

A low turnout of protesters but there was a.....

# Student picket at Queens Park

By SEAN DUNPHY

Between four and five hundred well-worn demonstrators staged a "mass informational picket" in front of Queen's Park yesterday protesting any future provincial government cutbacks in post-secondary funding.

The demonstration, organized by the Ontario Federation of Students, was attended by a contingent of York students, who filled just one of three buses provided by the Council of the York Student Federation. There were contingents from universities in Ottawa, Guelph, Hamilton and from the Ontario Federation of Students.

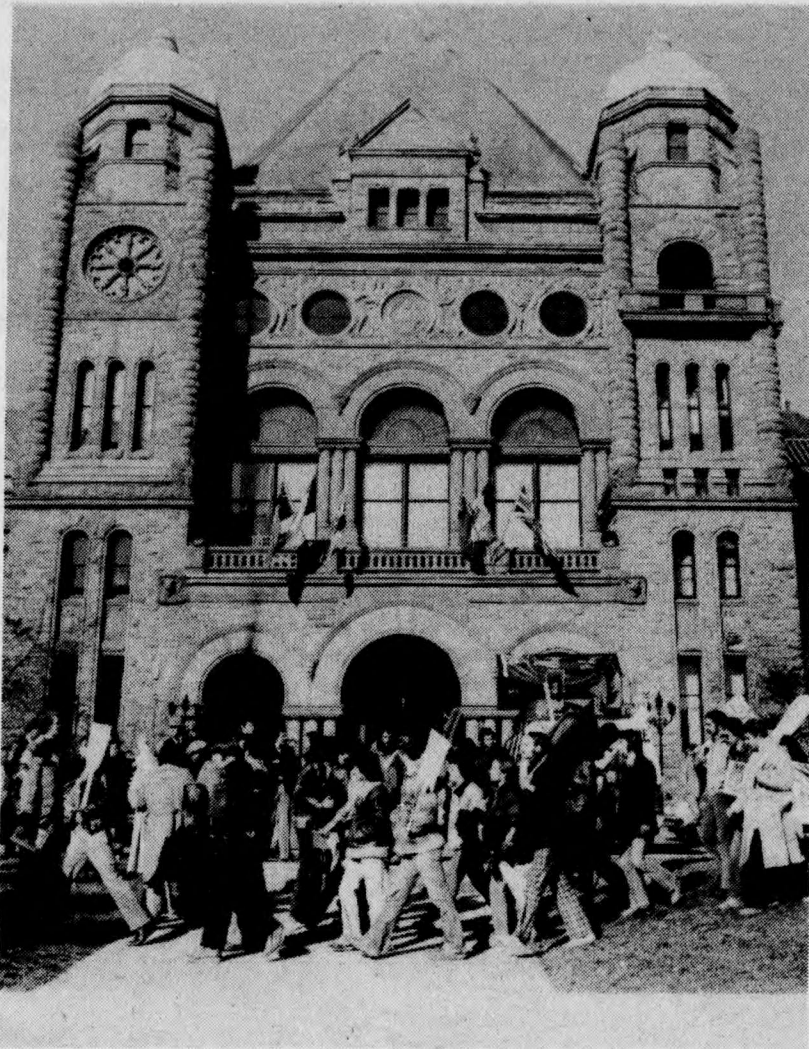
Attendance at the picket line was considerably lower than the demonstration last spring which drew about 7,000 students.

What protesters lacked in numbers, however, they made up in joviality with entertaining signs and chants.

The demonstrators picketed for a few hours, before winding up the day's festivities with a parade down University Avenue, back up Yonge Street, and finishing up with a get-together over coffee and doughnuts.

Asked if he was disappointed by the relatively low turnout at the picket, OFS executive member, Leo Casey, said it is too early in the year to expect mass support for this type of action. The ministry has not yet come out with a clear statement of policy on tuition and funding, said Casey, so there is not yet a sense of urgency about these matters. More people will get involved when these announcements come out, he added.

The picket line was not intended to be a mass rally, said Casey, but a preliminary effort to lay the groundwork for a long term student movement against the government's policy on cutbacks. The people at the picket line today



Students demanding a better deal for education at provincial parliament last Thursday.

will be the people who organize this movement, explained Casey.

The purpose of the demonstration, as explained by an OFS spokesperson at a press conference before the rally, was to protest the probable rise in tuition fees, and the decline in post-secondary funding. The demonstration was "meant to serve notice to the government that we are capable of mounting opposition to their aggressive policies," explained OFS chairperson

Miriam Edelson.

The government, she said, is getting ready to announce a further cut in university and post-secondary funding levels, as well as an increase in tuition fees. Edelson pointed to the consulting report presently being prepared by the firm of P.S. Ross, which has been studying the feasibility of a tuition hike, sources from within the ministry to support her arguments.

OFS calls for an eventual

elimination of tuition in the long-term and a freeze on increased tuition fees in the short term said Edelson. The effect of higher tuition and restricted access to student aid has been and will continue to be, a disincentive for people from low and middle income families to get an education, something which, she said, should be a right for all.

CYSF president David Chodikoff, who walked the picket line, said "it gave a lot of encouragement to the people who were there to continue the fight against cutbacks," adding that it got "a lot of media coverage, was well planned and well organized."

Chodikoff expressed the view that the time has come for student politicians to "change tactics."

"The next area students must move into is mobilizing themselves to get out and vote," in elections at all three levels of government, he said. "The 600,000 post-secondary students in Canada and the over 160,000 in Ontario, should try and elect people who will serve their interests," he added.

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