--projected by the recent agreements between the federal

and provincial governments whereby the provincial governments will no longer have to justify expenditures of tax dollars and may refuse to subsidize education to the extent that they have in the past--will place greater financial burdens on all present and future students.

Post-secondary education especially at the university level, will become even more inaccessible to the low income sectors of the public. As well, for those who can still afford it, education will suffer cutbacks in quality.

However, the critical financial situation can be improved through unified student work. It must be recognized that the major financial cutbacks to post-secondary education are not as a result of a uniform "anti-inflation" restraint program. It is rather the result of a wholesale de-priorization of education as part of our government's public spending responsibilities.

Through our unified voice in AFS/FEA we can express our concern over this government policy change. We can inform the public of our positions, gain their support, and demand that our governments justify the actions which they take, if, indeed, they are able.

Student Aid

AFS/FEA strongly supports the basic concept of government subsidized student assistance programs to aid students who are in financial need. Such programs should be a step toward making access to post-secondary education more equitable among Canadians.

However, many aspects of the various student aid programs available to Atlantic students are not fulfilling the criteria for promoting this equality of accessibility.

Low living allowances, arbitrary parental contribution

requirements, unrealistic summer earnings at a time when the Atlantic, in particular, is facing incredibly high unemployment--these are some of the examples of areas in the student aid programs which are more and more forcing low-income people to either mortgage their future or, more simply, not consider post-secondary education.



In the past students have shown that they can have an effective voice in helping to determine student aid policy. This input is best attained by students working together in a collective effort to represent student needs to the government.

With the advent of the MPHEC, the Maritime provinces, and possibly Newfoundland in the near future, are increasingly moving towards unification of educational policies. Student aid programs are becoming more and more similar.

Increasing yearly, statistics show that unemployment reached an all time high last summer, especially in the Atlantic provinces. Many Atlantic students who depend on summer employment to assist in the financing of their education were unable this year to continue their studies.

Much of last summer's unemployment was the direct result of government decisions to cut employment programs. The government had developed programs designed to help low employment areas of the country--the Atlantic. In fact, before the program was quashed, a full 25% of the Opportunities for Youth grants were awarded in this area.

Due to student pressure, the government has introduced stop-gap measures for the coming summer. There is still much room for improvement. Students in the Atlantic must join with other Canadian students to insure that the government's employment policies reflect both the long term graduate and the short term summer employment needs of students and, indeed, the needs of all Canadians.

Other Issues

For many Canadians post-secondary education does not consist of college or university but rather other forms of learning--manpower training programs are one of these.

Here too, the federal government has cutback its commitment of financial support.

In another issue facing Canadians: some governments are beginning to impose restrictive and discriminatory legislation against foreign students who wish to study in Canada. Much of this legislation presently being introduced in Alberta and Ontario, affects students from the Third World countries who comprise some 50% of international students in this country. Many of these students come from countries with no post-secondary education systems of their own.

These and many other issues: inadequate housing, the status of women at post-secondary institutions, the worsening conditions for support staffs at institutions--all demand the attention of Atlantic students. The complexity of the issues requires a stronger and better prepared student voice. As well, local work must be done to involve more students in solving these problems.

This then, is the dual role of AFS/FEA--to inform and assist local campuses in dealing with these various issues in terms of how they affect their individual institutions, and secondly, to initiate and co-ordinate action between Atlantic students where issues affect the entire region.

Co-ordinated effort on a regional basis will soon be the only way to positively influence our Atlantic governments.