Have you been seeing red squares?

By ELLA HENRY AND ALEX COREY

A student movement is growing on campuses in Fredericton. Students and supporters are being called on to "Fiery Fight against red squares," create a pool of public post-secondary education and wear a red square to show their support for the movement. Students are uniting in opposition to the growing levels of student debt in New Brunswick. The average debt load for a student graduating from a four-year undergraduate degree is $34,000. Last year, the New Brunswick government closed a program intended to reduce student debt, while simultaneously eliminating a $2000 bursary for first-year students. To qualify for the new program, students must have completed their degree on schedule and must have accumulated more than $25,000 in student loans. Last year only 430 of approximately 1000 graduates qualified for the program.

The students' movement points out that, "Changes in the economy and the job market..." increases significantly the levels of education in order to compete and participate. Given high tuition fees and student debt, they ask, "Who is left out? Who is disadvantaged or advantaged by the current system? What barriers do people face in today's system, in regards to education and employment?"

The students' manifesto demands that the government restore post-secondary funding, and provide more grants instead of loans to students applying for financial aid. "We are aware of arguments that would have us believe that our university degrees are a privilege that grant access to higher salaries and rewards, and these arguments serve to justify the payment of tuition as a sort of access fee to a private, profit-making system. We reject these arguments. While we agree that those who benefit more have a greater responsibility to support public institutions which guarantee the freedom of all, we feel that the Canada Income Tax currently serves this function, and should be used in conjunction with tuition fees, rather than as an alternative."

In 1976, Canada acceded to the United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. One article states that "Higher Education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of academic merit." This, and other factors, led to the establishment of a national and international program to support post-secondary education worldwide. Norway and Denmark both also offer public post-secondary education with zero tuition fees.

Over the past decades, government funding cuts to post-secondary education shifted the debt that Canada accumulated from deferred corporate taxes onto the backs of students. The interest rates charged on these loans are higher than their level in 1990-91. This year, students around the world fought back against increasing costs of education. Students in California occupied buildings to protest a proposed 32% fee increase. In Germany and Austria, students, faculty and workers participated in protests, strikes and occupations in response to cuts to government funding for post-secondary education.

The German government attempted to introduce a €1000 fee increase. The students' movement has been growing on the campuses of St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick, and it is challenging the neoliberal funding model that makes education a debt sentence.

St. Thomas University students Mike Frias, Christa Blizzard, Kerri Wood, Amanda Fair and Samantha Rothenberg wear their red felt squares to show their support for a movement that calls for equal access to post-secondary education. In New Brunswick, the average debt load for a student graduating from a four-year undergraduate degree is $34,000, making access to education anything but equal. Photo by Julie Michaud.

War Child breaks new ground with 'Battle of the Arts'

By ALEX MURPHY

With the organization of two Battle of the Arts events, the Fredericton chapter of War Child Canada is dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance to war-affected children around the world. War Child is an organization that is dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance to war-affected children around the world.

St. Thomas University student and musician, Sue Andrew, grew up during the civil war in Sierra Leone. "I came here as a war child after being forced to flee from a war-zone, a country that was not my home." Sue Andrew has travelled around the world and has contributed to War Child for some time and has donated music for an upcoming War Child compilation album. "I wanted to see War Child in action," she said. Fredericton High School student and War Child organizer Naeer Naeer was impressed by the audience turnout. There were over 170 people at the first event. That's not bad for the first time that War Child has worked in Fredericton, "Naeer remarked.

On February 6 at the Charlotte Arts Centre, 15 performers were chosen to compete in the final round, which took place on February 13 at STU. Starting from middle-school aged to young adult, the four judges scored performances on self-confidence, performance, and their overall impact on the audience. Judges and organizers met and decided on the winner. Fredericton High School student Naeer Kubert won first place for her hip-hop dance performance. "I am happy to get the opportunity to be different people in an art form," she said. "I would like to dance for the smile of faces of children who are affected by war." The organizers are encouraged by their success. They wish to continue this event every year." Naeer said. "We also want to get more youth involved and see what else can be done." Naeer is also looking forward to future initiatives. "War Child is definitely a cost organization, I'm happy that I was introduced to it and I see myself in it. It's definitely going to grow from here."

The Brief is an independent publication reporting on issues that matter to New Brunswickers. Our all-volunteer staff is dedicated to delivering fair and accurate news coverage.

Support independent media today!

The NB Media Co-op relies on the financial support of its members to fund high-quality independent journalism for New Brunswickers. Membership options include a monthly contribution or annul membership fee of your choice. Payment options include cheque, pre-authorized direct debit, or credit card payment. If you would like to become a member, you can contact us or pre-authorized direct debit payment.

Something on your mind? We want to hear about it! Send your story ideas and letters to editors@nimedia.coop.

Union printed on 100% recycled paper.