

No one agrees but...

Province denies cuts

by Peter Michalshyn

The provincial government view — that Alberta universities are well-financed and do not experience cutbacks — was attacked from all sides in a debate last week.

Cutbacks: "I contend there have been none," said Dr. Reno Bosetti, assistant deputy minister of Advanced Education and Manpower.

But students, university officials, and other post-secondary education spokespersons attending the Edmonton Social Planning Council's one-day conference on federal-provincial fiscal arrangements, disagreed.

"There have been budget cutbacks in the last several years," said university vice-president finance and administration Lorne Leitch.

"We estimate our revenues. We estimate what it costs to maintain a current level of services ... recognizing we are a highly labor-intensive operation and that our institutional costs tend to rise faster than inflation ..."

"Obviously there's a shortfall and cuts have to be made," Leitch said.

"There is this illusion in government circles, or at least in their public statements, that there are no cutbacks," said Keith Krause of the Federation of Alberta Students (FAS).

"A province like Alberta is forced to import engineers while our own students must claw their way past a quota system that sees only two-thirds of the qualified applicants accepted," Krause said.

"For those who are accepted, there are classes that in many cases have more than 400 students in them."

"Imagine 400 students all trying to visit a professor, two or three times each term, to deal with problems and concerns. Both the students, and the professor, must surely suffer."

Estimates from the Medicine Hat college administration show that more than \$300,000 would be needed to bring that library up to the minimum standard suggested by the Canadian Association of College and University Libraries," Krause said.

"At the University of Alberta, an administrative committee has

estimated that the real purchasing power of the materials acquisition budget has declined by more than 50 per cent over the past decade."

Bosetti rebutted: "I contend there have been none (cutbacks) because we have increased funding."

Instead of complaining about perceived underfunding, Bosetti, a Ph.D. in Education Administration from the U of A, recommended that universities focus on productivity.

"No one has talked about productivity. We should get every last ounce out of the university by teaching more classes," he said.

Bosetti also remarked that he saw no proof to show large class sizes were in any way harmful to the quality of education. Earlier this year, he said also that access studies — research into the effects of tuition fees on accessibility to post-secondary education — were "a lot of bunk," and not necessary for the government to make a decision on tuition fee policy.

Unconvinced of Bosetti's arguments, Dr. Sherburne McCurdy pleaded with universities and governments to be more honest with one another.

"Be more honest — admit there is a cut — for these reasons,"



Youth's found infiltrating HUB Mall. Claim they took a wrong turn in Albuquerque

Photo Dave Chin

McCurdy said.

"There's just no question, it's a fact. Now why don't we just admit that there've been cutbacks?" he asked.

McCurdy and others accused the two parties of "posturing" while doing little to solve the

funding problems.

Rodney Dobell from the University of Victoria suggested universities stop thinking of year to year percentage cuts and think of long-term justifications for continued funding.

Dobell, research director for

the federal Task Force on Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements (the Breau Report), suggested that universities rationalize their existence and their needs for funding beyond complaining that they didn't get what they asked for last year.

Any funds if EPF runs dry?

Alberta universities should not assume that provincial funding will decrease if the federal government pulls \$1.5 billion of post-secondary education finances from the Established Programs Financing (EPF) arrangement.

Approaching EPF revenues — in the form of tax credits and cash transfers from federal to provincial pockets — as general transfers, Reno Bosetti, assistant deputy minister of Advanced Education and Manpower, said last week:

"If revenues of this government are reduced in any way then priorities might change. But don't conclude if funding declines that we're going to shut down two universities," Bosetti said during a debate sponsored by the Edmonton Social Planning Council last week.

University vice-president

finance Lorne Leitch said he was optimistic that possible EPF cuts won't directly affect university funding.

He said the government couldn't cut education funding when it insisted the EPF wasn't directed specifically at education in the first place.

A major reason the federal government is threatening to cut its contributions to the 1977 EPF cost-sharing scheme is that provinces haven't spent the money in areas where it was originally intended.

For example, the federal government maintains that 32.1 per cent of EPF transfers were to go, in spirit if not in writing, to post-secondary education.

But the provinces say the transfers were strictly unconditional. They can spend EPF money on construction or education or as a tax break to citizens if they wish, they say.

Those who oppose the provincial view say the 32.1 per cent of EPF transfers account for a greater percentage of university funding than the province con-

tributes.

The federal Task Force on Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements said the province of Alberta contributed only 23 per cent excluding EPF funds, of the total post-secondary education bill last year.

Provincial critics are concerned if the federal government cuts off the EPF money, the provinces will not make up the difference. Instead, critics foresee much higher tuition fees and a continued decline in university funding.

Universities suffer in B.C.

VANCOUVER (CUP) — British Columbia universities minister Pat McGeer denied October 7 the ministry imposes its ideas on universities.

He was responding to a recent letter from universities deputy minister Robert Stewart to the Universities Council of B.C. which placed priorities on the engineering, medicine and business administration faculties, and said that "lower priority areas" would have to be reduced.

"We don't tell universities how to establish their priorities, except to tell them to provide education where there is demand," said McGeer.

There is a definite demand for doctors, he added.

"The province is in a difficult situation financially. Therefore all areas financed from public funds will have to respond to that," he added.

McGeer denied there had been any cuts in the liberal arts or other low priority areas: "I don't think there are any cuts. There's never been a cut," he said.

Universities in B.C. are much better off than elsewhere, he said.

A study commissioned by the Ontario provincial government

recently recommended that unless funding increased dramatically in the next few years, the province should close down six universities.

McGeer attributed Ontario's financial problems to bad planning.

The university system should respond to the province's needs, he said. Eighty per cent of the province's doctors come from elsewhere, which is an "in-

tolerable situation," he said.

"The consequence of having too few places in key areas is merely that you provide jobs and opportunities for people outside the province," said McGeer. "Our own students are being denied an opportunity to enter the highest paying profession."

"We're turning away far better students than any other province," he said.

*MacEachen comes...
MacEachen speaks...
MacEachen eats...*

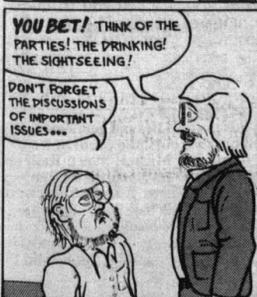
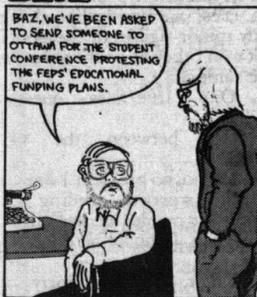
If by some strange chance you have a month's rent that you don't know what to do with you should keep October 30 free. That's when the Liberal party of Canada will be holding their annual fund-raising dinner at Edmonton's Four Seasons Hotel.

For only \$150 you can rub shoulders with government

power brokers and hear Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Allan MacEachen try to explain why post-secondary education deserves a \$1.5 billion cut.

Other speakers include Bud Olson, Minister of State for Economic Development, and Mr. Jim Coutts former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister.

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