

# BC gets new minister of post-secondary education

BY CRAIG SAUNDERS

VICTORIA (CUP) — The provincial government's decision to create a new ministry specifically for post-secondary education has impressed university administrators and students, who say they are relieved to have a ministry all for themselves.

They also say they are glad that Andrew Petter, B.C.'s former finance minister, is taking on the new portfolio of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

"Petter does come from the post-secondary system," said Maura Parte, provincial chair of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). "We hope that will lead to a greater understanding of post-secondary pressures."

Before his election to the provincial legislature in 1991, Petter was a law professor at the University of Victoria. During his six-year political tenure, he has been minister of aboriginal affairs, forests, health and, most recently, finance.

The new ministry is in charge of B.C.'s colleges, universities, private post-secondary institutions, training programs and technological initiatives.

Paul Ramsey will continue to hold an education portfolio, though reduced. He will oversee the province's elementary and secondary schools.

Robert Clift, executive director of the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of B.C., says splitting the ministry was a good idea.

"We're pretty happy to have a separate ministry again," Clift said,

noting the ministry was only amalgamated in 1995. "In the superministry of [kindergarten] to PhD, we tended to get lost."

Petter says post-secondary accessibility is his top priority as the new minister. He says the province needs more university graduates, since business is demanding them, and those graduates will help the economy grow. So he says the province needs to work harder to make education a right, rather than a privilege.

For the past two years, the provincial government froze tuition fees in an attempt to keep education accessible, Petter says. And while

a freeze this year will depend on the provincial budget, expected in late March, the B.C. government is pressuring the federal government to restore funding to students through any fiscal dividends.

"We have been very aggressive in trying to steward what resources we currently have in education and add to them by making savings elsewhere,"

Petter said. "There is a commitment on the part of the government to try to put the limited resources that are available for new social initiatives into the area of education."

But not everyone is happy with the recent changes in cabinet.

According to B.C.'s Liberal education critic, the shuffle is really an attempt to divert the public's attention away from the upcoming provincial budget. Despite this, she says she is looking forward to opposing both Ramsey and Petter. "I've got the two best ministers," April Sanders said. "I'm ready to put them on the ropes."

The Liberal critic and her NDP counterparts will get the opportunity to duke it out when the provincial legislature resumes sitting next month.

Sanders also says splitting the ministry is unnecessary, and that any lack of attention to post-secondary education on the part of

Ramsey likely came as a result of the time he spent fighting a recall campaign.

"I think whoever is in charge should have a good idea of what a child is going into [after high school]," Sanders said. "I would like them as one ministry."

The new ministry also includes technology, and that excites Strong, himself a geologist with a background in vulcanology.

"It makes good sense to have science and technology back with the university post-secondary system," he said. "I think our faculty are recognized as having that as part of their responsibility."

## Privacy for the poor respected

### BC re-examines approach to people on social assistance

BY ANNA ROIK

VICTORIA (CUP) — The B.C. government has temporarily backed down on the introduction of new measures which would have given them access to a wide range of personal information about people on social assistance.

In late January the government mailed out nearly 75,000 letters they called "consent forms". The completed forms would grant officials access to personal information.

Family members of claimants would also be subject to investigation under the new system.

Failure to return the form carried the threat of losing benefits.

But in the face of protests, phone calls and complaints, recently-

appointed Human Resources Minister Jan Pullinger has called for a legal review of the new system.

David Turner, a member of B.C.'s Human Rights Commission, says he is glad. He added that in their present state, the forms violate the rights of dignity and privacy and discriminate against those on income assistance.

"I urge the ministry to carry out limited searching in only those places needed to prove a claim," he said.

On Feb. 21 — the day the forms were originally supposed to be due — approximately 150 anti-poverty activists took to the streets of Victoria

to urge the provincial government to respect the privacy rights of those in need of social assistance.

Jacque Ackerley of the Together Against Poverty Society told protesters that everyone, including those on income assistance, has a right to privacy.

"We have to make everyone understand how dangerous this legislation is,"

she said. "If the rights to privacy of the poor can be taken away, so can anyone's right."

The two members of the NDP caucus responsible for getting the government to review the forms, Gretchen Brewin and Steve

Orcherton, attended the protest and were presented with two large plastic bags filled with crumpled up forms.

Brewin said her office has never received as many phone calls as they did on this matter.

"As a result of [the] calls, [Orcherton and I] were able to raise this issue in caucus and initiate the review process," she said.

But some spectators at the protest said the new measures were necessary to protect taxpayers' dollars.

"When someone receives welfare they are saying they can't take care of themselves and need the state to step in and help," said Les Haddad, a street vendor in downtown Victoria. "In that case I don't see why they shouldn't give away some of their [privacy] rights."

**"When someone receives welfare they are saying they can't take care of themselves"**

## Concordia critical of army recruitment on campus

BY YVES MARTINEAU

MONTREAL (CUP) — A regiment of Canada's army reserves came under fire earlier this month for trying to recruit Concordia University students for their summer training program.

The regiment was criticized by students for bringing a military presence into what some say should be a peaceful space.

"I don't believe that university [students] should be subject to recruiting," Concordia student union president Rebecca Aldworth said.

"There are plenty of means by which the army can enroll [recruits] other than doing it in school.

"University is a place where we learn to promote peace. When I see a big poster of a man holding a gun like the one the army had at their stand, it really contradicts the idea of the peace-promoting institution the university should be," Aldworth said.

Chief Corporal Daniel Kelly, who was at the regiment's recruitment stand, says while several dozen students expressed interest in the program, a significant number criticized the regiment for being there.

"About 35 students seemed really interested in participating in the program," Kelly said. "But about 90 students came to see us saying that we have no business

here, that we are not welcome in the university."

Kelly says the regiment recruits at approximately 15 Quebec schools over the year, mostly at colleges. He adds that 70 students enroll in the program, which involves ceremonial training and a basic infantry course, including weapons

handling.

He says the summer program is the perfect job for students, since it corresponds to the summer vacation period and pays about \$6,900.

Students at Concordia University have a history of opposing the military's presence on their campus. In a March 1984

referendum, students voted to designate the university a "military free zone". The student union also has a resolution declaring all of its space military-free.

But Concordia's acting dean of students says the university has no obligation to follow student union policies.

"Our role is to respect every association, even if not everyone agrees with the ideas they hold," Roger Coté said. "If the [student union], or other students, don't like the army doing recruiting here, there are others that may be interested in it and the university has to consider them too."

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