

Coffin March Against Course Cuts

WINNIPEG (CUP)--With thirty coffins carried overhead in the face of -20 degrees celsius temperatures, 800 University of Winnipeg students marched to the Manitoba legislature Jan. 15th protesting low funding from the provincial government.

After marching from the University to the legislature, protesters deposited the thirty coffins, representing thirty courses to be cut next year from the university curriculum, onto the legislature's steps.

Earlier in the week, provincial Progressive Conservative Minister of Education Keith Cosens announced the province would increase funding to universities by 13.8 percent next year.

John Hutton, vice-president of the University of Winnipeg Students' Association, said the funding comes "too late to stop the untimely demise of these thirty courses."

In a meeting with student representatives, University of Winnipeg President Harry Duckworth said the funding increase does not rule out cutting thirty courses next year.

Duckworth said the university requested a 16.4 percent increase in funding from the government that request took into account the savings from cutting thirty courses.

Speaking on the legislature steps, Manitoba Liberal leader Doug Lauchlin told the demonstrators, "it is no coincidence the funding increase announcement came two

days before the demonstration" "it is all very consistent with the yo-yo approach to university funding practiced by the Progressive Conservatives," Lauchlin said. "Four years ago when the PC's first got elected they gave the University of Winnipeg a 1.2 percent increase. For two years they still gave inadequate funding. "Now this year, with an election just around the corner, they raise funding to a decent level. It is still not enough for the universities to catch up on the past losses."

With the crowd chanting "too late" Hutton said "having decent funding in one year out of four does nothing to solve the problems of universities. There is still no concrete planning behind provincial funding. Universities can't rely on the political whims of legislators. Funding and education have to be planned if universities are to survive."

"We are not here to just protest about the thirty courses that will be cut next year," Hutton said. "We are talking about no change in student aid in four years. We are talking about no university representation of the university grants commission."

"We are talking about our classrooms with too many students for one professor. We are talking about the constant deterioration of universities in this

province over the past four years."

Cosens left the province before the demonstration to attend an education ministers conference in Edmonton, according to his office. In his place Brian Ranson, Minister of Natural Resources, tried to calm the crowd.

Commenting that it was the first time he had been to a funeral where he didn't know the name of the deceased, Ranson told the demonstrators that universities were considered important by the government and this year's announced funding increase demonstrates that.

Amid catcalls from the

crowd, Ranson cut his speech short saying he would be "willing to speak to three or four individual students in my office."

According to the students who attended the meeting, Ranson said he was unfamiliar with the issues since education was not his ministry. He agreed that funding for universities must be planned more extensively than in the past.

Hutton said the demonstration was a success and that students concerns were effectively relayed to both the public and the government by this demonstration.

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