

# Quebec students say enough is enough to government

BY PHILIPPE ROY AND KAREN CHO

QUEBEC CITY (CUP) — Students, teachers and support staff representing over 37 Quebec colleges gathered in front of the provincial legislature March 11 to protest impending funding cuts and a "failure fee" introduced by Quebec Education Minister Pauline Marois.

The demonstrators were opposing a rumoured \$82-million in proposed cuts to Quebec's colleges, as well as the new provincial "failure fee". College students who fail more than one class are now charged \$2 per class hour for their failed courses. The new fee was introduced in January.

Protesters arrived by bus from across the province to participate in the demonstration, organized by the

Federation des etudiants du Collegiale du Quebec. Braving sub-zero weather, participants marched from the historic Plains of Abraham to the National Assembly, bearing picket signs, banners and bells as they made their message loud and clear: "Down with the failure fee, education should be free!"

Philippe Leclerc, president of the federation, stressed that the province's colleges cannot withstand another round of cutbacks.

"There is [already] a loss of the quality of life in [the colleges]...and they're asking for another \$80-million," Leclerc said, referring to previous cutbacks in provincial education spending.

According to the federation, between 1982 and 1995, \$262-

million was cut from Quebec's colleges. Last year alone, they were hit with a \$70-million cut.

"I think it's important the government know what they are cutting isn't just numbers — it's possibilities," Dawson college student Rachelle Houde said of the protest.

Rosaire Margoux, a teacher from Ville de Lauzon, reiterated Leclerc's assertion that colleges have suffered enough. "The government has cut our salaries and [worsened] our working conditions," he said.

The demonstration, however, quickly gave way to political maneuvering as politicians came out of the provincial legislature to

jostle student representatives and union leaders for the attention of the crowd.

One Quebec City Liberal candidate even urged the crowd to vote Liberal to avoid the consequences of the Parti Quebecois' zero-deficit objective.

The political implications of the cuts were not lost on Sandra Hernandez, a student from Edouard-Monpetit. She pointed out that Quebec college students represent about 10,000 votes. If students are unhappy with the PQ government, she said, they won't vote for them in the next provincial election. Many observers expect an election to be called within a few months.

"When you cut education, you cut your future," Hernandez said.

Aside from the mass action in Quebec City, which organizers say over 4,000 people participated in — francophone and anglophone colleges across the province held their own demonstrations. Seventeen schools also held day-long strikes to protest the new fee and the coming cuts.

At Vanier College in Ville St-Laurent, for example, about 70 students and teachers took time off from their studies to go outside the school and demonstrate. They were greeted by honks of support from passing motorists.

With files from the Vanier Phoenix

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