

Ireland's rising university fees cause protest

Union of Students members make their way into Dublin government building; no arrests are made

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBLIN, Ireland — About 20 college students on Tuesday burst into the headquarters of Ireland's ruling Fianna Fail party to protest rising fees at universities.

Security guards locked the doors after the students, who were part of

a larger protest outside the central Dublin building, suddenly dashed inside.

About a half-dozen police kept watch on the standoff, but did not intervene or make any arrests. The students left voluntarily after about two hours.

"We caught them by surprise. We were walking along and then ran in," said protest leader Rory Hearne, deputy president of the Union of Students in Ireland, in an interview by cellular phone.

The government of Prime Minister Bertie Ahern has raised registration fees at Ireland's universities to an annual euro 750 (US\$925) and has also set limits on the availability of financial aid.

Hearne said less than a quarter of students qualify for the available grant of euro70 (US\$85) a week, while students like himself — with parents earning more than euro36,000 (US\$44,000) annually — receive no such grant.

"The government claims to be in support of free education, but the reality is that education is not free," said Hearne, who also led anti-capitalist protests in May during Ireland's presidency of the

European Union.

Fianna Fail spokesman Gerry O'Connor said the protesters delivered a letter addressed to Ahern, who wasn't in the office.

O'Connor said the protest didn't disrupt party business because the demonstrators were confined to the main lobby, not the party's suite of offices. The building, which has other points of entry and exit, also houses a recruitment firm and a software house.

U.S. puts pressure on NATO to deploy more peacekeepers

The U.S. mission in Afghanistan aims to combine with NATO under an allied commander

BY ROBERT BURNS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

POIANA BRASOV, Romania — The United States is pressing NATO to take over the U.S.-led military mission in Afghanistan, possibly as early as 2005, the U.S. ambassador to the alliance said Tuesday.

NATO currently commands the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, the Afghan capital, and it has set up five Provincial Reconstruction Teams in northern Afghanistan. Its troops do not conduct combat missions as U.S. forces do.

Nicholas Burns, the U.S. ambassador to the alliance, told American reporters traveling with Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld on Tuesday that the aim of the United States is to combine the U.S. and NATO missions under an alliance commander.

"There will be a lot of discussion about that tomorrow, but no decisions," Burns said, referring to Wednesday's NATO defense ministers meeting.

"It's a very complicated issue, how you put these two very different military missions together," Burns said. "But there will be a number of people who will support — we will certainly support — a direction to the military leaders of the alliance to go and look at this question and decide how we can best do that — give us a sense of how you put these two missions together."

Burns said he expects the alliance's military leaders to present answers at

a planned February meeting of defense ministers in Nice, France.

He said integration of the forces could happen by 2005 or 2006.

The ambassador also said the United States is pressing NATO's newer members who once were part of the Soviet bloc, like Romania, to donate older Soviet-era military equipment that is urgently needed to equip Iraqi forces.

In the shorter term, the United States is pushing its NATO allies to accelerate the deployment of extra peacekeepers to Afghanistan.

Ahead of two days of talks beginning Wednesday, U.S. officials said they were seeking commitments that the alliance would expand its peacekeeping operation into western Afghanistan, which would free up U.S. troops to hunt Taliban and al-Qaida remnants hiding out in the south and east.

"NATO is behind. We should have been in the west by now, and we're not," Burns told reporters earlier at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

NATO allies reinforced their peacekeeping mission from 6,500 troops to more than 9,000 for the Afghan elections held over the weekend.

Despite that temporary deployment, the alliance is slipping behind with plans to expand its longer-term peacekeeping operation into the troubled western provinces from its bases in the Afghan capital, Kabul, and five northern cities.

Audit says sick leave abused by Oregon's state employees

Poor incentives to save leave result in more than 40 percent of days taken for reasons other than illness

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM — Oregon state employees use sick leave more often than their counterparts in other states, a state audit says.

The report issued Tuesday by Secretary of State's Bill Bradbury's office also said Oregon is one of only six states in which most employees have no incentive to save unused sick leave.

For every 100 hours of paid working time, auditors said, state agencies pay for 2.3 hours of sick leave. The national average is 2.0 hours.

The report estimated the value of the above-average rate of sick leave at between \$14 and \$16 million.

"Reducing sick leave use may or may not result in immediate savings," auditors said, noting that less use "would reduce the amount of unproductive time for which employees are paid and further eliminate indirect costs associated with sick leave," such as overtime pay.

Most full-time workers accrue eight hours of sick leave per month, which they use for personal or family illness or injury.

The report said 44 other states provide financial rewards for employees to conserve unused sick leave. Because most Oregon state workers have little incentive to save their leave, auditors said, they might see it as a "use it or lose it" benefit.

A relatively small number of Oregon state employees receive some added benefit for unused sick leave when they retire. That's limited to

workers hired before 1996 who choose one of several retirement options.

For other employees, any unused sick leave balance is canceled when an employee quits or retires.

A national study indicated that more than 40 percent of sick leave is taken because of stress, personal needs or just to use up the benefit and not because of illness, the report said.

In other states, incentives for saving the benefit include reimbursing employees for some or all of the cash value of unused sick leave when they retire or quit, and converting unused leave into additional vacation time.

Auditors said paid "leave bank" programs, which give workers a block of leave hours instead of separate vacation, personal, and sick leave, also can be effective in reducing unscheduled absences.

In a written response to the audit, the state Department of Administrative Services said it generally agreed with the recommendations.

Kathie Best, president of the Oregon Public Employees Union, said other forms of time off "rather than just sick leave should probably be addressed."

She said the biggest state employee union has been interested in working with the state toward flexible scheduling by which employees could adjust work schedules to make up for time taken off for illness or other needs.

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Disney reproductions & original sketches mixed with historical University photographs

Oct 13th @ 4pm
Adell McMillan Gallery
Child Care Development Center Birthday Party

Oct 16th
Adell McMillan Gallery
Parents Weekend Brunch 9:30 am to 11 am

Oct 19th
EMU Ampitheater
Donald Duck Birthday Party Everyone welcome. Music, Prizes and Cake 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

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