

CROSSCANADA

End divestment in SA: activist

TORONTO (CUP) — Anti-apartheid activist Helen Suzman gave a stirring plea for Canadian universities to end their policies of avoiding investments linked with South Africa.

Many Canadian universities adopted such a policy, known as "divestment" in the late 1980s.

"I hope you will help those of us who intend to remain in the new South Africa to prove that democracy can work, to encourage investment in the new reformed, non-racial South Africa," Suzman told a June 18 convocation audience at the University of Toronto.

University officials said that while they are approaching an end to divestment cautiously, they would follow the federal government's lead.

"We do follow the policies set out by our government," said Bryan Davies, vice-president of administration.

Davies said he expected a change in federal policy, now that a tentative date for South Africa's first multiracial elections has been set.

"The government will be reconsidering the boycott policy and that will affect our thinking."

Suzman, 76, served as a member of the South African parliament from 1953 to 1989. Throughout the 1960s she was the only member of the whites-only legislature to vocally oppose apartheid. In 1978, she received the UN Human Rights Award.

During her address, Suzman said sanctions only worked to deprive the already dispossessed.

"I was against them because I could see what they led to. There's no social support system in South Africa at all."

Campbell protestors arrested

TORONTO (CUP) — Protestors attempting to demonstrate at Kim Campbell's first visit to the University of Toronto got more than they bargained for.

By the end of the afternoon on July 23, three protestors, including one student, were arrested. Two were charged with one count each of assaulting police, and one with obstructing police.

The charges came after campus and city police attempted to expel protestors from Hart House, where the new prime minister was meeting in private with Metro Toronto's Tory MPs.

The nine protestors originally gathered outside the main entrance of Hart House, where Campbell had entered. Barred by police from following her into the building, the shouting and clapping protestors, carrying their protest signs, attempted to reach her by coming up the east stairs from the basement. Several members of the campus police blocked their passage towards the main staircase.

"We were going to go outside of the meeting [room], and try and talk to Kim Campbell," said protestor Janine Sindrey.

"I don't think we had a clear objective when we were in. We were just looking for ways of continuing our protest," said protestor Libby Zeleke.

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news

Government plans "larger reforms"

Grace period on loans cancelled

by Arn Keeling

OTTAWA (CUP) — The government introduced long-awaited changes to the Canada Student Loans program this summer — but they will end up costing students.

Bernard Valcourt, federal minister of human resources and labour, announced in a summer press release that the three per cent guarantee fee paid by students who receive loans will be eliminated as of Aug. 1.

What the press release failed to mention, however, is that the interest-free period on loans for six months after leaving school would also be cancelled August 1.

For the past two years, students who received student loans have had to pay a three per cent premium up front on the amount of their loan. The government said it used this money to make up for students who defaulted on repaying their loans and to combat the national debt.

"The fee was implemented to offset the rapidly increasing cost of implementing (loans) programs," said Micheline Racette, Valcourt's press secretary. "The measure was successful."

As well, students had a six-month grace period after finishing full-time schooling during which the government made interest payments on students' loans for them.

The measures were originally proposed in the Tory budget of February 1992, but it was not until Feb. 4 of this year that the Conservatives passed Bill C-76 that made the changes law.

Ron Duhamel, Liberal education

critic, said the elimination of the interest-free period would cost students leaving school an extra \$35 million per year in interest payments on their loans.

Students will only save \$25 million with the three per cent tax gone, according to Duhamel. This means students will lose money in the long run under the new measures, he said.

The changes will affect student loans negotiated after Aug. 1, said Linda Fleming, a financial aid administrator at Carleton University. Student loans will still be administered in the same fashion, except that the tax will not be removed when the student takes their loan to the bank to receive their money.

Racette said the elimination of the interest-free period will not be a burden to students because they will be finished school and trying to find a job. She said the \$6,130 average yearly loan amount is "well within the repayment ability of most borrowers."

But Duhamel said the lack of an interest-free period will devastate students already facing a tough job market and increasing debt loads.

"Now there will be no reprieve," he said.

Racette disagreed that student loan defaults — which occur nearly twice as often as consumer loan defaults — will increase due to immediate interest payments. "We don't agree that this will contribute to these problems," she said.

Gillis said accessibility to student loans will be threatened further by Tory policies such as the privatization of loan administration. A government report, made public earlier this year, suggested turning over more of the administration to one or two private banks.

Gillis said under the government plan, private banks could turn away students who are considered a bad credit risk. Under the current program, a student merely has to establish financial need to qualify for a loan.

Accessibility to student loans will be threatened further

Carl Gillis, chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, said the organization worked hard for two academic years to secure the elimination of the tax. But he added the cancellation of the interest-free period made the victory bittersweet at best.

"There's a side of me that's cynical," said Gillis, who admitted the move may have been a pre-election ploy as much as it was a CFS lobbying triumph.

Racette said the government's decision to eliminate the tax was not a result of pressure from the CFS, but the change is "part of larger reforms" planned for the loans system. She said she could not comment on the nature of further reforms.

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