

the Dalhousie Gazette

Moncton : students take university

by Cathy McDonald

Universite de Moncton students have brought the university to a halt and are determined to keep it that way until their board of governors agrees to a five-year freeze on tuition increases.

"We can't afford another increase" said Brenda Cote, president of the student federation.

The students blockaded entrances to the campus Sunday night. Moncton police broke the blockades on Tuesday, however an around the clock occupation and boycott of classes still remains in effect.

The students are asking the board of governors to meet with them on campus, but university president Gilbert Finn has so far stalled any move towards negotiations, according to a student spokesperson.

University staff and faculty are supporting the boycott, Cote said.

Students are protesting a proposed minimum 15 per cent tuition increase, and are angered that the board of governors refuses to discuss tuition increases until after the academic year, eliminating any chance for student input. Cote expects the board could raise tuition as much as 25 per cent, bringing fees to about \$1,200 from the current \$985 average.

The blockade was quickly organized in reaction to the board of governors deciding to meet off campus when it heard of a planned demonstration of 150 students that night.

Finn wants the students to come off campus to talk, but Cote has refused, fearing legal action would be taken against the student leaders. One student assisting the blockade was arrested on Tuesday and charged with obstruction.

About 200 to 300 students have set up camp in the Taillon building, where the administrative offices are located. Committees have been organized to collect donations for food, and to keep up contact with outside organizations and the media. In all, about 800 students are "right into it," Cote said.

Tuition increased 20 per cent last year and 12 per cent the year before. Cote said it was especially difficult financially for students in the Acadian region of New Brunswick where the economy is depressed and unemployment is high.

Revenue to Francophone universities is a lot less than the New Brunswick average, she

said. Universite de Moncton has suffered cutbacks in the last three years in services such as audio-visual, libraries and non-academic staff.

Another student spokesperson, Cyrille Godin, said the university president is strongly opposed to a tuition freeze. "He told us personally he is against freezing tuition," Godin said. Finn did not see the necessity of calling a meeting of the board as "they'd say no (to the freeze) anyhow." Finn spoke with the students Tuesday night and agreed to call a meeting of the board of governors. However, the students called the board members Wednesday morning and they said they had not been contacted.

Finn would not comment to the *Gazette* on the situation.

A group of 50 Universite de Moncton professors sent a letter to Finn on Tuesday, stating they supported the students' struggle, Godin said. They called for an end to police intervention and that charges on the arrested student be dropped. A group of 125 professors met again on Wednesday and undertook to obtain a mediator to act on behalf of the students.

Godin said Finn will be closing the university for an undetermined amount of time. Godin claimed Finn is attempting to make the students appear to be disruptive and the cause of the university closure. But Godin said "We're not doing this for fun, we have other things to do. He is trying to create conflict among students."

Labour unions in Moncton, the Maritime Fisheries Union, student unions across Canada including the Dalhousie student union, and the Canadian Federation of Students, have come out in support of the protest. A rally will be organized on campus, where outside organizations and members of the public will hopefully show their support.

The New Brunswick government has as yet not announced its funding increases to the universities for next year. Student anger is also focussed on the government for its planned restraint in university funding. Telegrams to government ministers from the protesting students have not yet received any response, Godin said.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission has recommended a 12.9 per cent increase in operating grants to New Brunswick universities.



Tuition likely up 12% per cent next year

by Cathy McDonald

A major victory has befallen Dalhousie students, with the strong likelihood of a 12 per cent tuition increase next year.

The administration's proposal of a 15 per cent tuition increase was defeated Wednesday at a joint meeting of the Board of Governors' finance and budget, and student relations and residence committees.

The committee voted seven in favour and two opposed to the 12 per cent figure. President MacKay abstained.

"We've established a precedent now. This means the president's recommendation is not necessarily sacrosanct," said Peter Rans, student union president-elect. "We regard it as a major victory."

Student representatives Atul Sharma, Geoff Seymour and Rans proposed a figure of 10 per cent as the maximum amount students could afford. The students repeated their case made earlier to the same committee that student resources will increase only six per cent, but in light of Dalhousie's deficit a 10 per cent increase would be acceptable.

The students supported 12 per cent as the compromise they felt would be accepted by the committee, Rans said.

"We are lucky (to have achieved the compromise), given the immense financial deficit the university is facing, and is desperately trying to eliminate," Rans said.

Whether the Board of Governors will concur with the vote, Rans wasn't sure. However, "if

the board does not respect the decision of its own committee it would be pointless for the committee to exist," he said.

The committee considered postponing the vote until the provincial government's funding levels for next year were known. The decision to raise tuition would therefore have been made with very little student input, coming at a time when most students are writing exams.

Waiting to meet the board members when they arrived for the meeting were a group of 25 student society presidents, to impress upon board members students' solid support of the ten per cent proposal.

The committee did not have time to examine the proposed \$250 increase in the international student levy.