

Free Speech

Take care of Medicare

Universal Medicare in Ontario is being slowly but steadily eroded by a segment of the medical profession and, more significantly, by the present government of Ontario who by default are knowingly allowing the program to erode. Unfortunately, this is all occurring with the unknowing aid of a silently complacent public who will, in the long run, suffer the consequences.

In Canada, Medicare began in Saskatchewan when Tommy Douglas' CCF government first introduced a plan in the 1940s which was fully operational and successful by 1962 despite virulent opposition by doctors and insurance companies. It was not until 1968 that the Federal government offered a voluntary program to the provinces which the Ontario Conservative government of the day reluctantly joined.

In Ontario today, Medicare, which was fought for so long and hard, is in imminent danger as the doctors and the government push health care further and further toward the open 'marketplace'. OHIP premiums in Ontario are the highest in Canada: \$240 for individuals, \$480 for families, and increasing at a greater rate than any other province; this in comparison to Saskatchewan where health care is free to all.

Perhaps a more serious long term problem is the rate at which Ontario doctors are 'opting out' of the program as well as the fact that they are allowed to opt out at all. At present, nearly 20 per cent of all doctors in the province have opted out and the rate of doctors opting out is increasing rapidly. Some communities, such as Peterborough, are left with only 40 per cent of their doctors charging OHIP rates; some smaller communities have no doctors charging OHIP fees at all. Those doctors who have opted out of OHIP are charging up to 42 per cent more than OHIP fees. As can be expected, the people who are suffering most are those who are poor, handicapped or unemployed—precisely the people who are generally in most need of health care. The extra billing, along with excessively high premiums, amount to nothing more than a regressive tax on the poor and the sick.

The government's unwilling-

ness to stem the erosion of Medicare and its apparent collusion with that segment of the medical profession that wishes to see OHIP destroyed clearly indicates an intention to put the care of people's health back into the realm of 19th century free enterprise. This is particularly ironic in that the great bastion of free enterprise today, the United States, is itself slowly moving toward universal health care based on the Canadian model.

The arguments against Medicare that are most frequently put forward by its opponents are that doctors under OHIP are underpaid, that medical services are 'overused' and that the program is generally too costly. Doctors in Ontario presently earn an average of \$80,000 gross per year and about \$50,000 net per year. One is immediately hard pressed to feel much sympathy for a profession which is so 'underpaid'. However, there may be a case for some of the doctors who receive less than the average, particularly the hard working general practitioners. I agree with many who feel that doctors should be very well paid because of the invaluable service they provide; however, it would be unethical if their extra pay were to come primarily from the pockets of the poor and the sick, which is increasingly becoming the case. If certain practitioners deserve an increase in pay, it should come from the public purse via OHIP not from extra billing of those who can ill afford the extra fee.

Finally, the government would have us believe that giving universal health care to the populace is overly expensive. This is certainly the most incredible and short sighted excuse that could be used to kill Medicare. A nation's future is surely dependent on the health of its populous and surely the present Conservative government should realize what the 19th century industrialists found out: that a healthy worker can produce more profit.

In an advanced and wealthy society, health care must surely be a right rather than a privilege only for those who can afford it. The right to health care should be free and universally available.

Duane Muires

York Unions

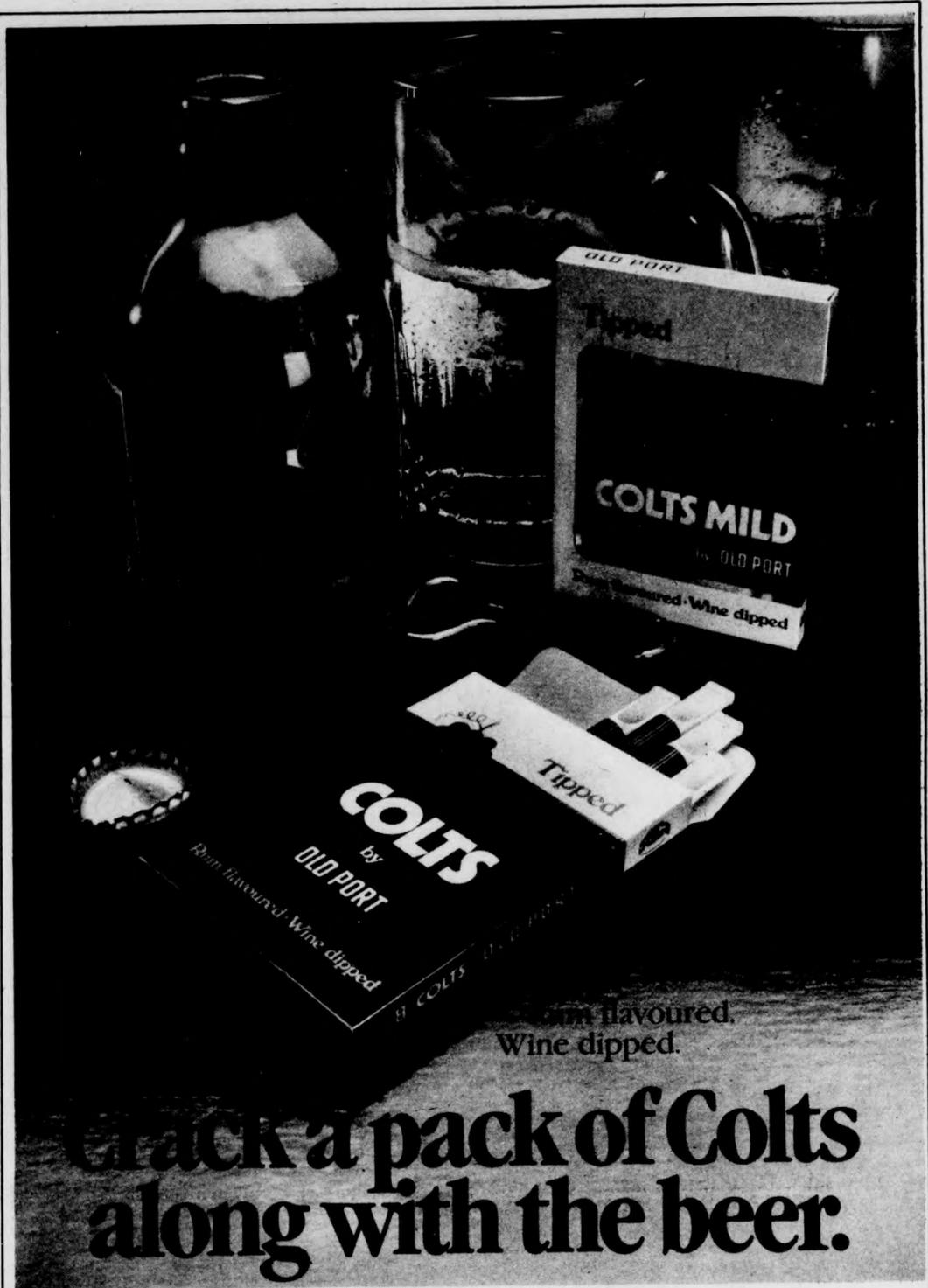
Once again it seems that the Administration at York is incapable of reaching agreement within the normal process of collective bargaining. First the York University Staff Association (YUSA) was forced to go to the length of taking a strike vote before the Administration would come up with an acceptable offer. Negotiations with the Graduate Assistants' Association (GAA) have broken down and the parties are about to go to conciliation. Now it seems that the York University Faculty Association (YUFA) will be forced to go the same route to show the Administration that we are serious about our demands.

The administration has refused to agree to effective means of challenging improper appointments of faculty. In a magnificent show of contempt, the Board of Governors has just made a faculty appointment which broke all the rules they agreed to in the present collective agreement. And then they wonder why we want a change in the powers of the arbitrator.

The administration has flatly refused to bargain with us over matters relating to Tenure and Promotion. This is an area crucial to all faculty members. YUFA believes that it must ensure that the process works fairly and efficiently. The Administration informs us that they prefer the present system, in spite of numerous examples of its malfunctioning.

On matters of money we are still far apart. York faculty salaries are among the lowest in the province. And yet our desire to improve our relative position has fallen on deaf ears. The latest Administration offer of 3½ per cent scale, plus ¼ per cent merit plus career progress increment does not even come close to keeping up with the cost of living.

Why is the Administration's record of collective bargaining so bad? YUFA does not relish the air of uncertainty and disruption caused by prolonged negotiations and threats of concerted action. Why do they insist on a show of strength before they will negotiate effectively? YUFA sincerely hopes that such a policy of brinkmanship will not result in jeopardizing the entire educational process at York.



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