

Students Deliver

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Campus Reporter

Students rallied across Canada on Wednesday, Feb 05 2004, to protest high debt loads, and rising tuition. Student debt and tuition have been accumulating over the last few decades to the point where they now jeopardize our future, and the future of students yet to come.

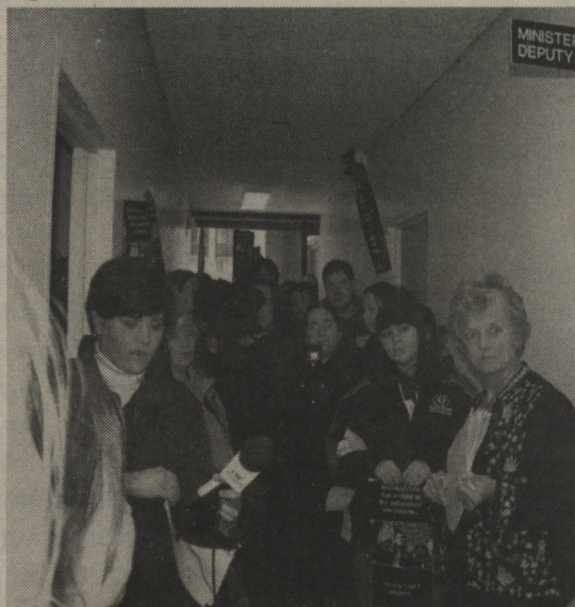
At UPEI a dedicated group of individuals met at our SUB to make good on our duty as students, and on our attitudes toward tuition costs. We were escorted via bus to Victoria Park where our march toward the Sullivan Building (and lower tuition) began. With a large banner stating our cause, we walked 50 strong down Euston St. disabling traffic, and chanting such slogans as, "Freeze tuition NOW!" And, "Yada Yada Yada Yo, Mildred Dovers needs to know, high tuition has to go!" Followed by the ever popular, "Yada Yada Yada Yo, UPEI students know, Mildred Dover needs to go!" and so on. We cut across a little path that leads to the parking lot, and from there we continued on to the courtyard where we began our demonstration. For those of you who don't know, the courtyard is central to the government buildings on Euston St., and is prime real-estate when you're hosting a protest. With employees seemingly enjoying their afternoon show, we began clarifying our plan, going over our rights as protesters, and making clear our strategy and objectives. However, this was just a distraction from our real intent. You see, being students, we were quite clever. We had already planned our route right up to the office of the Minister of Education.

That's right, with a loud cheer as a signal of our consent, we stormed the building and headed up the stairway to the first floor. As we exited from the stairway and into the working area, the looks on the employees' faces were priceless, they had no clue! The route we took couldn't have been better; we were interrupting meetings, telephone calls, and anybody who was in our way. Being the good mannered students that we are, we tried to practice a bit of refrain like, being clean and good-natured, not swearing, and of course committing no violent acts, but it's hard to be polite when you're protesting. People were stopped in halls and doorways like cars at train crossings, wondering if the end would ever come. We cruised down the halls meeting them with our signs, sleeping bags, slogans, and our sense of riotousness, and left them with a feeling of irritable awe, and a ringing sensation in their ears from our crazy noise.

We entered a second stairway where we climbed two stories and emerged onto the floor of our beloved minister. Here we sat and made ourselves comfortable. The sleeping bags, you see, were a testament to our dedication. Our catchy chants continued until Mildred Dover came to the door to speak

with us. If you watched the episode of Compass that aired that Thursday, you caught a little bit of the action that ensued. Although Mrs. Dover did give us a good portion of her time, halfway through she tried to duck out saying she had a very important meeting, and that people were waiting to see her. I assumed from her speech that she had meant they were there, in the building waiting. However, 10 minutes later her

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secretary appeared at the door with her purse and jacket. It all seemed very rehearsed to me, but it did not matter, for we kept asking questions, and half an hour later her secretary was still waiting in the doorway with the coat.

Mrs. Dover did seem to be sincere, and I believe she does care about students, but I got the impression that our problem was not a problem for her government. When she left, she had agreed to two of our three requests.

First, she agreed to write a letter to all UPEI students addressing student tuition and student debt, and enclosed in this letter would be a list of organizations which precede the university in terms of funding priority. Second, she agreed that she would recognize student debt and rising tuition as concerns for the

Conservative party in front of all opposing, and honourable members seated in the legislature. So with a hallway of students still unimpressed with the government's dedication to this issue, Mrs. Dover left to go to her conveniently scheduled meeting.

Now, about our third and final demand. We had demanded to meet with the government to discuss action plans for student debt reduction and lowering tuition, but Dover did not agree, saying that she could not make that decision on behalf of the remaining members. On a tip from "a nice lady named Nancy," we were made aware that Mitch Murphy, the finance minister, was in office that day, and that he might be able to satisfy our third demand. We had all settled in for a long night, that was for sure. However, location didn't matter -- if we had to stay in Mitch's hallway for the night, so be it. But being the clever students we are, we decided to call first. Mitch returned our call in a very timely fashion, and agreed to meet with us. Wow! In a protest that was prepared to pull an all nighter, we finished up in a mere three hours. And then I knew that it worked, or that it could work, that if we want something to happen, we can make it happen. And in knowing... it felt good.

With that, we left the building a little ruffled, but in the same peace we had found it in earlier that day. All in all, it was a good first step, but we are looking for results, and the harder we look the more we will find, so support your student body, and our representatives in reducing our debt and our tuition.