

B.C. Universities for the poor?

by Justine Hunter
VICTORIA (CUP) — Students who can't afford a post-secondary education in B.C. can still go to university, says the province's education minister, Stan Hagen.

Hagen appears to be leading his ministry on the road to reform, his critics say, taking a 180 degree turn from former minister Russ Fraser — known for telling students during the 1986 election campaign that if they couldn't afford to continue their education, they should put it off.

Hagen, in his year in this portfolio, has promised to make better access to education a priority. But that does not mean more money for universities and colleges.

"It's important for (students) to recognize that just because they cannot afford post-secondary, they can still go," Hagen said, pointing to improvements in accessibility, especially financial aid and distance education.

Hagen has pumped millions into

improving student aid. Direct financial aid to students more than doubled in 1987, jumping to \$36.8 million from \$17.8 the year before. A 15 per cent jump in enrollment last September followed, and more increases in aid have been committed over the next two years.

But the minister said funding for universities and colleges in "adequate", despite the increasing strain on the faculty and facilities.

Funding estimates in the Spring budget will likely hold few surprises this March.

"We have to be focusing on maintaining the level of funding of the last year, on the quality of education, on the quality of teachers and teaching," he said.

NDP education critic Darlene Marzari agreed that Hagen has improved education, but said the universities are "starving."

Marzari said funding is in no way adequate, and the system of funding

post-secondary education needs revamping.

An NDP MLA for Vancouver-Point Grey, Marzari said Hagen has been able to restore some of the funding lost in the 1983 restraint budget because he sits on treasury boards, and sometimes exceeds his budget. She warned that Hagen's changes may not last.

"Hagen is all that comes between the post-secondary system right now and the rather vindictive, ignorant bunch of cronies in the provincial government," Marzari said.

"Everybody is breathing a sigh of relief, before they know how long this minister is going to last, and without looking at the rest of the government... (which) is anti-post secondary."

The legislature will sit in full again in mid-March, and will include a second throne speech and budget under Premier Bill Vander Zalm's government.

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Deadline for application and presentation of project proposal to the Director of Student Awards, 252 Athabasca Hall is March 4, 1988

Tuition fight

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Pam Frache, has been leading a similar campaign to persuade their own board not to adopt a similar policy to SFU and UBC.

"We packed the gallery at the last board meeting," said student union vice-president Michael Geoghegan. "Pam presented (the union's) arguments, and the board seemed quite impressed by it. We think we've been successful at convincing at least a few members."

UVic's campaign has focused on assuring future fee increases be tied to the rate of inflation, rather than the 20 per cent of the universities \$71 million operating budget. Although the final board decision has yet to be handed down, optimism is high.

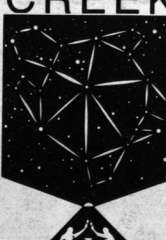
"Pam Frache did an outstanding job," said Geoghegan, "I think her effort and initiative have carried the day."

UBC's student society has not announced organized resistance of any kind to their own fee increases.

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