

Plan it, dammit!

These blunt words begin the National Union of Students' (NUS) latest call for long-term federal planning of post-secondary education in Canada.

"A System in Chaos" is how NUS describes the current state of post-secondary education in its brief, but it's one many students, faculty, and support staff at universities and colleges will recognize. Even if governments are not yet willing to recognize the facts, those in higher education know the truth of what NUS is saying—underfunding and the lack of a coherent plan for education are causing the slow disintegration of Canada's higher education system.

The danger signals have been around since 1972, when the federal government unilaterally slapped a ceiling on the yearly increases in its cost-sharing programs with the provinces, including higher education. According to NUS, the situation has only deteriorated since then.

The NUS brief identifies five areas which have suffered:

- The quality of education has suffered as research and graduate programs have been reduced, equipment has not been replaced or updated, and library holdings and hours have declined.

- Students are less able to move to education because of the rising costs out-of-towners must meet, despite the effects of government cutbacks reducing the availability of specific courses or post-secondary education in general.

- International students are being discouraged from coming to Canada by the removal of their permission to work, introduction of differential fees, and

recent cuts in the Canadian International Development Agency budget. This will ultimately hurt Canadian students, the brief says, because it reduces international cross-fertilization of ideas and threatens the presence of Canadians in foreign post-secondary institutions.

- Research and development has been seriously hindered by cutbacks in funding, affecting general advancement of R&D in Canada, as well as the supply of research to the industrial sector.

- Accessibility to university for those from lower-income families has been greatly reduced, because of the increasing cost

of a university education, and the lack of sources of income to cover that increased cost. At the same time tuition has risen, government support through student aid has not improved and, in some cases, has been reduced, summer and graduate unemployment has risen, and Manpower training grants have been cut.

NUS directly attributes these problems to lack of federal government planning of its spending on education as it rapidly expanded that sector in the 1960's. Under a system of transfer payments to the provinces, NUS points out, "Ottawa was pouring money into the entire post-secondary system, but it paid little

attention to the long-term goals and objectives of the institutions."

"The federal government was supporting the growth of Canada's educational institutions, but no plan was adopted to ensure that they would become accessible to all Canadians in each province and territory, or to ensure that the quality of the education would be maintained. No attempt was made, by either the provincial or federal governments, to develop the system as a whole at a rational and sustained pace."

In the early seventies, the federal government suddenly tried to put on the brakes. The cost of the programs was too high, it said; it could not afford the high annual increases. As the brief explains, "the cost-sharing program had accomplished a greater expansionary effect on the system than had been expected or desired by Ottawa."

In 1972, the federal government imposed a 15 per cent ceiling on its transfers to the provinces. Before, it had matched each dollar the provinces had spent on education; from then on, it would only match the increase in spending up to 15 per cent.

This, the brief said, put the provinces, particularly poorer provinces, in the difficult position of either reducing spending to keep under the ceiling, or making up the lost revenue in other ways. In many cases, they cut back grants or asked students to make up the difference with higher tuition fees.

In 1976, the federal government abolished its cost-sharing scheme altogether, and moved to block funding increasing with the growth in the economy. Unlike previous plans, the amount of the transfers was not determined by need; in fact, the money did not even have to be spent on education and could be diverted to other areas.

Several provinces, including Nova Scotia and Ontario, have taken advantage of these provisions to decrease their portion of university funding. "It is becoming painfully clear," the brief says, "that the current financing arrangement, in fact, facilitates a reduction in provincial spending."

What this means to students, the brief says, is reduced services and higher fees. What it means to higher education is insufficient funding to maintain the system, and lack of access to higher education by students from low-income families. And this problem is worst in the poorest provinces.

"Put quite simply, the federal government has allowed inequality of opportunity, both in terms of accessibility and educational standards, to persist within Canada. Inequalities exist not only within the nation, but also within each province."

NUS questions why the federal government felt it necessary to cut education funding at all, pointing out that the cuts were made before the government's objectives of achieving quality, accessible education "could possibly be met". Quoting from an Ontario Federation of Students paper, it says that funding education is a "question of political priority, rather than of potential government poverty".

The rapid expansion in the sixties was sold to the public as a "desirable investment in the country's future", it points out: "The need for technological advancement, a skilled and educated labour force, the development of Canada in culture and the arts, are no less pressing today than they were a decade ago."

"The importance attached to a developing educational system cannot be underestimated. It is hardly a program that should be subject to the economic constraints of the times irrespective of future needs."

"We know as Canada approaches the 1980's we face a critical economic and social challenge. How Canada survives in the coming decades will be in part based upon how well Canadians have been able to understand problems and come to reasoned solutions."

Unless governments discontinue these funding cutbacks and plan the route of post-secondary education, NUS warns, this will be impossible.

Without clear goals and objectives, it says, schools have difficulty meeting the needs of Canada's changing society. And, without proper funding, there cannot be academic excellence and educational opportunity.

As well, lack of financial planning, combined with restrictive spending, in the short term damages the quality of Canadian higher education and in the long term, makes it very difficult to repair that damage.

"What costs will Canadian taxpayers face when governments 'renew' their commitment to educational opportunity? A system that has not been maintained... is likely to demand heavy 'catch-up' spending. For example, ... many new books, not purchased in their publishing year, are triple their original cost."

"Short-sighted financial restraint leads one to question whether the monies that governments do provide can be spent wisely and in the best interests of Canada's future."

According to NUS, the solution must be long-term national planning of post-secondary education by the federal government, with full input from groups interested in and directly affected by post-secondary education.

"No other level of government is charged with the economic and intellectual growth of Canada. No other level of government must answer for the financial and social well-being of all Canadians, irrespective of where they live."

Constitutionally, provincial governments are responsible for education. However, NUS says this should not impede a planning process by which the governments can act in the best interests of Canadians, and recommends the establishment of an "integrated educational policy in terms of objectives and allocation of resources" by the eleven governments.

But, as one reads this year's NUS brief, there's an uncanny echo of its last major brief—the Statement of Concerns presented on National Students Day in 1976. Tuition, student aid, unemployment, international students, the quality of education—those were major concerns then and they haven't gone away.

Neither has NUS' major demand. In 1976, it called for public participation in developing policies for post-secondary education, arguing that the lack of this participation had been "a steady drift away from stated goals" and would lead to a backlash against higher education.

"Canadian post-secondary education has entered a critical stage in its development," it pointed out then. "Its future can be the subject of public debate, so that the post-secondary system develops in the manner that Canadians want. The only alternative is unexplained, non-participatory decisions, leading to a backlash against any public expenditure on an 'unknown quantity'."

But that public debate never happened. The only sign that the federal government heeded NUS' call was a speech by Secretary of State John Roberts last November, in which he suggested setting some desired national goals for education. And that speech was never followed up.

Now, in 1979, NUS cries "Plan it, dammit!" Those who believe in quality education can only hope that, this time, its cry is heeded.

by **Alayne McGregor**
of **Canadian University Press**

"There is a crisis in the Canadian post-secondary system, unlike any other experienced throughout its development. Despite the danger signals apparent in recent years, higher education has been allowed to reach a point where it is neither socially responsive, nor fiscally responsible."



Canadian nuclear safety questioned

by **Susanne Small**
of **Loyola News**
For **Canadian University Press**

In light of the recent rejection of the Rasmussen report on reactor safety by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a report it had accepted for five years, Canadians must examine the implications of the reversal for Canada. Lacking a report on disaster probability of our own, our nuclear industry has relied heavily on the now disowned study to quiet the debate.

Just where does that leave us now?

Nuclear energy is Canada's sacred cow. As its one true example of high technology, Canada has allotted multi-billion dollar investments for the development and production of CANDU reactors.

Nuclear power has been pursued because it promised to be a cheap and reliable source of energy, and foreign sales of CANDUs were expected to yield a profit.

Now, after 30 years, the industry has failed miserably in meeting the expectations and the most alarming predictions of nuclear risks have been proven all too true.

"The Canadian government emphasizes the initial cost, not the life-cycle cost, of nuclear power plants," said Dr. Fred Knelman, Concordia University professor and author of **Nuclear Energy: The Unforgiving Technology**.

This pricing system led easily to the conclusion that nuclear power was a cheap energy source, he said, since the initial cost did not reflect the cost of repairing damage to the plant occurring from radioactive aging.

"All the pressure tubing at the Pickering plant will have to be replaced by 1980. This will cost \$500 million, not including the cost of the shutdown. This is almost as much as the initial cost of the complex."

The cost of what promised to be a cheap energy source has become so prohibitive that the **Financial Post** estimated last year that Canada could not afford more than one new reactor per year.

The existing price comparison between nuclear and other energy sources also ignores the cost of disposing of nuclear wastes and of the plants themselves once their 30-year life cycle ends.

MORE THAN A MATTER OF COST

The nuclear debate now also becomes more than a matter of cost analysis. Nuclear wastes from the plants have a potential for destruction which defies any measure.

In Dec., 1957, in central Russia, the nuclear waste depot of a commercial plant exploded. Although much of the accident remains a mystery, it is known that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people died because they lived in the region over which the winds blew the radioactive cloud. The earth lay barren for years and for as long as 10 years after, it was thought necessary to advise pregnant women in area to abort because of the lingering effects of radiation.

Billions of dollars have been granted to the Canadian nuclear industry for the permanent, safe disposal of wastes. "However, numerous scholarly studies have shown there is no technically and economically feasible means of disposing of nuclear wastes," Knelman says.

"Canada is plugging for burying the wastes in stable geologic area with no seismic activity. But the experts say this is not certain at all. Many factors could cause the material to corrode and the wastes could find their way into the environment."

Germany, Sweden and the state of California, have responded prudently to the problem of waste disposal by barring the construction of plants until there is a safe means of disposal.

In 1976, the nuclear power plant in Oyster Creek, New Jersey ended its life cycle. After 30 years in operation, the entire plant structure became dangerously radioactive.

A \$100,000 fund was raised so that the plant could be entombed in a mass of concrete so thick that the amount of radioactivity which leaked out would be considered relatively safe. Most of the burial coupled with the cost of maintaining the concrete intact is not noted in the original price comparison.

PROFITS NOT APARENT

Profits the federal government hoped to make on sales of CANDUs have not yet materialized.

In his article "Canada Nuclear Policies and Politics", Kran writes: "The Canadian taxpayer stands to lose \$130 million on the Argentina sale because of loopholes and errors in the facts."

The sale to South Korea accrued inflated agents' fees and fared better. The construction costs of nuclear power plants, having risen twice as fast as for conventional power plants, and the increased price of uranium to the plants from \$7 to \$44 per pound, dampened the foreign market. The predicted profits may never materialize.

Our domestic demand is almost non-existent today. Even if from the monetary and safety cost and the problems of waste disposal, nuclear energy in Canada is difficult to justify.

According to the Canadian Nuclear Association, the CANDU is a national asset because the technology for the fuel and all the equipment is, can be, produced in Canada.

However, since only eight per cent of Canada's energy needs rely on an electrical source, nuclear power is would only be necessary to support these needs.

Knelman says these needs more than efficiently provided for terms of cost and safety, by hydro-electricity.

