

Trudeau vows prairie students

SASKATOON (CUP) - Pierre Trudeau isn't known for his diplomacy with students.

Just before facing a crowd of students, packed into a University of Saskatchewan hall March 19, he said shrinking funding of post-secondary education is partly the fault of "the ignorance of students and student organizations in lapping up everything (Saskatchewan) premier Blakeney has fed them."

The provincial governments, the prime minister said, are also to blame.

Then, entering the jammed hall to the tune of the Hogan's Heroes theme, Trudeau called for the provinces to match the funding for social services currently provided by Ottawa. In three years, Trudeau said, federal support for post-secondary education has climbed from 46 to 62 per cent of total costs. The provinces,

according to Trudeau's math, have decreased their share from 46 to 23 per cent.

Evan Thornton, external vice-president of the U of S students' union, grilled the prime minister during a one-hour question period. Reacting to his comments on student attitudes, Thornton shot back, "Mr. Blakeney hasn't fed us anything."

But Trudeau said the 17 per cent tuition hike announced in the recent provincial budget was "only a start" for students, and insisted that the heckling students "should be booing Blakeney, not me."

Thornton later said the

federal government is equally responsible for cuts that will swell tuition by 12 to 20 per cent in most provinces this year. He said the 1976 funding agreement between the federal government and the provinces was originally a "blank cheque", for use at the province's discretion for any social service.

It was with tacit approval from the federal government, said Thornton, that the provinces chose to cut back on university funding. He accused the prime minister of playing politics with students' tuition fees, squeezing post-secondary education between the provinces and Ottawa in their squabble.

Trudeau responded to charges that the government is funnelling money into technical training rather than liberal arts programs, claiming he had "enormous respect for liberal arts education." But he said an increase in technical students, while a shortage of skilled workers exists.

"Mr. Axworthy's office is filling out thousands of working visas a day for foreign technicians coming into Canada," Trudeau said. "We can't keep producing sociologists."

One student retorted that the shortages are caused largely by quotas forced by cutbacks at technical schools. "That's your opinion," Trudeau said.

Thornton said the prime minister's responses were evasive, and said it was "scary" that Trudeau was threatening the

autonomy of universities by "talking about how liberal arts don't fit the job market."

The Liberal government, he said, has "one of the worst track records in predicting the job market," while liberal arts provides a good base education in the rapidly-changing job market.



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