

# MARCH '82: Of blizzards, anger, and evasive speeches

Minister of Advanced Education and Manpower James Horsman prepared a statement to read from the steps of Legislature for the Alberta Day of Action.

This statement was released even though the minister did not read it in its entirety. The information though is interesting.

If you have come here this afternoon to voice your concern for the level of post-secondary education funding provided by this Government, I want to assure you that we do not intend to pass through to post-secondary institutions the cutbacks proposed by the Ottawa Government. Funding for post-secondary institutions in Alberta through government grants has increased dramatically in recent years. This budget year our grants to post-secondary institutions increased 18.3 per cent for operating purposes and increased 41.6 per cent for capital purposes. In the seven years since 1974-75, operating grants to Alberta's post-secondary institutions have increased 170.8 per cent. Combined operating and capital grants to institutions during the same period increased 175.1 per cent. In comparison since 1974, the Consumer Price Index increased by 78 per cent.

The University of Alberta over the past seven years has received operating grant increases of 132.8 per cent. This budget year, government provided the University 155.2 million dollars operating funds and 41.6 million dollars for capital purposes. Total annual grant increases since 1974-75 to the University of Alberta amounted to 154.7 per cent. During the same period, University of Alberta enrollment has remained constant. While the very significant increases at U of A have been slightly less than throughout the rest of the system, one must recognize that flat enrollments have not justified further funds.

I recently made a grant of an additional \$150,000 to Grande Prairie Regional College, to be added to the College's base, which, over a period of years, will assist in reducing the College's deficit. Since our government came to office in 1971, the magnitude of expansion in Alberta's post-secondary system has been enormous, and it will continue to grow. Calling the massive increases in funding and this tremendous expansion of the system "cutbacks" is ludicrous. Individuals should examine the facts for themselves.

The 1980's Advanced Education Endowment Fund is another significant program our government has introduced to broaden the financial base of post-secondary institutions. By providing 80 million dollars to match private donations, the post-secondary system will receive an additional 160 million dollars in the decade ahead. This 160 million dollars is not a replacement for government funding but is extra dollars for the system.

Please do not be misled concerning Student Assistance. Since 1974-75, this government's financial support to you as post-secondary students, has increased more than 400 per cent. In 1978, your Premier promised a review of student financial assistance. As a result of this review, this budget year alone, financial assistance to students increased 50 per cent as the various grant programs introduced in 1980 came on stream. The improvements to the plan have been very significant indeed and 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 parents and other persons in disadvantaged situations; we relaxed parental contribution requirements and independence criteria; in addition to other improvements. The failure to acknowledge and recognize these facts is not helpful to your cause.

With regard to tuition fees, it is very

inconsistent for you to express concern on one hand for institutional funding, and on the other hand to call for a freeze and by some even the abolition of tuition fees. Students' contributions through tuition fees to the costs of operating their post-secondary institutions has continued to decline steadily, from 30 per cent of institutional budgets in the 1950's to 12.2 per cent in 1974-75 to less than 9 per cent today.

Over the past seven years, increases in tax payers' contributions to post-secondary education have been almost four times that of increases in tuition.

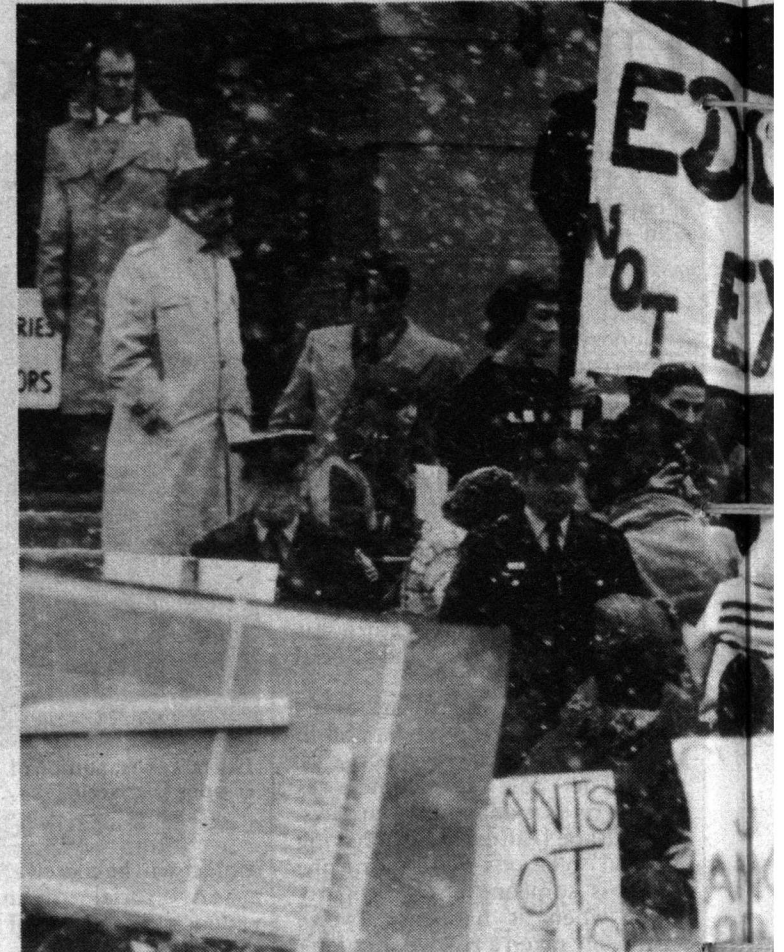
Students have a personal responsibility to make a financial contribution through tuition fees. Both society and the individual benefit from post-secondary education and costs should be shared accordingly.

I will soon announce a long term tuition fee policy through which students will continue to make a reasonable contribution. I will also announce in the very near future government's response to the call by students and others for an accessibility study. I recognize students are anxious to hear of our decisions on these matters.

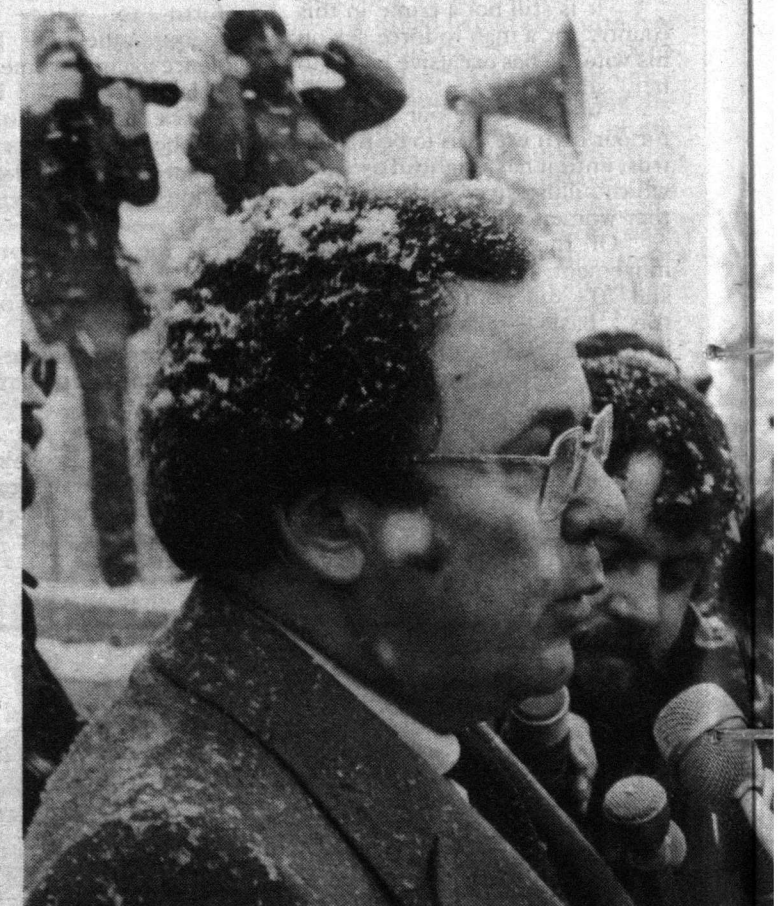
The pamphlet circulated to students in conjunction with this event contains several glaring misrepresentations, one of which, I wish now to address specifically. The federal government cash transfers to Alberta under Established Programs Financing equal 20 per cent of Alberta's post-secondary spending. This proportion has remained constant since the introduction of the program in 1977. The constant misrepresentations to the public that federal transfers form up to 60 per cent of Alberta's spending on post-secondary education must stop. These misrepresentations are a detriment to all of our efforts to stop the federal cuts.

I agree with your efforts in opposing the cuts in fiscal transfers to the provinces proposed by the federal government. I am pleased to see you here today to demonstrate visibly your opposition to Established Programs Financing cuts. The Alberta provincial government is also committed to opposing the proposed cuts. Our calculations anticipate transfers from the federal government to Alberta for post-secondary education being cut \$26 million this coming year and being cut substantially further in future years. I encourage you to watch the provincial budget address next week to learn that these cuts in transfer payments will not, I repeat, not be passed on to the institutions or to students. Our budget has been finalized for weeks. Your action today has not changed it.

On two previous occasions, I have offered to work with students in opposing those federal cuts. University of Alberta student leaders have not responded to my offers. The federal government has thus succeeded in its divide and conquer strategy on this issue and post-secondary education may eventually suffer by direct federal intervention in an area of provincial constitutional responsibility. Students are making a strategic error in not working with us in opposing the federal government's decision to cut transfers and I therefore repeat my offer here, today, to all Alberta students, let's work together in opposing the Ottawa cutbacks. I want to emphasize also my strong opposition to the proposed voucher system which is now under active consideration by the federal government. Such a voucher system would destroy institutional autonomy and stability in institutional financing. The voucher system would render post-secondary institutions mere training establishments to churn out workers according to some central government plan for a "1984" scenario. While some student leader's positions, concerning tuition, student aid, and institutional funding are not based in fact or are unrealistic, surely we can work together where we agree. We must collaborate to stop the voucher system and Ottawa cutbacks. I hope I have your support today.



A miserable day for a protest march



Jim Horsman was there...



The Pied Piper of Edmonton led the march

Photos By: Martin B