

THE GATEWAY

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Québec students poised to fight fee increases

QUÉBEC • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Having high access to university is less valuable if the university can't provide a consistently high quality education," Mendelson added.

However, Brent Farrington, deputy chair of the CFS and former student at Concordia, said that the drive to end the freeze is supported by a select few who don't value accessibility.

"I think what you see is university presidents going against the grain," Farrington said. "They're speaking on behalf of a prestigious few who think that accessibility should take a back seat to the prestigious few of their institution, and what we see in the province is people consistently rejecting that opinion."

"Having high access to university is less valuable if the university can't provide a consistently high quality education."

**MORTON MENDELSON,
MCGILL DEPUTY PROVOST
(STUDENT LIFE AND LEARNING)**

Farrington said that students across Québec will continue fighting to keep the lowest tuition in the country, putting pressure on government to reaffirm their commitment to the ongoing freeze.

"Even though [the government] might be dabbling with the idea of lifting this freeze, we won't take it and it's unacceptable. And students will take the street, and students will mobilize and their families will mobilize to keep this freeze in place," Farrington said.

During a phone-in student press scrum last Friday, federal NDP leader Jack Layton said that his party is supporting CFS' Day of Action and working closely with student groups to put pressure on the government to invest in postsecondary education.

"We disagree [that tuition freezes are an outdated policy], and I think that keeping tuition down through freezes and policies of reduction very definitely open the door to increased participation," he said.

Layton said that it's time other Canadian provinces start following Québec's lead, adding that a European approach to postsecondary is also key.

"I think [most European countries] recognize that the investment by society in educating young people is one that pays off in so many ways for their societies; that it's an investment, that it's a high priority. That doesn't seem to have been the philosophy in many parts of Canada," Layton said. "In Quebec there's been a recognition of the importance, really going back to the Quiet Revolution."

But Mota and Mendelson both cited an overall shortfall of funding in Québec, with estimates between \$375-450 million in the whole system.

"That's just to get our heads above water. That would simply put us at par with the rest of the country. And then if tuition rates did not increase, we would again start to slip behind," Mota said.

Mendelson further pointed to growing problems like high student-to-professor ratios and the lack of funding for infrastructure and research centres.

"At McGill, we like to think of ourselves as being able to punch above our weight, which means doing better with less. But it means that there are certain services that we may not be able to provide students as much as we would like," Mendelson said.

In addition to university infrastructure, Mota also said the lack of funding creates challenges with recruiting international students, and retain top professors due to lack of competitive salaries.

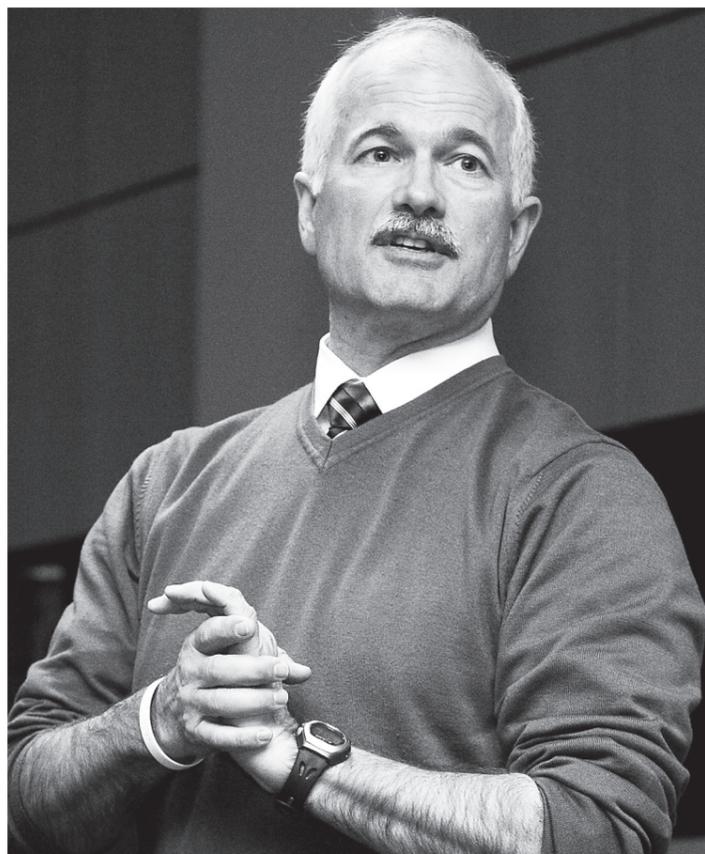
"When you're studying in Québec, you're paying basically nine per cent of what it costs to educate you. Everywhere else in the country it's about 30 per cent," Mota said.

Dave Cournoyer, Students' Union Vice-President (External) said that Québec has "an incredibly unique situation in Canada," with a different kind of funding system that makes it hard to compare to Alberta.

"We don't use Québec as an example [when advocating]," Cournoyer said.

He said that the SU is lobbying for a tuition rollback to about \$3000 annually, at which point the current policy of having tuition increase by CPI would be sustainable.

"I wouldn't advocate for a freeze, per say. What we've found is that freezes in other provinces have become unsustainable," he said, adding that freezes have the potential of resulting in large increases once they end.



FILE PHOTO: NEAL WILDING

LAYING DOWN LOYALTIES Layton has sided with students on postsecondary.

NEWS BRIEF

FEDERAL NDP LEADER PROMISES TO PRIORITIZE POSTSECONDARY

As Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his party are drafting a budget to carry the nation forward another year, Jack Layton and the NDP opposition are hoping to capitalize on the minority government to force a compromise in their favour.

Layton said that the Conservative government is aware of the high priority the NDP places on postsecondary, and that his party is pushing for a budget that reflects that—though he was clear that no terms have been worked out between the two parties that would have the NDP support the budget.

"First of all, there is no 'deal,'" Layton said, last Friday during a press scrum. "What we have done is to very publicly say that we want a budget that addresses fairness and affordability for families today, and that would include students, and we've specifically highlighted education and training when we speak about that."

Layton has been working with students, travelling to campuses across the country and hearing students' concerns.

"With any minority parliament, what you try and do is raise the key issues, put the pressure on, try to work with those in the community that are trying to press government for action, and that's why

we're working closely with the student movement for instance," he said.

He said that this method allows a larger base of issues to be brought to the table and addressed, but stressed that no matter the final result, working with minority governments typically spreads initiatives thin between the various players.

"It usually isn't sufficient, and it usually doesn't match what you would do if you were in government yourself, but you then have to consider on balance: is it more important to have an election, or is it more important to take what has been accomplished and make it real? And that's the judgment that one has to make on a daily basis around here," he said.

On Monday, the Postsecondary Education Act was introduced to Parliament by Denise Savoie, NDP MP for Victoria, calling for university funding to be cut if standards for academic freedom, class size and public accountability are ignored. With this bill, the NDP hopes to increase the federal role in postsecondary, Layton said before the bill was introduced.

"I'm not necessarily expecting all other parties to say, 'You know what: let's give this bill unanimous consent, right now and make it law today.' My guess is that it's going to take a lot of hard work and a big campaign across the country to press for this sort of thing. But it's a tool that we feel is very important," he said.

Chloé Fedio, Managing Editor

Shake your caboose this weekend

