

The Board of Governors wants to index you ...

the Gateway

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1981

... right out of university.
Come to the Board meeting this Friday, 9 a.m., Rm. 3-15, University Hall.

The Board wants your money

by Peter Michalyshyn

The university Board of Governors will decide this Friday if it wants students to pay more tuition next year.

The Board, the most powerful decision-making body at the university, will consider a proposal from its Executive and Finance committees to index tuition fees as a fixed percentage of the university operating budget.

James Horsman, minister of Advanced Education and Manpower, called for such policy submissions from the university community by November 1. He is expected to use the submissions to help form a long-term government tuition fee policy.

Student representatives think the Board would be making a hasty, expedient decision by supporting the indexing proposal.

"You'd think in a policy situation they'd (the Board) try to address the rationale for tuition at all — they just haven't," says Students' Union president Phil Soper.

Soper says the Board and the university administration haven't considered the social consequences of higher tuition fees.

"They've refused to look at the philosophical aspect of charging people to go to university," he says.

"They aren't looking at it in the sense that they are making a long-term policy."

"Instead they've tried to find the best method, without political flack and with the fewest problems from students, to get fees to rise," Soper says.

University v.p. finance and administration Lorne Leitch admitted the university did not consider social impact when forming the indexing policy.

"I'm speaking as an administrator responsible for drafting a budget. To have the matter settled (that tuition fees would climb every year) would be a good thing," Leitch said.

Phil Soper says the administration's report in support of indexing is "narrow in scope."

"They prepared the document on the grounds that this would be the safest policy in assuring a balanced budget for the university," Soper said.

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In 1978, 5000 students marched on the Legislature to protest government cutbacks. They marched in vain, however, because now not only the government but our own Board of Governors wants to victimize us for their own inadequacies. March on the Board Friday.

The Students have their own ideas

by Wes Oginski

Students' Council has formally challenged the Board of Governors on their proposed policy on Tuition Fees for Alberta Universities.

Council ratified a motion on Tuesday, September 30 to officially protest the Board's proposal.

"We want to make it quite evident - hell, we want it bloody clear, the students on campus are not going to give tacit approval to this policy by saying nothing," pronounced SU president Phil Soper.

"The policy would see annual increases in tuition fees forever, which poses a number of problems," says Soper, explaining what the policy would mean if accepted by the provincial government.

The Board's proposal is presented by

request of the provincial Minister of Education, Jim Horsman. Horsman has requested all university communities to submit proposals for a tuition policy. From these proposals, a provincial policy on tuition fees will be created.

A primary concern about this proposal is that it would effectively remove any student input.

"Presently fees are set annually. The Board recommends to the government the level of fees. Students have input on the Board of Governors, through talking with Board members, and through media to present their views on what would be equitable," Soper explains.

"They (the Board) came up with this one (policy) to basically provide dollars for the university avoiding accessibility to

students on what they have to pay," he explains.

"I think that is directly related to inadequate government support," says Liz Lunney, SU vp academic.

The Board's proposal would eventually have student tuition fees cover up to 12 percent of the university's net expenditures.

"The problems with setting fees up to 12 percent are if the number of students decline, as predicted, less students will still have to make up that 12 percent of the university needs from fee income which could send tuition fees skyrocketing," says Soper.

Another of the concerns presented to Council is that the research component is part of the university's operating expen-

ditures.

"If the research component at this university rises dramatically as some anticipate, students will be shouldering a greater load of the cost of conducting that research," Soper explains.

Research costs would then be felt across all Alberta universities. A policy now exists that keeps fees between different institutions within a certain percentage of each other. The U of A's research component would take a certain amount of the student fees away from academics, while at the University of Lethbridge, with a high liberal arts content, the fees would go more directly into education.

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Once again we hear the common refrain, this time from the U of A Board of Governors: "Students should contribute towards their education. Those who benefit should pay."

Tomorrow the Board will consider recommending that the provincial government implement a policy of tuition fee indexing. Under this policy, total fee revenue would be maintained as a certain portion of total university revenues. This would guarantee that tuition fees would climb every year. Government officials appear sympathetic towards the idea.

Both the government and the university have much to gain from any tuition fee increase. In any given year, the more money students pay toward supporting the education system, the less the government has to provide. As for the university, government funding is simply not keeping pace with inflation in costs; Board members and administrators look to students as an alternate source of revenue.

But students in the past haven't quietly accepted tuition fee hikes. Both government and the university have taken a lot of flack any time they have tried to raise fees. Indexing's simple attraction is that it solves this problem. Once the government passes indexing legislation, there will be simply no provision for any debate over tuition fees.

But this debate, which both government and the university want to stifle, is no modern

phenomenon. Until about 150 years ago, parents had to pay full tuition fees to send their children to elementary school. High school fees were only abolished in the 1920s. University fees themselves now account for far less of the cost of post-secondary education than they did only a couple of decades ago.

editorial

The reason for these changes is basically this: people have come to see education as a basic human right, not a market commodity to be bought and sold; any barrier, financial or otherwise, is a denial of someone's right to education. (Not that fees are the only barrier — there are many, both economic and social. But tuition fees are a significant deterrent that can easily be done away with.)

Indexing seeks to arrest the century-long trend toward free education by stopping the fee debate entirely. A mechanistic system to increase fees makes no provision for debate over fee levels and accessibility.

Just as the idea of accessible education is nothing new, neither is concerted resistance to it. The indexers are heirs to a long tradition of

opposition to accessibility. In 1852, for instance, the Township of York wrote to the *Globe* urging the city of Toronto to resist a recently-passed bill imposing a property tax to pay for elementary education:

"(For mechanics and labourers) there cannot be any such right so wrongfully given them (than) to educate their children at the expense of their more wealthy neighbors....(Toronto) should spurn the unrighteous counsel which is introducing communism in education, to the undermining of property and society."

But the concerted opposition of property owners could not stop the trend towards free education — not in the 1850s, not in the 1920s when high school fees were abolished. And the indexers, although they could well win the immediate battle, cannot ultimately be any more successful than was the Township of York in 1852 when it opposed free elementary education. Even the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party cannot in this case withstand the force of change.

Mike Walker

The Board of Governors will decide on this issue Friday, October 2 at 9 a.m., 3rd floor University Hall (across from SUB).

If you support the right to education, be there — you're needed.

M.W.