

UPEI Students Leave After Threat

CHARLOTTETOWN (CUP) — Prince Edward Island education minister Gordon Bennett brandished the threat of police action over the heads of 300 university students Tuesday (January 27), forcing them to discontinue a sit-in provoked by fee increases and substandard education at the University of Prince Edward Island.

After a march through downtown Charlottetown, the students filled the corridors of two floors of the provincial government's administration building for two hours, also occupying Bennett's office and the outer chambers of PEI Premier Alex Campbell.

The students also asked the Premier Campbell live up to promises made in a government white paper issued in April, 1968, in which Campbell said the province "would have a

university comparable to national standards."

An advance group which occupied education minister Bennett's office was given no response to its demands for government action.

After two hours of discussion, Bennett called in eight members of the RCMP and local police force, and told students they would be liable to charges of obstructing a police officer, obstructing private property and obstruction of justice if they did not leave.

Eventually the students filed out of the building, after convincing a small number not to face arrest by staying.

Tuesday's protest climaxed two weeks of unrest at the one-year-old UPEI campus, which began January 15 when students discovered via a local television program that their

board of governors had secretly approved a \$100 tuition fee increase and a \$100 residence increase for next year.

The board decision was made October 27, 1969: Both administration president R. J. Baker and a single student union representative on the board justified their silence by saying "the students would find out about it anyway."

The increase would raise tuition to \$550 per student; and residence fees to \$775 per student. A poll conducted by the UPEI student council revealed that 68 per cent of those interviewed would find it "very difficult" to return to university if the increases were implemented. One-quarter of the campus was sampled in the poll.

The average summer earnings of students polled by the council was \$718.

Currently, students at UPEI are eligible for up to \$1000 in loan-only financial assistance from the provincial government. Students had originally proposed that the system should be supplemented by the institution of a \$200 grant after the first \$200 in loans.

A government counter-proposal would "match" student loans over a minimum of \$600 with equivalent grants: The scheme would allow students a maximum grant of \$400 on financial assistance totalling \$1400. Students oppose the scheme as they would have to go \$1000 into debt to get a \$400 grant.

Monday (January 26), 250 students watched as the UPEI board refused to rescind the fee increases. According to administration president Baker,

the board could not go directly to the provincial government without "usurping the authority" of the PEI government's post-secondary education commission.

The three-man commission, set up as a "buffer between UPEI and the provincial government," will not meet again until April 8, long after the provincial treasury board has completed estimates and proposals for university revenue and expenditure for the next year.

At a meeting January 19 between Bennett, Campbell and 400 university students, the provincial premier said the government was not "in a financial position or a bureaucratic position" to guarantee the implementation of a grant system for students in the province.

But, Campbell added, he was "optimistic" that the system might be in effect for the 1970-71 academic year.

The University of Prince Edward Island, less than year old, is an amalgamation of St. Dunstan's University and Prince of Wales College, which the government implemented to raise educational standards in the province.

In the government white paper which announced the creation of the new university, Campbell promised the institution 18 million dollars in student aid and 69 million dollars for operating costs during a ten-year period ending 1978.

So far, neither program has been implemented.

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