

B.C. native students slam federal cuts

By PHILLIPA BECK

"Scream your name, say it loud: 'I am not a non-status, I am not a Bill C-31.' Our ancestors come from the land this building stands on — be proud of that," UBC Native Union Vice Chief Phil Stewart told 80 native students who occupied the Department of Indian Affairs office last Wednesday.

More than 500 native students from campuses across the Lower Mainland rallied at Robson Square, then marched to the DIA's downtown Vancouver office to protest Ottawa's \$26 million cap on financial aid for native students, which takes effect April 1.

Speaker after speaker slammed Indian Affairs Minister Pierre Cadieux' statement in the March 21 Province that "native people have been getting a free ride."

Five hundred native students cheered when one speaker yelled "We say to Brian Mulroney and Pierre Cadieux: Give us your homes and your prime real estate — we'll gladly redistribute it and feed scraps of it to your children."

The new education policy drastically cuts native education funding. Student assistance for travel subsidies, housing and shelter, and day-

UBC Native Students' Union Coordinator Bev Scow said native students reject the new policy because they had no "real, honest consultation with the Department of Indian Affairs."

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Regional DIA officers introduced the policy in June and gave native bands five months to respond. Some sent in written responses rejecting the policy. Others simply kicked DIA personnel off their reserves when they came to make the presentations.

"It was a protest," Scow said. "No one in DIA is native, there was no input from native people in the research or drafting stages, and it says nothing about self-

Five years ago the Assembly of First Nations received a \$6 million federal government grant to evaluate native education. They produced a four volume review and 54 recommendations," Scow said. "None of that came out in the new policy. What's the point of giving them all that money if nothing is taken into account?"

One thousand native students were unable to attend school after September 1987 when the provincial government started its first funding freeze, Scow said.

The daycare cuts will eliminate returning, mature students who have families, she added.

Carol Buswa, a native student in Thunder Bay, said she will not be able to afford to travel the 400 km from her reserve to college after April 1.

Scow said that, in Canada, the death rate of native people is four times higher than that of non-natives. Thirty per cent of prison inmates are native, while they are make up two per cent of the population. Native students have the highest high school drop-out rate; only one or two per cent graduate.

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