

Petitions of no avail

Ontario students face fee hikes despite protest

TORONTO (CUP) — About 50 Ontario student leaders bearing petitions with 25,000 signatures opposing a recent tuition hike were told by the provincial minister of colleges and universities he would not change his mind about instituting the hike next year.

Harry Parrott told the student union representatives at a Dec. 10 meeting he called, that even five million signatures would not pressure his government into rescinding the \$100-a-year hike for universities and \$75-a-year hike for community colleges effective in 1977-78.

As a result the student leaders mandated the executive of their provincial organization, the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) to produce a province-wide strategy to fight the hike in the new year. A special plenary will

vote on the executive recommendations in the near future.

According to OFS information officer, Allan Golombek, the executive will propose a half-day moratorium on classes set for sometime in March.

The province-wide petition campaign was set just two weeks prior to the meeting with Parrott, at an emergency meeting of student representatives Nov. 27, two days after Parrott announced the tuition hike.

The text of the petition, struck at the plenary, attacked the hike on the grounds that it would not improve the quality of education in the province or lessen the decreased funding Ontario's colleges and universities receive yearly, but would only act as a barrier to post-secondary education for many students.

Additionally, the petition called

for the creation of a government summer employment program and a lowering of the \$1000 loan ceiling in the province's student aid program (OSAP).

An OFS research paper presented at the plenary stated the fee hikes were intended to make students pay the difference between needs and funding for post-secondary education over the past two years. (During this period the increases in government funding has declined, with only a 7.98 per cent increase for 1977-78, as compared to a 14 per cent increase for 1976-77 and a 16.9 per cent increase for 1975-76. University administrations have claimed the reduced increases actually mean a decrease in operating grants, since inflation has run in excess of the increases.)

The petition gathered about 25,000 signatures in the two week period between the emergency plenary and the meeting with Parrott Dec. 10.

However, at the meeting Parrott told the student representatives he had hoped to talk about other things than the tuition hike.

Parrott told University of Toronto student president, Shirley French, he would not consider the petition, and when asked by members of the assembly if he would reconsider the hike if one million, two million or five million signatures were presented, he repeated, "No, no, no."

When asked by an OFS representative why colleges fees were increased by a greater percentage than universities (30 per cent as opposed to 16.6 per cent, according to OFS estimates), Parrott said he did not know why fees were set as they were.

Parrott refused to answer many questions on the technicality that they were asked by the wrong party, since he had set two meetings, one for community college representatives in the morning to be followed by one with university studenty reps. The students ignored Parrott's restrictions and attended each other's meetings, although the minister would only acknowledge questions relating to the subject at hand in each of the two meeting.

Parrott told the community college representatives their increased tuition fees would up college revenue by between \$4 \$5 million, but in response to a question said he could not guarantee if operating grants to colleges would not decrease because of the increased revenue.

When asked how Ontario's tuition could be justifiably increased, the minister said that individuals must bear some of the costs of their education. He admitted that the whole popula-

tion benefited from the post-secondary education goes to only 3 percent of the population.

He dismissed claims that the hike would bar some students from attending college or university, saying that there were grants for needy students and that the loan scheme guaranteed assistance to all who needed it.

He also claimed that increased tuition ensured the quality of education, but refused to answer a question from National Union of Students, fieldworker, Gavin Anderson, on whether Parrott considered the college systems of New Brunswick and Quebec, which have no fees, inferior to Ontario's.

Representatives at both meeting after the tuition hikes had been announced, and not before.

He admitted at the universities meeting that he had no intention of responding to student protests over the hike, despite the large number of students opposed to it.

Strategy for fighting the tuition fee hike in the future will involve a two-month campaign culminating in a moratorium on classes for half a day, likely sometime in March, according to OFS's Golombek. In doing so, students will be seeking support from outside the education community, from such groups as the Ontario Federation of Labor, the teachers' federation, high schools and boards of education, he said.

The distribution of "information kits" and meetings with "media people" will be used to draw attention to the students' position on the fee hikes, said Golombek.

He also said the late date for holding the moratorium, in the last month of the academic year, was necessary because of the time it would take to build up support.

In the meantime, the petition campaign will continue, with the aim of gathering more signatures from the community, he said.

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