

# Student organization wants free tuition

BY DAVID COCHRANE

OTTAWA (CUP)—A document released by the Canadian Federation of Students is calling for the establishment of a federal ministry of post-secondary education and the elimination of tuition fees at universities and colleges.

The federal Strategy for Change document, released Tuesday, proposes an alternative model for the country's higher education system — one that is publicly funded and allows for easier transfer of credits between post-secondary institutions. The report goes on to recommend the creation of a national advisory council on higher education and the adoption of what the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) calls Pan-Canadian principles of educational accessibility and flexibility for students.

CFS also called for the repeal of the Canada Health and Social Transfer.

In 1995 the federal government rolled transfer payments to provinces for education, health and social assistance into one fund — cutting funding to these transfers by more than \$6.3-billion since 1993-94.

But government and education officials are criticizing the Strategy for Change, saying the elimination of tuition fees would cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Brad Lavigne, CFS' national chairperson, admits his

organization's educational blueprint is a costly one. But the price of an inaccessible education system, he says, is much higher.

"If you look into the eyes of somebody in grade 10 or grade 11 and you ask them why they are not going to school and they will tell you it's because they and their family do not make enough money...how much does that cost?" Lavigne asked.

Calling Canada the student-debt capital of the world, he criticized the federal government for not taking an active leadership role in dealing with the problem.

Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Human Resources Development, disagrees. He says the federal government is working to keep student debt levels low and help students access the post-secondary funding of the Canada Student Loans Program.

But student debt has been increasing substantially since the Federal Liberals came to power in 1993. Last year, students graduated with an average debt of \$17,000, and that number is expected to rise to \$25,000 next year, according to the federation document.

Pettigrew says he doesn't support the creation of a federal ministry of post-secondary education, as the matter is clearly under provincial jurisdiction.

And the Council of Ministers of Education Canada says the provinces, notably Quebec, probably won't support that aspect

of the federation's plan either.

But Paul Cappon, the council's director general, agrees that governments should provide a stronger leadership role in post-secondary education.

"I think there should be a national strategy for post-secondary education," he said. "In the absence of a federal ministry of education it should be done through the [council]."

The harshest criticism of the Strategy for Change came from the CFS' chief political rival, the Canadian Alliance of Student

Associations (CASA). The CFS suggests increasing taxes on corporations and wealthy individuals to pay for the revamped education system. Hoops Harrison, CASA's executive director, called the plan "irrational".

Dalhousie is a member of CASA.

The Strategy for Change contains what has essentially been the core of the federation's principles since its creation in the early 1980s. In the short-term Lavigne says the CFS' goal is stable educational funding and the

creation of a national system of grants.

Lavigne says the federation is asking the federal government to honour a commitment the Liberal government made more than two decades ago. In 1976 the Liberals signed an international accord promising to reduce financial barriers to education and eventually eliminate tuition fees altogether.

"Twenty-one years later, students and other Canadians are asking the federal government, 'At what point are we going to see a movement in the direction that was made in 1976?'"

## Baptist college credits non-transferable

BY MICHAEL CONNORS

ST. JOHN'S (CUP) — The governing body on academic matters of the Memorial University of Newfoundland has voted not to accept transfer credits from a Baptist university in New Brunswick. This re-opens a three-year debate revolving around the question of academic freedom at Bible colleges.

The Moncton-based Atlantic Baptist University (ABU) had requested that the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) recognize its courses for transfer credits following a case two years ago when one of its graduates could not have her degree recognized because of a university policy.

That request was turned down, however, because MUN requires that an institution be a member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), in order to be recognized for transfer credits. The AUCC is a national body representing 88 universities and colleges, and ABU is not a member.

ABU then asked that MUN make an exception on the basis that it is individually recognized by other Atlantic universities who are AUCC members.

Glenn Collins, MUN's registrar, said the Senate considered the matter in light of a debate it had on Bible colleges in 1994.

"The Senate debated the general question, 'Should we recognize Bible colleges for transfer credits?'"

And the decision that Senate took was no, we should not," Collins said. "It was based on a couple of reasons, largely because most of these colleges require a statement of faith from their professors, [and] most of them don't conduct research."

Collins said there was an impression among many Senators that a statement of faith can, coupled with a lack of research responsibilities, negatively impact the quality of courses taught at an institution.

Seth Crowell, ABU's registrar, disagrees. He says ABU is not a Bible college.

Although his university's mission statement promises to provide a "Christ-centred" learning

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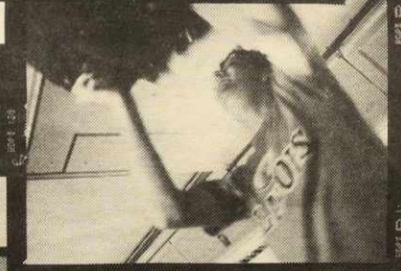
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