

People shouldn't be charged for anything...

the Gateway

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...unless they're charged for gravity, too.
Mikey



3500 marching through snow

photo Ray Giguere

analysis by Peter Michalyszyn

It's not likely the March 11 march on the Alberta Legislature will ever produce tangible results any of the 3,500 demonstrators will be around to see or appreciate.

But the march was an enormous success.

Organizers predicted about 2000 people would show up. The CBC said 3600, the *Edmonton Journal* counted 1200, City Police said 3500.

That is still some 1500 short of the 1978 'March in March', the hallmark of student activism against cutbacks at the University of Alberta.

Things were different in 1978. Real campus political groups existed; the *Gateway* was more persistently digging into funding abuses; in the words of sometime ACT chairperson, Amanda LeRougetel, there were people who stood up and said the things that had to be said. And people listened.

However, the results from 1978 were as nebulous as this year's march results promise to be.

Last week, Premier Peter Lougheed promised us for the first time that his government would not pass on potential federal cuts in post-secondary education.

"If there is a reduction by the federal government, that will not reduce our level of support to universities," Lougheed said.

In 1978, the Premier promised students, academics, and non-academics gathered under sunnier skies that he would re-examine the student loan program. He said then that he was impressed with student criticism of the existing loans program. Since then, according to students, he must have changed his impression; except for minor tinkering. The student loan system has not changed in the last four years, critics say.

On other points, the Conservative government litany remained the same.

In a prepared speech, minister of Advanced Education and Manpower Jim Horsman told jeering students last week that calling Alberta's support of universities 'cutbacks' was "ludicrous". He encouraged individuals to examine the facts for themselves. (See text of Horsman's speech, pages 8-9.)

Horsman claimed U of A funding over the last seven years had increased 154.7 per cent, while the Consumer Price Index rose only 78 per cent.

Total provincial funding to post-secondary institutions increased 175.1 per cent over the same period.

"While the very significant increases at the U of A have been slightly less than throughout the rest of the system, one must recognize that flat enrolments have not justified further funds," Horsman said.

He also defended Premier Lougheed against criticisms of the student loan system.

"...today Alberta's student financial assistance program is the best in Canada. We introduced the Educational Opportunity Equalization Grant to assist rural students; we froze the loans ceiling and provided supplemental assistance grants above that level; we increased maintenance grants for single

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parents and other persons in disadvantaged situations; we relaxed parental contribution requirements and independence criteria. The failure to acknowledge and recognize these facts is not helpful to your cause," Horsman said.

The minister of Advanced Education and Manpower appealed to students to join him in the fight against the real enemy, the federal government.

"We must collaborate...to stop Ottawa cutbacks. I hope I have your support" Horsman said.

Apparently, that support was not forthcoming, as students assembled before the minister heckled and shouted him down.

Horsman cut his speech short and retreated to the relatively quiet and warm confines of the House, where he had a somewhat more sympathetic audience.

"I think it is fair to say that those who listened were impressed by the government's support (to the universities)" Horsman said.

But alas, "There are none so deaf as those who won't hear, and none so blind as those who don't see," he said, complaining that students shouted him down on the steps of the Legislature.

(Some honourable members: Here, here!)

Before and after Horsman's speech outside, student representatives had their shots at the government.

Anne McGrath of the Federation of Alberta Students (FAS) explained that in lieu of a federal government cabinet minister, we had received a telegram from Ottawa stating no cuts had been made, and that the provinces would be to blame if cuts were made.

McGrath suggested the federal and provincial government get together and agree who is giving how much and where all the money is going because now there seems to be a lot of confusion about the whole arrangement of transfer payments.

Colin Searle from NAIT called on the province to act boldly and not "blame everything on Ottawa."

FAS president Lorraine Mitchell told the crowd what would happen if government refused to hear student concerns.

"We'll be back," she said, followed by choruses from the demonstrators.

It all depends on the government now, say march organizers

"The most important thing is that we got our message across to the government," said Don Millar.

Yesterday afternoon members of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) met with federal Secretary of State Gerald Regan to discuss what was to come of the nation-wide student protests.

At the U of A, the Anti-Cutbacks Team (ACT) will meet Wednesday at 4 p.m. in SUB 280 to discuss how to capitalize on the growing awareness of cutbacks on campus.

Millar says government can no longer deny students are concerned about cutbacks, tuition fees, and students loans.

"(The march) can't help but strengthen the FAS bargaining position," he said.

All that was missing last week was for someone to say, "You have demonstrated true concern and nothing but good can come out of it," just like U of A president Harry Gunning did four years ago from the steps of the Legislature.

But president Myer Horowitz was not with us on Thursday.