

# Federal education funding won't intrude on provincial rights — Dion

BY CHRIS BODNAR

OTTAWA (CUP) — Stephane Dion, federal minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, says Ottawa will continue to fund education through its own program, while simultaneously respecting the role of the provinces to take overall responsibility for education.

In an exclusive interview with Canadian University Press, Dion said the federal government is supporting post-secondary education through the

Millennium Scholarship Foundation, but added that the provinces are ultimately responsible for deciding what is taught in the classroom.

Provincial governments have accused Ottawa of ignoring its responsibility to provide more core funding to post-secondary through federal transfer payments.

The federal Liberals have cut health and education transfer payments to the provinces by \$7-billion since taking office in 1993.

"The Millennium Scholarship Foundation is a way to help

students to go to university but it's not a way to decide what will be the teaching at universities," said Dion.

"The provinces have the full roll of that it's not the government of Canada. We're only there to help students go there with money. This is a roll the government has fulfilled for over a century now, so it's fully within our responsibility."

Dion was drafted into cabinet by Prime Minister Jean Chretien after the federal government nearly lost the 1995 Referendum.

Dion and his government have been criticized by the government of Quebec trying to maintain too much control over education — a provincial responsibility under the constitution.

Following the Speech from the Throne in October, Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe accused Ottawa of attempting to control how the provinces spend money on education. The separatist leader was angry that the Liberals were only giving money to special research initiatives, rather than through increased provincial transfer payments.

In November, provincial education ministers called on the federal government to increase transfer payments to the provinces, after federal finance numbers indicated a budgetary surplus estimate be-

tween \$60 to \$90-billion over the next five years. But Dion says his government is not overstepping federalism boundaries by setting up new research funding bodies or scholarship funds.

"Education is terribly important for the future of the country. Here we are in a new economy, where it's so important to be competitive with technologies, and the government of Canada is involved with funding post-secondary education involving research, involving funding students and we will do the more we can," said Dion.

"This being said, the provincial role in education is paramount. It is their exclusive responsibility under the constitution. So the government of Canada will play its role while respecting the role of the provinces."

Nonetheless, the government has been aware of the impact of its education funding in regard to Canadian unity.

Documents obtained from the Privy Council Office under the Access to Information Act show extensive briefing notes for ministers throughout the creation of the Millennium Scholarship Fund's creation regarding impacts on Quebec and national unity.

Numerous pages track the responses of Quebec politicians during negotiations over the distribution of scholarships to Quebec students, focusing most commonly on reaction from Quebec Liberal Leader Jean Charest.

Briefings indicate Ottawa believed the media were more willing to side with the Quebec government than the federal government.

Negotiations between the Foundation and the Quebec government eventually broke off. An agreement for the distribution of funds only came about this past December after current minister of Human Resources and Development Jane Stewart stepped in to mediate the situation.

Now, Dion says 90 percent of his time is spent dealing with work unrelated to unity while almost all of his media attention deals specifically to separatism threats.

"There is a difference between the image I project and the reality of my work," he said. "What is unfortunate to me is that I will be known when there is a dispute, especially with the Quebec government. So I may be portrayed as the minister of disputes."

## GLBT students seek on-campus services

BY SARAH MURPHY

CHARLOTTETOWN (CUP) — The University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) must do a better job of servicing the needs of gay and bisexual students on campus, say members of the University community.

UPEI prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and in 1999 extended same-sex partner benefits to their employees.

But despite these actions by the university, there are still no groups or designated meeting spaces on campus specific to gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual (GLBT) students.

"Most universities and colleges have support groups for their GLBT students," said Mike, a third-year UPEI student who didn't want to reveal his last name. "These groups facilitate a sense of community and acceptance. It allows GLBT students to talk to their peers about life issues, romantic issues and many other issues that heterosexuals take for granted but that homosexuals must usually censor."

The lack of a campus space has led many students to find alternatives at the Women's Centre or

Student Services.

"If a student requires counselling then UPEI has an excellent counselling team at the University's Student Services," said Mike. "GLBT students can also find a supportive atmosphere at the Women's Centre."

However, the Women's Centre isn't designed to cater to the GLBT student.

Bob Gibson, director of Student Services, says he would help anyone who wanted to establish services GLBT students. He says any such group would have a positive impact on campus because it would allow people support.

Gibson's words are echoed by Ann Braithwaite, a professor and co-ordinator of the UPEI's Women's Studies program. She says that a lack of campus support for GLBT students encourages a myth of homogeneity that excludes a large number of people.

"[The lack of a GLBT group] does a disservice to all university community members, both GLBT and straight, by delimiting the concept of an intellectual learning community that supposedly characterizes the university," said Braithwaite.

But the Women's Studies pro-

gram and Student Services are not the only ones who support GLBT services on campus.

At present, the student Union has not been approached by anyone who wants to start a GLBT organization at UPEI. Nevertheless, the union supports any efforts made by students to initiate such services.

"This group [if initiated] would receive the same support and attention that any other group," said John Desrosiers, UPEI Student Union president. "The student union has some support in place for new groups and I don't think there would be a problem in helping them."

Desrosiers says he will not "get out and search" for new campus organizations — be it sports, GLBT or other — but maintains that the union will have no problem providing any help if interest is shown. Mike says the support of such an organization would likely come as a breath of fresh air for GLBT students.

"Being a GLBT youth growing up in today's society can be really difficult," said Mike. "In large cities some GLBT youth wait until high school before exploring their sexuality. Most youths, however, still wait until they are financially secure, have moved out of their parent's house or until they start attending a university or college."

Mike adds that help from the UPEI community is likely not enough.

"Many GLBT groups have asked me why there wasn't a group at the university," said Mike. "The answer is simple: no one wants to take charge and start one. Such a group would have to be advertised to get members, therefore there would be a fear of gay bashing."

Although not as convenient, some support is available to GLBT students off-campus. The Abegweit Rainbow Collective (ARC), Prince Edward Island's first organized GLBT support group, has monthly 'drop-ins' and organizes social events and dances.

(With files from Barry Dennison)

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