

# The Grad Zone

The UNB Graduate Student Association

## The cost of education

by Peter Ferguson

This week's article is inappropriately titled. Education isn't so much a cost as it is an investment, though one might have a hard time convincing the government otherwise. No, today's topic is really the cost of not educating.

The Saturday Telegraph-Journal carries a feature called "Just the Facts". It's appropriately named because it often provides a smattering of unattributed statistics that trivia buffs like me lap up for later regurgitation at parties, at work - wherever one has a compulsive need to see other's eyes glaze over. The January 25 edition (page 2), however, presented the following sobering statistics: Percentage of Japan's 17-year-olds that are still in school: 94; In the United States: 87; In Canada: 72.

And there's more: Cost in lost income and productivity over a 20 year period of allowing 11,000 (100,000 drop out annually) young people to drop out of school according to the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology: \$23 billion.

Amount of money lost in foregone tax revenues: \$9.9 billion.

Increased amount needed to be spent on welfare and unemploy-

ment benefits: \$1.4 billion.

These are staggering numbers. If you use these statistics to scale up to the 100,000 who drop out annually these figures become, respectively: \$207 billion, \$89 billion, and \$12.6 billion.

Our economy is being (surprise!) grossly mismanaged. I feel safe in making this statement not solely because I know a lot of Canadians would agree with me. These are big numbers. I'm willing to grant that statistics often have a life of their own: they often lie, trivialize, or distort. If these figures are remotely accurate guesstimates, they were uncovered by a Senate Committee (I can hear old geezers snoring) which in itself might make these figures suspect. In any case, these numbers and the fact the Senate was given the task of determining them are an indication that education is a low priority concern for our government.

I made a point last week that we shouldn't blame the government for all our educational problems. We have to share some of the responsibility, too.

We've all become lulled into a sense of apathy. Everytime we jump on a bandwagon and sign

petitions or join marches we aren't showing a true concern for an issue. And politicians know it. It's easy to pretend to be concerned about education when confronted by a student politician presenting a petition. The press is snapping pictures, writing about what can be done. And what comes of it? Next week students are complaining about the high price of beer. And that politician is off the hook, again. That petition I signed? Oh yeah, what ever happened to that issue? Nothing? See, I knew it wasn't much even as I was signing it. Apathy.

We've become trained to believe that there's not much we can do to influence government between elections.

But who do you think has more chance of being heard by a politician: a thousand students who sign a petition (big effort!) or fifty who take the time to write a personal letter (not a photocopied form letter) in which they state their concerns and expect a personal reply. Don't just complain, show them you have a brain and you know what's going on. Quote statistics. Tell them the thirty second TV spot showing a teenager hopelessly

looking for a job in a newspaper (no luck!) followed by an ominous "stay in school" is a waste of money and a hopelessly ineffective ploy. There's no substitute for better schools.

Tell them education is an important part of your life, and an important part of the life of Canada. Tell them you want education issues to be as familiar to Canadians as are the GST, the Constitution, and the national debt.

Today is National "I love education" Day. As a graduate student I'm concerned about the shortage

of engineers and scientists (and perhaps of other professions) that is predicted for Canada at the end of this century. Sure, it will be great for my job prospects but what will it cost the country by not having enough people to fill these positions? The GSA is sending a large "valentine" to Vaughn Blaney outlining a number of graduate students' concerns about education. Many of you may have seen it and signed it, but it's only a small step in the right direction. The rest is up to you.

### NOTICES

SATURDAY  
February 14

GSA Social featuring "The High Divin' Act" at the University Club (3rd Floor of the Old Arts Building).

8:00 p.m.

### THE GSA AND C.A.M.P.U.S.

Proudly Presents

### VALENTINE'S DAY BASH !!

FEATURING:

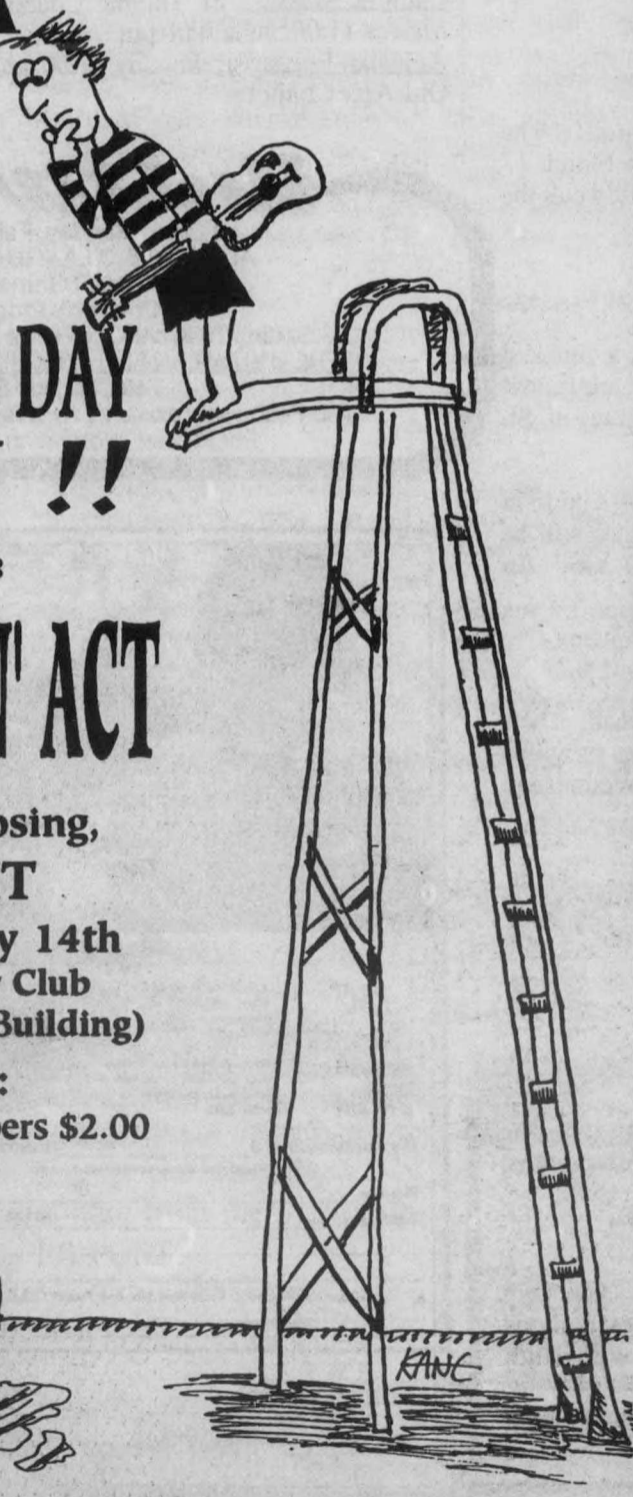
### HIGH DIVIN' ACT

8:00PM 'til Closing, TONIGHT

Friday, February 14th at the University Club (3rd floor Old Arts Building)

Admission:

GSACAMPUS Members \$2.00 Non-Members \$3.00



## O'TOOLE'S

presents... Valentine Weekend

Friday Night...



FREE SALAD & GIFT FOR THE LADIES (non-alcoholic. While supplies last)

Saturday Night...



LIVE BAND

### X-IT

\$3.00 cover charge

Sunday Night...



THE FUNNIEST SHOW IN TOWN!

STAND UP COMEDY \$5.00 COVER CHARGE



The Roadhouse that Rocks!