

Minister of Youth Payette "defensive"

OTTAWA (CUP) — Celine Hervieux-Payette is awfully defensive these days.

In almost all of her recent speeches, the new Youth minister insists the creation of her portfolio, announced in December's federal throne speech, is "not just a political scheme." She can accomplish a lot for Canadian youth, she stresses, and her role goes beyond placating the growing number of unemployed young people.

"I wouldn't have accepted (leading the ministry) if there were no need for it," the 42-year-old former minister of Fitness and Amateur Sport recently asserted at Carleton University.

Since she was made Youth minister Jan. 10, Payette has swept the country to explain her role to young people. Though she insists her ministry is needed, she has little to offer, especially to university students.

At her Carleton speech, she told students she is concerned with the problems facing higher education, but students must take a back seat to less advantaged youth.

"I feel I am here talking to the privileged of society. Your chances of getting a job are far greater than someone who has finished just a high school degree," she said.

Still, she stressed the federal government is examining issues in post secondary education, such as reduced funding, accessibility and poor job prospects for graduates. But when pressed for details, she would not elaborate.

Several days later, at a press conference in Victoria, she said the federal government wants accessible, high quality education but the provinces aren't cooperating.

"By provinces cutting their own funding and not matching the amount of money and

effort that we are making, they are transferring a good part of the burden onto students' shoulders," Payette said.

The provinces and the federal government are currently negotiating a funding arrangement but Payette said nothing has been finalized. This year in B.C., the province held education operating grants at the previous year's level, despite increased federal funding.

Payette said she's concerned about the problem, but offered no solutions.

Though Payette is unable to explain the exact purpose of her ministry, her prime objective so far seems to be coordinating current federal job creation programs. But her main message is that youth must not rely on government for job opportunities, and turn to the private sector.

At Carleton, she questioned the value of govern-

ment job creation projects. "Is that the answer?" she asked. "If I remove \$3 billion from the economy to solve the problem, have I solved the problem?"

She's very fond of telling audiences the future relies on today's youth. "Youth have a place in society. We should be able to marshal their energies," she said at the recent Alberta Liberal Youth

Commission convention in Calgary.

Though Payette actively defends the creation of her ministry, a leaked Liberal cabinet document suggests it is largely a public relations gesture.

The Youth ministry is "a simple and inexpensive way" of restoring hope to Canadian youth, influential Liberal senator Jacques Hebert wrote

in a report presented to cabinet last July.

The Liberals insist youth unemployment is one of their main priorities, but the recent budget added only \$150 million to the current billion-dollar federal job creation program.

Payette has been unavailable for comment since the budget was brought down Feb. 15.



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