

# The arrogance of Peterson's style of government

On September 10, 1987, the people of Ontario made a grave mistake: they gave Premier David Peterson a majority government. Majority governments throughout Canadian history have traditionally resulted in conservative, cautious policies and a lack of sensitivity to contemporary issues. Ontarians, having recently endured the blandness of the Davis majority government, should have known better. Peterson, unfortunately, has added arrogance to the customary banality of Ontario majority governments.

Mr. Peterson's imperious attitude was on display in a recent interview with *Excalibur*. When queried about the sorry state of funding for post-secondary education, Peter replied, "The more your institutions whine about underfunding, the more they lose their credibility." What do you suggest we do, Mr. Peterson, when the university share of the budgetary pie drops from 5.92% in 1977-78 to a paltry 4.72% last years? That amounts to a \$359 million shortfall in government support in the year preceding an expected influx of students caused by the introduction of the new four-year high school system. To top it off, the plight of universities did not even merit a platitude in the government's recent throne speech. Correction, Mr. Premier: we're not whining, we're fuming. What do you expect us to do, stay quiet and behave like good little institutions?

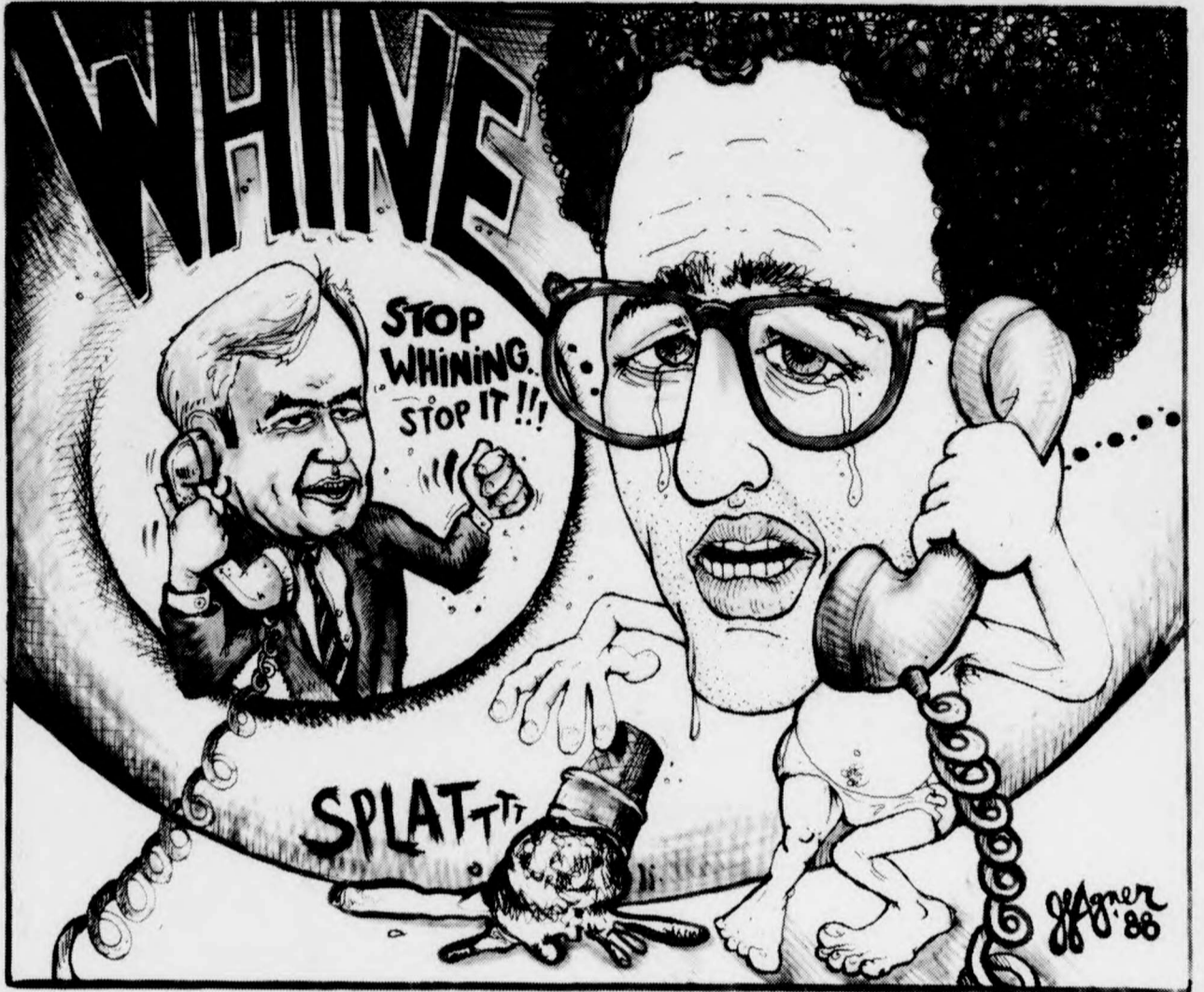
In Mr. Peterson's style of government, arrogance translates itself into selective amnesia. Who can forget (except Mr. Peterson, of course) the magnanimous Premier walking among hundreds of students at U of T's Convocation Hall during last year's election campaign while they scrambled to find housing for the year. Don't worry, Peterson told the crowd, the government is sensitive to your concerns. We promise to build 5,000 resident spaces across Ontario in order to deal with the shortage of affordable housing.

And what has become of this promise? Nothing. When asked when he plans to implement the student housing programme, the Premier casually explained that he did not know. Is there a time frame? No. It's so easy to be coy when you know you're going to be in power for the next three years.

Peterson did not confine this blatant insensitivity to university issues. Before Joan Smith became Solicitor General, she openly admitted that if the government let the municipalities decide the question of Sunday shopping, it would amount to a cop-out. When confronted with her remarks, Mr. Peterson curtly replied, "She's learned to shut her mouth since she's entered the cabinet." In a nutshell, Peterson's remarks sum up the problem with majority governments. The Canadian parliamentary system discourages internal party dissent by stressing the need for strict party discipline. In the context of a minority government, which receives significant input from opposition sources, this kind of partisanship is tolerable. With a majority government, however, party discipline can be dangerous, especially on issues of conscience. Perhaps the best solution in such cases is an open vote in Parliament, during which MPPs can express themselves outside the constraints of party policy.

Mr. Peterson's haughty attitude thinly conceals his insecurity over his indecisive handling of the Sunday shopping issue. Face it, Mr. Peterson, your decision was a cop-out. Peterson's record provides a perfect example of the difference between minority and majority governments. The Liberal minority government seemed sensitive to the financial needs of universities, and they raised total operating grants of universities by 16% from 1985-87. This year, however, universities received a disappointing 6.4% given the Council of Ontario Universities' estimate of 10% as the bare minimum required to prevent further deterioration of post-secondary education. Mr. Peterson's commitment to post-secondary education seems to have evaporated with his minority government.

Recent Canadian political history, however, demonstrates that majority governments can be forced to pay attention through public pressure. The Mulroney government's controversial plan to de-index old age pensions was trampled in a wave of outrage by a number of senior citizen groups. Next Thursday (March 10), the Ontario Federation of Students plans to hold a demonstration at Queen's Park to protest this province's record of university underfunding. Even arrogant and insensitive majority governments can be made to listen. But only if we whine loud enough!



## LETTERS

We will publish, space permitting, letters under 250 words. They must be typed, triple-spaced, accompanied by writer's name and phone number. We may edit for length. Libellous material will be rejected. Deliver to 111 Central Square during business hours.

### Excal photo misleading

The picture showing myself next to a sign endorsing the Osgoode cafeteria boycott is disturbingly misleading. It appears to indicate that I support the boycott. I do not and have no intention of supporting such a movement.

Yours truly,  
Joel Scoler

### I'm for hockey suds: reader

Dear Editor,  
As a fan of Yeomen hockey and a regular spectator at home games, I felt compelled to address the issue of alcohol in the ice palace raised in Karim Hajee's article, (February 25th).

Clearly the students of York are once more suffering under the petty, bureaucratic whim of another puerile, dictatorial administrator.

Like Hajee, I have attended numerous Yeomen hockey games. In the last three years there have been only a handful of games where attendance is such that the consumption of beer is even noticeable. These are the so called "big games," the play-offs, the UoT and the Western games where the support of the many students who stay away from the more predictable regular season games is crucial to the team's success. I have never witnessed a single violent, dangerous, or even mildly aggressive incident at the ice palace, (off the ice!)

As spectators we suffer under what are nothing short of disgraceful conditions—it is always cold, the PA is inaudible, the refreshment area is too small. In comes a new 'manger' and what is his primary concern?

Not to address these appalling inadequacies, but to impose his personal, puritanistic, moral standards on those who have never been the source of any problem. Cox was bent on imposing his will even if he had not dug up a 1979 University policy.

I am at a loss for words to express my absolute revulsion at Cox's actions. Just where do his priorities lie? Whose interest is he trying to serve? Certainly not the interest of the athletic programme at York. I wonder what he really feels his job to be. When he goes to bed at night can he really feel that he is serving the interests of the York community? Mr. Cox you are working at a University, not a kindergarten.

It is my appeal to all those involved to start taking positive action to serve this community instead of taking the easy way out, and it is my appeal to all those who agree with my sentiments to protest in the strongest terms over this latest action. It is time for the students here to stop giving in to this type of dogmatic administrative crap. Obviously people such as Greg Cox have no interest in making this a proud and spirited University—well I do.

Yours sincerely  
Phil Downes

### Socialists state their case

Dear Editor:  
We are writing in response to the very confused and incoherent letter by Michael Kay attacking Socialist Worker, the paper of the International Socialists (in *Excalibur*, Feb. 25/88). The target of Mr. Kay's venom is the paper's coverage of recent events in Israel. Unfortunately, he does not appear to have read the article. We contend that any analysis of the long history of conflict in Israel and its occupied territo-

ries must be founded upon an understanding of the origins of that state. And here I simply quote from the article in question: "The roots of the (current) conflict are much deeper than simply the conditions in Gaza. They grow out of the very policy of the State of Israel, which began with the expulsion of the entire Palestinian people in 1947/48. Almost one million Palestinians were driven from their homes by the actions of the Zionist settlers. The massacre of Deir Yassin and the bulldozing of Palestinian homes were the hallmark of the new state."

Israel is today the guardian of American interests in the Middle East. It is the largest recipient of U.S. military and non-military aid. In addition, Israel is the largest arms supplier to American-backed regimes around the world—for example, to such notorious regimes as Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. Israel also has very close economic ties with the racist regime in South Africa.

These are the roots of the current conflict which has resulted in 75 Palestinian deaths (and Mr. Kay praises this as 'restraint?') The racist foundations of the state of Israel have given rise to a courageous resistance movement by the Palestinian people. We support their right to self-determination (just as we completely and unequivocally defend the right of black South Africans to resist apartheid by any means necessary). Does this mean we are anti-Semitic? No. Our politics are anti-Zionist. As socialists we oppose all forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, anti-gay bigotry. We believe that socialism is based upon full equality—and for that reason we also oppose the state-capitalist regimes in Russia, China and so on. Moreover, we have a long and proud record of opposition to fascist and anti-semitic organizations.

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