

\$100 tuition hike part of larger cutback plan

By ERIC McMILLAN

Where do the government's ideas come from?

In the case of Ontario, a lot of them can be traced to a small group of businessmen, media personalities, and politicians headed by Treasurer Darcy McKeough.

That group formed a committee whose report — the "McKeough-Henderson Report" (officially called the Special Program Review) — was released in November 1975 but is affecting students now more than ever.

Are your classes overcrowded? McKeough's brain-trust said in 1975, when some universities already had hiring freezes, that the number of professors should be cut back.

Having trouble finding the course you want? The committee recommended that community colleges phase out certain courses, and that no new graduate programs be funded.

Worried about making enough to pay next September's higher education costs? This is the group that advocated raising fees 65 per cent over three to four years. The first step — a hundred dollar jump (16 per cent) — is being implemented just slightly behind schedule. Community college students are being hit for an even higher proportion of the proposed hike — 30 per cent to be exact.

Don't look to student aid for fast relief either. The Ontario government made its first moves towards the committee's all-loan plan: A graduating student could face a debt of a thousand dollars for every year of study. The McKeough group also recommended lopping a thousand dollars off the maximum possible grant per student.

STUDENT PROTEST

The McKeough-Henderson Report affected students directly in one other way — it led to the largest student protest in four years at Queen's Park.

The anti-cutbacks demonstration was January 21, 1976. Since then the Ontario Federation of Students has become convinced the report, though not officially government policy, is in fact being used as a guideline by the Ontario government to trim back post-secondary education.

What one labor group called the "most reactionary document prepared in Ontario in the 1970's" is being implemented. The Ontario Public Service Employees Union warned this would "set back social development in Ontario more than 30 years."

The committee's terms of references indicate what was expected of it. The Order-in-Council says that because the government

doesn't want public spending to become an unnecessary burden, the Special Program Review should "enquire into ways and means of restraining the costs of Government."

Studying how to cut unnecessary costs is surely commendable, but the other side of it — how to raise revenues — isn't mentioned. The implication in the order is that the way to save is to cut out services.

The first page of the report elaborates:

"World-wide inflation, combined with rising levels of domestic unemployment, seriously threatens Canada's economy. Governments have introduced new programs to create more jobs and have sought to alleviate hardships resulting from the rapidly rising cost of goods and services. This pattern has become a vicious circle, because one of the consequences of increased government spending at current levels is that it fuels the very inflation governments are fighting."

The committee accepts the analysis of Canada's economic crisis which says there's no way out of the inflation-unemployment cycle except "to face up to the difficult job of cutting back."

By the second chapter it becomes clear why the report raised labour's ire. Not only could inflation be blamed on too many jobs but high wages are attacked with a vigor that would do the AIB proud. The section called "Inflationary Factors" deals exclusively with the need to hold the line on wages for provincial employees.

The pro-business bias of the committee becomes rapidly evident. Chapter Three has been called the "What's good for General Motors" chapter. The trend is strongly towards returning services from public to private control.

The parks system, for example, might better expand under the direction of "privately operated camping organizations rather than (under) the Province."

Moreover, "the province should explore the possibility of transferring back to the private sector some of the activities that it



Implementor of tuition fee increase, Harry Parrott, Ontario minister of colleges and universities.

currently undertakes."

And in case you thought we're wearing seat belts these days because the government wants to save us pain, the report states:

SEAT BELTS

"The universal use of seat belts would reduce the number of injuries and deaths in Ontario by 20 per cent, producing an estimated saving in hospital and medical costs of \$35 million annually."

Anyway, the villain is not the government, it seems. In the section on collective bargaining, the committee concludes that labour demands themselves cause unemployment and other social ills:

"Increasing labour costs lead to price increases and ultimately to decreased consumption and growth in the unemployment rate. The housing and automobile industries are suffering from this sequence of events at the present time. The solution, of course, lies in moderation, either voluntary or imposed."

If that last line sounds a little ominous, there's good reason. The report goes on to recommend wage guidelines be established by Parliament each year. Two months later on January 14, 1976, the Ontario government jumped on the

federal government's wage and price controls bandwagon.

The McKeough report had even specifically opposed cost-of-living clauses which allow wages to rise with increasing prices.

Students are doubly vulnerable to the thrusts of the "McKeough-Henderson Report", both as consumers of a service (education) and as job-seekers each summer and after graduation.

The report argues that student tuitions at universities and colleges have decreased over the last few years compared to the increasing public support of the institutions. This is attributed to Ontario's "open-door policy" which supposedly keeps fees down in order that merit alone allows entrance to post-secondary education.

The government's response was released in November 1976 shortly before the tuition announcements. It lists the recommendations of the McKeough-Henderson Report and states the government's agreement or disagreement with each of the items. All the post-secondary education proposals were either agreed to immediately or deferred for a later decision.

Following are the responses which most directly affect students:

—The government put off

deciding about lifting its control of tuition fees but has since announced hikes for next year:

— The government imposed a two to three year freeze on funding for graduate programs;

— Recommendations concerning student aid changes were officially deferred but the government went partway by reducing the maximum grant by \$200 and increasing the loan portion by the same amount.

— The report asked for a bursary program for "outstanding students from low-income families" if the all-loan plan was implemented. The government deferred decision until after a report from another advisory committee.

The Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) saw the changes in student aid as a ploy to justify higher tuitions. According to an OFS National Student Day publication,

"All calls for higher tuition are accompanied by a plea for a revised student aid programme to protect students in low income families... Strangely enough, in the nine provinces where fees have increased this year, there has been no significant change in student aid schemes."

Apart from being hit in the pocketbook this year and next, students face difficult times upon graduation, if the committee's report is further implemented. Among those occupations which would be cut back or held at present levels are faculty, campus workers, university administrative staff, doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and public servants in general.

Last week saw the first anniversary of the January 21 anti-cutbacks rally at Queen's Park. While student leaders seem split over whether to celebrate or to observe a minute of silence for the lack of action since that time, the government has been moving ahead implementing much of the McKeough-Henderson Report.

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