

Tuition Fees Are Reaching A Crisis in N.B.

For The Record is a regular feature on the editorial page. Today's contributor is Dr. Claude Dionne, a full professor at l'Université de Moncton and president of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.

This week's student strike at l'Université de Moncton to protest this year's unfortunately, predictable round of tuition fee increases sends a message to government which should not be ignored.

In the last ten years, the cost of tuition at l'Université de Moncton has skyrocketed by 86%, more than four times the increase of less than 20% in the Consumer Price Index over the same period.

Worse still, it has gone up by 57% in the last five years.

Students in other parts of the province have chosen various alternative means to drive home the point, but they all have the same legitimate complaint: rising tuition fees will soon render a university education once more the preserve of the lucky few who can afford to pay for one.

Tuition fees are not the only compulsory charges a student must pay to enroll. Added to them are various other inescapable administrative service charges, such as health insurance premiums, use-of-facilities fees, and the like. As a result, actual annual increases in the overall costs of admission tend to be understated.

Nowhere is the tuition fee situation worse than it is at l'Université de Moncton, but the problem is province-wide and needs to be addressed by government both immediately and realistically.

While the corresponding national average increase in the cost of admission to a Canadian university rose by four-and-a-half per cent in the 2002-2003 academic year, in New Brunswick as a whole it rose by nine-and-a-half per cent. However, at l'Université de Moncton it rose by an incredible twelve-and-a-half per cent.

In its recent report "Access Denied", the Canadian Association of University Teachers notes that tuition fees across the country are now higher than they have ever been. In fact, even after being adjusted for nearly 90 years of inflation, on average they are six times what they were in 1914.

One is at a loss, therefore, to understand how governments professing to have an education-driven agenda can continue to let this phenomenon occur year after year in our universities. The average New Brunswick student with a study-related debt load who graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2001 owed almost \$30,000.00 at graduation.

The students at l'Université de Moncton are not protesting against their cash-strapped administration. They are trying to draw the attention of governments to their own shortsightedness.