

Why should have-nots, have to pay more?

(FREDERICTON) "We are citizens of New Brunswick, we want to learn here, we want to live here, we want to work here, and we want to pay taxes here..." (Demonstrator, Centennial Building, January 31, 1976).

Students from a number of New Brunswick universities are still occupying the Centennial building in downtown Fredericton.

By BEV HILLS

Photos by STEVE PATRIQUEN

Student spokespersons claim they will not leave until several demands they have made are met. The most urgent demand is an immediate change in the present loan-bursary ratio.

After Wednesday's cabinet meeting the minister of youth has offered a proposal to striking students. Mr. Oullette suggests the formation of a student committee comprised of representatives from this province's universities and colleges. To defray travelling costs for student spokesmen up to \$1,000 per representative will be provided.

Students in the Centennial Building will discuss the proposal Wednesday night and decide Thursday morning by referendum whether to accept this latest offering.

The government is beginning to reconsider their flat "NO" they had originally stated to students at earlier meetings.

Up to this point the occupation continues, with both sides apparently weakening.

Support is currently being generated on campuses across Canada for the protesting students. Even within the city of Fredericton, individual citizens and business groups are donating foodstuffs to help feed the students.

Students have "occupied" the building for more than a week now. They are tired, but still dedicated. A UNB student union spokesperson said Tuesday that "next week we can have 500 UNB students downtown", but the actual physical presence of UNB students at the Centennial building is up to now a matter of imagination.

Public opinion, which is felt by both students and civil servants varies from "beat the bastards" to "I guess we should help them."

Last year the provincial government

supplied \$2,536,245 in bursaries within the province; a total of 4,946 for an average bursary of \$500.

These provincial monies were handed out to qualifying students while a total of 6,978 Canada student loans were given to New Brunswick students.

Students from the province borrowed \$7,444,630.

While final statistical breakdowns have not been completed for this year, the average loan is running slightly higher compared to last year's figures. It ranges around the \$1,200 mark. Because of modifications in the loan-bursary schedule the exact breakdown is as follows; \$1,400 loan \$1,000 bursary \$400 loan. These changes were made last year by the provincial government.

The federal government covers interest rates on student loans which are carried by the federal administration until six months after a student graduates. This year the interest paid on New Brunswick student loans that have not extended past the six month period totalled \$1,000,000.



Last Friday Premier Hatfield addressed students in the Centennial building, suggesting that a limited amount of money might be found to partially meet student demands.

As of now the provincial government does not seem to be prepared to offer any solutions to this problem. By students stringently demanding specific solutions with little recourse for compromise they have also left themselves in poor position to bargain.

The current demands by students to alter the loan bursary ratio from \$1,400 to \$900 (loan) and \$1,000 to \$1,900 is seen by many as a short term solution to the overall question of student aid.

This demand will provide immediate assistance to a number of students, but students who would have loans under \$1,000 would not benefit to any extent. Because of alterations in the loan-bursary formula initiated last year, as many as 35 percent of students who have loans would not benefit from this move to lower the loan portion of the aid plan. This figure is computed from the fact that since approximately two thousand students who received loans last year did not receive bursaries, and of this group most loans were under \$1,000, the same applies this year. Even with a fairly wide margin left for increases in loan figures for this year a minimum of 30 percent is not unreasonable.

This short term situation that is the major demand of demonstrating students will alleviate the pressing financial situation to a certain extent. Any student that must borrow money to attend a post-secondary institution is left with a substantial debt after graduation. By lowering the formula now the amount of

indebtedness will be lowered slightly. Both the student aid and youth department say they are concerned with the large amount of indebtedness students who borrow money are faced with after they finish their education.

As of now the government seems to be prepared to offer at least partial solutions to this problem.

Students have indicated that they might compromise on most of their demands but not on the loan-bursary ratio demand which they consider the most immediate concern. On this basis, unless students are reconsidering their original position, the demonstration should still be in effect by Friday's publication of this feature.

Dr. Anderson feels that access to post-secondary institutions should be "as open as possible". There are two limitations to access to this type of education; qualifications and finances.

If a student belongs but can't afford it should he or she be prohibited from attending? Will access become limited to the rich?

Dr. Anderson is concerned with the failure rate at this university. He says that "maybe the standards should be higher" for qualifying to attend. It isn't at all

realistic to expect criteria in the loan program to distinguish between "achievers" and budding socialites. He is aware of this problem, and shows concern and sympathy to students who do have to borrow so much.

He does state that "university is a place to learn" and not a job training center. This aspect of post-secondary institutions appears to be overlooked by at least some students.

Dr. Anderson said that in solving the overall problem the government should "establish a student aid advisory board to the department and minister of youth". He says there is "good precedent at the federal level for influential advisory boards to confer with ministers". But Dr. Anderson also warns that any such board should not be "token".

The Deputy Minister for the department of Youth, Mr. Martin, was asked if this would be possible, and if so, how beneficial would it be? Martin said that such a move was "not impossible" but he stressed the fact that final decisions are left to cabinet. He said that "the government is concerned with the level of indebtedness" and that future trends must take this "into serious consideration".

Students and university officials must question the formation of any type of advisory board.

Based on the past performance of the now defunct Youth Advisory Board the "precedent" is not at all impressive. The YAB expired in March of 1974 when provincial funding was dropped.

The board consisted of 21 members. The province was divided into seven regions, and three members were chosen from each region. Per region, one high school student, one university student and one "professional" involved with youth recreation or education were selected to sit with a tenure of two years.

According to a former member of the board "recommendations were made, the government shot them back", typical government response was they "didn't know what you were talking about."

The department of youth is "pleased to receive briefs on student aid". When a group presents a brief the deputy minister said "representatives are invited to discuss briefs with cabinet" when possible. This move comes after any brief has been evaluated by the ministry responsible for action on any citizen suggestion.

Based on the performance of this board students must question any such formation now. They YAB did make several recommendations pertaining to the overall question of student aid and the government "ignored" them, according to the source.

Several types of degrees, usually those leading to professional status in the

occupational ranks are, at least partially, subsidised by government agencies.

For example, students studying medicine or related fields can at times receive free financial assistance upon agreeing to compensate for assistance by working for the sponsoring agency for a pre-determined length of time.

Students with special aptitude can be awarded scholarships, but these are limited, and again, do not concern the majority of the student population.

In the words of Dr. Anderson, "the student demonstration served the purpose of focusing public attention on the problem."

If the immediate solution is short term in nature a clearly defined solution must emerge, not only to alleviate the inequities and abuses of the current loan process, but to govern and begin working in earnest on a more just solution.

The government does seem to recognize many of the problems and obviously the students know, and are concerned about the direction student aid is leading them to.

The question is having problems justifying the mere existence of a student aid program to a group of taxpayers who really don't comprehend the depth of the entire issue.

The government must begin working on answers to these problems. They cannot work alone, they cannot continue on the present course.

Students must try to work with the government on the question. The insanity of the present situation is that this approach has been tried in the past with little consequence, but change is necessary.

A voice has spoken out objecting to the current student demonstration at the Centennial building.

Roger Alain, a Daily Gleaner reporter and columnist said in a column last week that students with federal student loans had a high rate of default and that most students had a preponderance of jobs during the summer months-complete with excellent pay. Mr. Alain is "sick and tired" of the antics of demonstrating students.

Many people, students, administrators, and civil servants alike have expressed dismay at Mr. Alain's comments.

Mr. Martin, the deputy minister of youth told The Brunswickian that the rate of default on student loans hovered around the 5 percent mark, and that of this percentage at least half of these defaults resulted from "illness and lack of jobs."

According to Mr. Martin student unemployment is perennially high and that "many students are paid at the minimum wage."

