

of forming such an economic union. Japan has found this plan very attractive, given the flight of corporations to set up shop in other countries due to cheaper costs.

Finally, what about the American market? It's ironic that those advocates of free trade who accuse the opposition of scare-mongering tactics, indulge in the politics of fear themselves. These advocates charge that the opposition's over-emotional campaigning of becoming the 51st state does not deal with the agreement itself.

Yet those very same people passionately argue that it's too late now to go back on the deal, and if it did Canada would be the laughing stock of the world. They also point to the growing protectionism in the US, saying that if we don't secure access now, Congress will slowly build up the trade walls keeping Canadian goods out.

Both fears are probably greatly over-exaggerated, and unfortunately such emotion can sometimes obscure the disclosure of the real issues surrounding the deal. A lot of questions still persist, and sadly enough, candidates from all three political parties are not offering sufficient answers.

The opposition parties have recently been effective, particularly the Liberals, simply because they have made this a one-issue campaign. Now it's time for both sides to constructively debate the agreement itself, if that's not asking too much from this election campaign.

An issue, however, which the three candidates were quite decisive on was abortion. Lambrinos outlined the NDP position of supporting abortion on demand, saying the issue was something to deal with solely between a woman and her doctor. She said that her personal position was pro-choice, and that people have to come to understand that women should have the right to make a decision about their own bodies. She added that if abortion were made a criminal offence, "You'll see a lot of women going to prison."

Kaplan said that he did support abortion on demand, but only up to a certain point in the pregnancy. He said the rights of the fetus must be recognized, but was not specific about a time-frame.

Sebastiano did not outline any legislation he would like to see Parliament pass. He did, however, tell the audience that he identifies more strongly with the pro-life movement.

## University funding

Unfortunately, only one question was asked about university funding — an important issue which is rarely identified in a federal campaign. Voters usually believe that the provinces are solely responsible for university funding. But the federal government, through its transfer payments, funds a large part of post secondary education.

Over the years though, the federal contribution to universities has been steadily dropping. In 1979-1980, federal payments to provinces provided 52 per cent of the post secondary budget, but in 1986-87 that dropped to 43 per cent.

The Conservative government's Bill C-96 is partially to blame, reducing transfer payments by 2 per cent annually. According to a report put out by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, the federal Tories have cut at least \$1 billion to the post secondary education sector.

The sorry state of university funding can be blamed on the provinces as well. Before bloc funding was introduced by the Trudeau government in the late '70s, transfer payments were earmarked for specific ministries. Today, though, the provincial government often diverts funds from the post-secondary envelope in order to make up for shortfalls in other budgets like health care.

Lobbyists on behalf of universities are asking that the federal government pass legislation which would force the provincial government to spend a certain amount on universities. Such legislation, the lobby groups argue, would also ensure that Ottawa's financial support does not fall beyond a certain point.

So far, the NDP has been the only party to come out with a platform on university funding. Lambrinos said that it consists of reinstating a 50-50 split on university funding between the provinces and the federal government. It also calls for a one-time infusion of federal funds to



ILLUSTRATION: BRIAN KROG

redress the chronic underfunding of post-secondary institutions throughout the country. And it also promotes the creation of flexible education programmes like co-ops and part-time programmes.

Kaplan said the Liberal would increase transfer payments, and depending on the year, ensure that the provinces spend a specified amount of transfer payments on universities.

Sebastiano, however, said that this was "provincial jurisdiction and we can't tell what the provinces do." Actually that's not the case at all. Ottawa can easily put such conditions on transfer payments if it chooses to do so. It abandoned this practice due to provincial pressure for bloc funding. But all too often the provinces have abused this privilege by transferring funds from one sector to the other. Legislation to prevent such abuses is desperately needed.

And then there's the area of student assistance, an issue which unfortunately was not raised at the forum. For the past five years, Ottawa has refused to increase Canada Student Loans from its current level of \$105 per week. This kind of assistance barely pays for tuition fees — let alone living allowance. Presently provincial governments are forced to make up the difference in order to meet the financial needs of students.

Too often campaigns tend to distort rather than reveal the issues of the day. The predominant issue of this campaign is, of course, free trade. And while Canadians can pat themselves on the back for conducting a far more issue-oriented election than our neighbour to the south, a one-issue campaign poses real problems. It obscures pressing issues like the environment, daycare, and abortion, and literally wipes out important policy questions like universities and immigration. And what ever happened to Meech Lake?

This election is essentially a prebiscite on free trade, and the Liberal Party has been especially effective in making it so. That's too bad, because voters should be looking at the parties as a whole and not at just what either side is saying about the deal.

Newspapers such as *The Financial Post* and the *Toronto Star* have completely disagreed on every point of the deal, yet they do have a consensus on one point: the government should have made a separate plebiscite for free trade in order to help the public better understand what the agreement is all about. Now it looks like the public will get that hearing, but critical issues will be forced to take a back seat as the parties start focusing all their campaign efforts on the deal.

*Women should have the right to make a decision about their own bodies . . . If abortion was made a criminal offence "you'll see a lot of women going to prison."*

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