

Foreign students scapegoats for gov't cutbacks

by Gary Watson

Foreign students in post-secondary institutions have been a centre of controversy across Canada in the past year. Quotas exist on foreign student enrolment in most professional faculties and have recently been established across the board at Concordia and McMaster. In Ontario this fall, foreign students are paying higher fees than Canadians or landed immigrants. And in Alberta, Advanced Education Minister A.E. (Bert) Hohol announced last April that a differential fee structure would be established beginning in 1977. The extent of the Alberta hikes has been suggested by D. M. Lauchlan, President of Mount Royal College. He recently recommended that fees be increased at that institution by 300%!

In all cases, officials have cited similar arguments. Claims have been made that foreign students are crowding out Canadians and taking away valuable housing. The President of Red Deer College complained that foreign students impede education because of language barriers. And some have charged that only rich foreign students attend Canadian universities. In an August 30th interview, Hohol stated that "tripled fees might cause hardship in some cases, but overall I think they'll be able to handle it."

Until this past summer, however, little has been known about foreign student enrollment. Despite comprehensive research in Alberta by the Federation of Alberta Students (FAS) and the International Students Organization (ISO), many students are still unaware of the real situation. A FAS

document complains that the tendency to confuse foreign students with landed immigrants "has led to frequent distortions of enrolment figures for foreign students." In her Sept. 9th letter to *The Gateway*, Eva Kroeller described *The Edmonton Journal's* coverage of the issue as "close to sabotage."

Landed immigrants not "foreign"?

Landed immigrants have some of the same rights as Canadian citizens. But what about the foreign student?

Foreign students reside in Canada on a temporary basis only. Visas are issued annually and the student must prove financial self-sufficiency before being allowed into the country (minimum \$2500-3000). They must leave the country as soon as their studies are completed. In Canada, there are approximately 567,000 post-secondary students. Of these, only 33,000 (5.9 per cent) were from outside Canada. In Alberta during 1975-76, there were 2,761 full-time visa students. They represent just 4.6 per cent of the entire student population of 47,542.

Student visa holders are not allowed to work in Canada. In most countries today, severe restrictions are placed on the amount of money which an individual may take outside national boundaries. This is more so the case with Third World countries. In Alberta last year, only 3.6 per cent of all foreign students received financial aid. Foreign students are ineligible for assistance from the Canadian government. The vast majority thus, are forced to live on fixed incomes. So much for the rich foreign student argument! In fact, as FAS executive secretary Brian Mason indicates, "the increase simply ensures that only rich international students can benefit from an Alberta education."

Gunning would have more...

The U of A's president, Dr. Harry Gunning, opposes the proposed fee hikes. "If anything, I think we have



Oriental students, African students, British and Americans, maybe someday Manitobans too.

"The provincial government has set itself against the concept of international campuses and is moving to restrict admission to Alberta post-secondary institutions to any but rich foreign students

an inadequate number of foreign students," he said, noting that in quota faculties there are fewer foreigners than allowed.

Many foreign students will not be able to attend Alberta post-secondary institutions because of the fee hikes. This contradicts official federal government foreign policy — policy which would have us believe Canada is particularly generous with its aid to underdeveloped countries.

The statistics verify positions taken by the ISO, FAS, the Edmonton District Labour Council and the New Democratic Party — "Foreign students do not take places away from Canadian students!"

FAS describes the foreign fee hikes as a "smokescreen," and suggests the "government is attempting to make international students a scapegoat for the harmful effects of educational cutbacks." Mason points out that "it is only

since government cutbacks have caused a decline in the quality and availability of education in Alberta that the government has made international students an issue." Hohol has yet to answer these claims.

In October 1975, Prime Minister Trudeau announced his wage and price control programme. He told all Canadians to "lower their expectations." He urged all government bodies to curb spending. Since then, throughout most of Canada, tuition fee increases of 10 to 25% have been announced. There was considerable student protest in Calgary and Edmonton to Alberta's 25% hikes. Three months later the foreign student tuition fee controversy began.

Foreign students least able to defend themselves

Increased fees for foreign students will not lead to improvements in the quality of education for Canadian students. If the astronomical fee increases successfully imposed upon a small, much misunderstood group like the foreign students, provincial authorities may find it much easier to 'sneak in' future hikes for all students. Higher tuition fees are anticipated in Ontario next year.

A FAS document explains: "The facts have demonstrated, Dr. Hohol's expressed 'reasons' for the move are both superficial and unsubstantiated... The pressures on Alberta's students do not originate with foreign students and they will not be resolved by denying them access to our post-secondary institutions."



Foreign students represent only 4.6 per cent of Alta's post-secondary students

"Overcrowding charges are smokescreen for tightened purse strings"

