

education policy; loan programs discouraging

NUS takes government to task

The National Union of Students has produced a document on secondary education for presentation to the federal government this week. Gateway reporter Alison Thom has analysed the NUS brief and presents summation.

The federal government has played a major role in cutting back expenditures on secondary institutions and in developing educational policy in national interest, says the National Union of Students (NUS) in a brief to the government.

NUS has requested a meeting with the federal cabinet, and the Privy Council is setting a date.

The document, titled *Education: A Message in Chaos*, claims higher education has been allowed to reach a point where it is "neither socially responsible, nor financially responsible."

The brief notes although the federal government has long accepted the need for federal funding of higher education, it has never grappled with the problem of developing educational policy. It goes on to blame the past involvement of the government in education, and contends, as a result of Established Programs Financing (EPF) "the federal government has allowed inequality of opportunity, both in terms of availability and educational standards, to exist within Canada."

NUS has four major concerns with the government's policy of fiscal restraint. Firstly, it questions the stated policy that the government could not afford to continue to pour money into the

education system, in light of the fact that increased spending was a conscious policy of the 1960s.

Secondly, NUS states its concern about the lack of public consultation about changes in spending patterns. The brief contends the Canadian public should have "enjoyed a basic right to

participate in that decision making."

The brief also contends in the long run it will cost more for the institutions to catch up after a period of cutbacks than it would to maintain the status quo. Finally, it claims the need for post secondary education is more pressing today than ever before, because of the

need for artistic and cultural development and an educated labor force.

The brief considers the effects of fiscal restraints on specific institutions and programs. Specifically, it claims the decline in enrollment in arts programs is directly related to the lack of employment opportunities in these fields, and that this lack is the responsibility of the government.

NUS blames the government for lack of interprovincial mobility for students. The brief contends that the lack of funding of student housing makes it unfeasible for students to attend institutions far from their homes. The same criticism applies to the lack of international exchange; NUS states education is improved by cross cultural exchange, and students do not want to see it threatened by cutbacks in spending.

The question of access is addressed by the brief. It states a user-pay philosophy is emerging which places barriers in the way of students from lower income families. "There is no question that governments believe learning had its price, and those who cannot afford to pay should not enjoy the right to an education," claims NUS.

The brief criticizes the Canada Student Loan Plan, on the ground it does not place all students on an equal financial footing. NUS says that not only does disinclination to borrow hinder prospective students, summer unemployment makes it increasingly difficult for students to return to school.

Isn't education provincial?

Fed financing the link

The division of powers between federal and provincial governments as defined in the British North America Act places education under the jurisdiction of the provinces.

Why, then, is the NUS charging the federal government with "being responsible for the current state of chaos in the Canadian post-secondary education system"?

The basis for the charge becomes more clear when it is realized that despite the fact that constitutionally Ottawa has no role in education, the federal government has made substantial financial contributions to post secondary education since the turn of the century.

This involvement

began with support of agricultural, technical, and veterinary colleges. By the second world war, the government had a large financial investment in post secondary education, and these contributions were made in the form of cost sharing agreements.

After the war, it became common practice for the government to fund the institutions themselves. This continued until 1966 when the Fiscal Arrangements Act (FAA) was introduced. It channelled most of the federal money for education through the provincial governments, although some direct funding of institutions was continued, mostly in the form of research grants.

In 1971, however, the federal government became concerned with the high cost of the program. They had been paying half the costs of post secondary education in each province; they proposed to replace this with a cash grant to be determined by a formula. The provinces objected to this and the result was a continuation of FAA until 1977, with a 15% ceiling on the increase per annum.

In 1977, the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements and Established Programs Financing Act (EPF) was passed. Under this program, education funding is combined with medicare and hospital insurance

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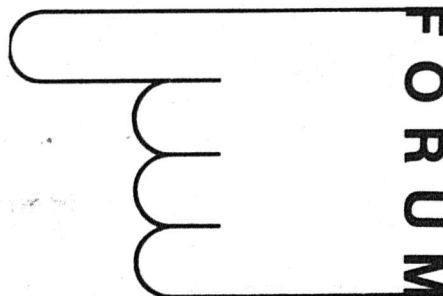
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