

News analysis ...

Controls hit students hard

by Gary Watson

The U of A Students' Union has recently announced its refusal to support the Oct. 14th day of protest. Several student bodies in Alberta and throughout the country have made similar decisions. Some have argued that the wage control programme does not affect students while others have expressed apprehension about participating in a potentially illegal act. This latter argument, though, completely evades and distorts the purpose of the Oct. 14th demonstration. Any decision to support the CLC should be made on the basis of whether or not the controls have negatively affected the majority of post-secondary students. After one year of controls, where do students stand? What has happened to post-secondary education since Thanksgiving Day, 1975?

Cutbacks in spending for social services are an integral part of the wage control programme. It is impossible to consider the one without the other. Post-secondary institutions have suffered heavily. In the past year tuition fees have been increased by 10-25% in most provinces and further increases are expected next year. In addition to an across-the-board increase of 25% in Alberta, the government plans to raise fees for international students by as much as 300%.

The quality of education has certainly not risen accordingly. Fewer teaching assistants, shorter library hours and larger class sizes are some of the effects of the Alberta government's 11% ceiling on social service spending.

Rents are exempt from the controls. Although a number of provinces, including Alberta, have been forced to introduce rent controls, serious loopholes exist. Since most legislation depends upon tenants making complaints about unfair increases, students become prime targets for gouging by landlords. Students move a great deal. It is difficult to find out what previous rents were, and thus, with students, landlords have almost a free hand in demanding increases. Furthermore, because of the serious shortage of housing, landlords have more openly adopted "Take it or leave it" attitudes.

In recent months the cost of food has contributed significantly to a lowering of the rate of inflation. But food prices are not controlled by the AIB! The slower rates of increase for food have been caused primarily by low beef prices. Experts are predicting astronomical increases for beef when today's extremely high inventories become depleted.

The costs of many other essentials have risen — unhampered by the AIB. These include telephone rates, gas and lighting bills. Residence costs and book prices have not been controlled either.

How are students expected to pay for these increases? Traditional means of support have included summer jobs and student aid. This, however, is where wage controls and cutbacks have had a most devastating effect.

Many students had their first direct contact with the wage control programme this past summer. A vast majority of students work at lower-paying, non-union jobs. That is, those

jobs which have been most severely hit by wage controls. Salaries earned in the summer of 1976 were, for many students, the same as, or only marginally higher, than in 1975 — insufficient for keeping up with the cost of living, notwithstanding higher education costs.

Student unemployment in 1976 was the highest ever. At a rate of approximately 15%, this represents a rise of 3-4% over last year. Many potential jobs were eliminated when the federal government dropped Opportunities for Youth, Company of Young Canadians and the Local Initiative Programme. Thousands of students each year depended upon these programmes for employment.

The final result has been that students are entering this university year with substantially lower savings than in the past. One would expect, then, that the other traditional means of support, i.e. student aid, would "pick up the slack." This has not been the case.

Provincial and federal governments continue to make student aid more restrictive and more expensive. In Ontario, which has a loan/grant system, the loan portion was increased by 25%. Now, the first \$1,000 received by the student is considered loan and must be repaid. In Alberta, all funds received through student aid are loans.

The wage control programme and subsequent cutbacks have made obtaining a post-secondary education in-

creasingly difficult. Yet Len Zoeteman has suggested that university students are not really affected by the controls!

Opponents of the day of protest maintain that graduating students become a part of management, a sector of the labor force least hurt by the controls. This argument is purely utopian.

The unemployment rate for recent graduates is twice the national average. Thousands of people now work at jobs which do not relate to their fields of study. Wage controls have done nothing to alleviate the problem of unemployment. There are 775,000 people out of work in Canada.

Universities and colleges provide research and the highly skilled labor force required by government and industry in this technological society. The federal government has cut back its allocation of funds for research and, in addition, government departments are moving towards stabilizing employment levels. Job availability is not matching the increase in the labor force, particularly for the more highly educated. The resulting unemployment is used to suppress wage demands, since employers can rely upon the large surplus of unused labor.

For protection of job security, skilled workers have seen the need to unionize. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of "white-collar" unions, like teachers and medical workers.

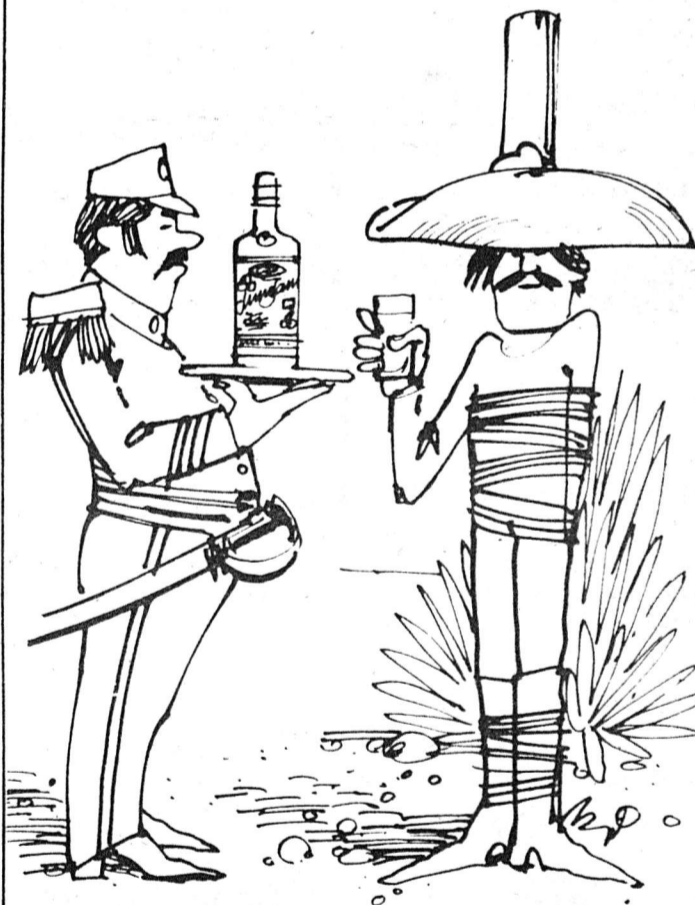
The wage control programme is a frontal attack on the trade union movement. The government is moving to weaken unions so the surplus pool of labor may be more easily exploited. More than ever before, graduating students form that surplus.

Those graduates who do find jobs in their fields of study are discovering that pay scales do not meet expectations. Nor do pay scales meet their needs, in light of the enormous debts accumulated in acquiring higher education. In fact, it has been found that a four-year degree is less economic than directly entering the work force after high school.

Students are not an elite group in this society as some

would have us believe. Students' parents are often working people without the resources to entirely finance post-secondary education. Students must work to support themselves during their education and most can count on becoming full-time members of the labor force upon graduation (or after dropping out, many due to poverty). It is ludicrous to say that the fight against wage controls does not interest students. Oct. 14th represents a collective battle to maintain standards of living both now and in the future. It is also a struggle against the erosion of social services, including education. Students should join that fight and march with the labor movement on Oct. 14th. They have little to lose but much to gain.

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