

Five faces of protest greet Stephenson



Paul Stuart — photos

When Stephenson informed the crowd that "universities have done better than any other segment of public sector institutions," Michael Michie of the Graduate Assistant's Association asked, "...even better than Ford and Inco?" (See Michie's comment piece, page four).



Gary Hershorn

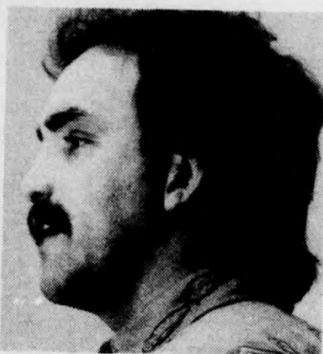
Miriam Edelson, Chairperson of the Ontario Federation of Students, said that a government source has warned that computer tests for the Ontario Student Assistance Programme will start six weeks late. The minister said she would check this point, but was confident that this year's fiasco, which held up the aid money of 4,000 students would not be repeated.

Student Governor Paul Hayden said he thought deficit financing would be "destructive" for York, but he didn't see Stephenson taking action that help the university avoid this move. As to Stephenson's claim that imaginative solutions are what the universities need, Hayden asked, "What do we do in the meantime?"



Fine Arts Council member Judy Abrams said York's East Indian Music Programme (headed by Prof. Trichy Sankaran) is the sort of creative effort that Stephenson said she values. Abrams wanted to know if Stephenson would intervene to prevent the programme being cut. The reply: No, that's up to the Board of Governors.

At last Friday's appearance of Bette Stephenson, Minister of Education, Colleges and Universities, Sociology grad student Bill Johnston read statistics from a 1977 survey by the Quality of Life Project of York's Institute for Behavioral Research which found that 55% of Canada's taxpayers want "more or much more" government effort put into education — even if it requires a shift of money from other areas.



Excalibur

Vol. 13, No 24

York University Community Newspaper

29 March 1979

Stephenson pressed on issues at York

By Bruce Gates and Paul Stuart

She came to speak about the need for universities to keep pace with changing times, but Bette Stephenson, minister of colleges and universities, found herself answering questions that went beyond the topic at her noonhour appearance at York last Friday.

Considering the unpopularity of the Davis government's level of funding to Ontario Universities, Stephenson got a polite reception from the audience of about 100 in the 525 seat Curtis I lecture hall.

The audience listened quietly as Stephenson told them that "if we are to provide arts graduates with specific marketable skills we have to look at the whole system and find a way of providing these skills.

"There is a system of applied arts and technology... what we have to do is sit down and coordinate these parts."

Stephenson added that "a lot more money would not solve the problem in the university system right now. It might slow it down a bit, but universities still have to come to grips with declining enrolment and inflation."

But money, specifically Stephenson's management of funding to post-secondary education, is what many members of her audience wanted to hear about.

Murray Miskin, president of the Osgoode Hall Legal and Literary Society read Stephenson a petition from York's Anti-Cutbacks Coalition, signed by just over 2,000 members of the York community. The petition called for a "rejection of cutbacks and the maintenance of existing levels of staff and faculties."

The petitioners' goals are:

- "An open, public budgetary process"

- "A freeze in firings and maintenance of existing levels of facilities and services." The petition state that "deficit financing should be the means of achieving this in the event of a reversal of government policy."

- "An end to the discrepancy between the educational inflation



Gary Hershorn

Minister of Education, Colleges and Universities says money isn't enough to help Ontario universities.

rate and the ceiling in spending" and "an extension of higher education to those that have been excluded in the past," made possible by "the easing of demographic pressure."

Miriam Edelson, chairperson of the Ontario Federation of Students, wanted to know if the government would still be allotting \$15-million for a "loan remission" to students who had become ineligible for grants under new OSAP regulations. The new programme cuts off grants to students who have already received them for four years. Edelson said Stephenson's predecessor, Dr. Harry Parrott, pledged the \$15-million would be divided up among students affected by the new regulations this year. Dr. Stephenson's position was that the money was to be spread over a two-year period. Edelson asked Stephenson if she

was aware that, according to a government source, testing of a computer programme for the Ontario Student Assistance Programme, slated to begin at the end of next month, would be delayed until mid June.

Stephenson said she would check Edelson's assertion, but stated that the government's testing schedule is being adhered to.

Edelson's question was aimed at averting a repeat of this year's OSAP computer foul-up, which affected over 4,000 OSAP applications and, according to Edelson, left some of the applicants without their assistance to date. Dr. Stephenson said this year's foul-up was the result of a computer error which experts told her could only occur "one in a billion" times.

The government is not making any changes in OSAP in order to

ensure that there are no further problems with the computers.

Murray Miskin, president of Osgoode Hall's Legal and Literary Society, complained about the government's failure to adjust the cost of living allowance in OSAP this year—again because of the computer check. Miskin told Excalibur Monday that, normally, the allowance is increased every year due to inflation. He told Stephenson at the Friday meeting the OFS statistics indicate the absence of an increase will mean the average recipient will fall \$340 behind next year. Dr. Stephenson questioned this figure and said she would like to see the statistics it is based on.

Stephenson did say that OSAP will keep pace with the 4.97 per cent tuition increase next year:

"The OSAP program has been amended to accommodate this increase totally." Questioned by Miskin as to when action would be taken on Dr. Parrott's 1978 promise for regionally indexed living allowances in OSAP, Stephenson replied that OFS had not supplied required information on this proposal to Dr. Parrott in sufficient time. At this point, Edelson interjected from the audience that OFS had sent the information to the minister in March '78.

In response to a question from audience, Dr. Stephenson maintained that there are no cutbacks to education, but rather "a restraint in the growth of the amount of money made available to universities."

In response to questions about the academic hardships being undergone at universities due to underfunding, Stephenson referred the questioners back to the administration.

"The government is simply a medium of transferring the money from the taxpayer to the university...It is not the part of the minister to become actively involved in the administration of the university," she said.

With increasing costs and declining enrolment, there have been rumors that the province will

consider closing some of the smaller universities, like Brock and Trent. However, Dr. Stephenson, in responding to a similar question asked by CYSF president David Chodikoff, who was part of a three-man panel, said: "There has been no government debate or discussion of closing institutions."

She said she believed there is a need for a "rationalization of the university system. You have to ask several questions: Should we try to



Gary Hershorn

duplicate the University of Toronto in each university? Should every university by big like the U of T? Should they have the same graduate programs?"

She suggested future universities may lean toward specialization rather than duplication.

"My belief is that we have the creative energy to solve the universities' problems and cope with this ever-changing world," she said.

Dr. Stephenson says in some cases movement should be allowed between programs at colleges of applied arts and technology and universities, with credits made transferrable. This has already been done on a limited scale.