

EXCALIBUR INTERVIEW

With William Davis

Ontario Premier William Davis spoke with Excalibur last week following an appearance on campus. He discussed differential tuition fees for foreign students, higher fees for everyone in 1977-1978, cutbacks and Stuart Smith among other things.

By IAN MULGREW

EXCALIBUR: Let me start off by asking you about the differential fee system for foreign students that your government is proposing. What is it?

DAVIS: We're now suggesting, no not suggesting, we're developing a policy whereby foreign students will pay, I can't give you the exact amount, but it will be something more than a Canadian Student.

It's done with the knowledge that if a student in Ontario wishes to go to Michigan, and there are some who go to Michigan, they pay full fees. In fact if they go to Michigan State or Michigan their fees will be, I'm not sure but you can get the figures, but it's somewhere around \$2600. So the foreign student coming here will still be paying less.

There is no question that there are some who come here because of the economics. It's cheaper to get an education.

Those students who are here on exchange programmes recognized by the Federal government, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) etc., do not pay the increase. And it's policy, I think, in Manitoba they've gone to a quota policy, Alberta is thinking about doing something with respect to fees, the United Kingdom has done something and every state in the Union. And it's a policy I think that is an equitable one.

We're not saying that you can't come. We're not establishing quotas. We're just saying to students outside Canada that you'll pay a greater share of the cost.

It's still not the full cost, whereas if you were going to a lot of American Universities you'd be required to pay the total cost.

EXCALIBUR: It sounds like Ontario is doing it just because the Americans and everyone else are doing it.

DAVIS: No, no. We're doing it because we're looking for ways to make our fee structure here as equitable as possible and you really can't say that what was going on was equitable in terms of the taxpayers of Ontario. It really wasn't.

EXCALIBUR: What then of out of province, Canadian students?

DAVIS: No, problem. Their fees will not change.

EXCALIBUR: Yes, but since they are also a burden on the Ontario taxpayer, why shouldn't their fees go up?

DAVIS: Well, because they're Canadian. And the other provinces in Canada do not charge Ontario students a tariff when they go to their provinces.

EXCALIBUR: But don't you think that we have a moral obligation to educate the students from the third world?

DAVIS: Oh yes, and we're not stopping them. But you'll find that some third world students who come here do not always return to the third world with their educational

experience. We have people coming here in grade thirteen, not from the third world, in order to gain admission to Ontario universities just because of the straight economics and if the federal government were to decide in it's wisdom, and we would certainly not object, to expand their programme say, the CIDA programme, then they would qualify...No problem with that, none whatsoever.



David Saltmarsh photo

Tuition increases are still being discussed. There hasn't been a tuition increase since 1972.

EXCALIBUR: What about undergraduate foreign students who have finished their degree and will do graduate work next year, will they be labelled as "beginning a program" and therefore have to pay the increased fees?

DAVIS: In other words he's completed his undergraduate work, has his degree, and you are asking me if the new fee structure would pertain to him working on his PhD, I honestly don't know, I'd have to get that for you.

EXCALIBUR: Several federal MP's have come out in reply to the high student unemployment this summer, calling for increases in the loan-grant programs that are offered. Joe Clark, I believe was the most recent, what's your thoughts on this?

DAVIS: The only thing that they deal with is the loan. I haven't seen any such statement. We think that the numbers were down this year, the number of students employed, but the economic return to the students who were employed was just as great as in years before. So if someone is suggesting there is a shortage of loan money and Joe is saying that there has to be enough money, our policy has always been that, if a student can show that he couldn't get employment over the summer then they would qualify, so I don't think that there is a problem, but I hadn't heard what Joe had said.

EXCALIBUR: Why is the government starting to cut back in the universities? The sixties saw untold thousands being pumped into universities and huge institutions springing up, and now in 1976, the same government has decided to cut back on them.

DAVIS: No it started before that, in terms of percentage budget increases, we faced, and I was there, I was part of it. We faced a numbers situation which today has stabilized. The percentage growth in 1964, 65, 66 through to about 1969 and 1970 was much higher in percentage terms than today, we were short physical plant, and we had to

accommodate increasing percentage of students in the age group who wished to get a post-secondary education, whether it was the universities or the community colleges, so that was part of the growth pattern.

But we have accommodated that growth, we're not being faced by many universities or colleges saying they need a major plant facility. It's by and large provided, there are exceptions and you know some people say you're cutting back, well, we're not increasing it as much as we did, I won't argue that.

But to say that we are cutting back is not really a fair way of saying it. I mean you're obviously interested in journalism and proper use of the language, you know...well we're talking about health cutbacks, I can give you a better example, how can you say that there are cutbacks in the field of health when the ministry's budget is up 500 million dollars, this year.

Take a look at the budget of colleges and universities in terms of percentage increase, colleges and universities this current fiscal year you can argue this, the administration will argue one figure we'll argue another, but the fact remains that it is somewhere in that neighbourhood of between 16 and 18 per cent. That can hardly be described as a cut back.

EXCALIBUR: What are your views on the National Students Day which is being put on to protest these non-cutbacks?

DAVIS: I think, you know I'm interested in students views and making their thoughts known to governments and a boards of governors and what have you. I really couldn't support the concept of taking a day off classes to demonstrate you're point of view, I don't think it proves anything. And I've lived through a lot of demonstrations in my day.

EXCALIBUR: What do you think about the rapid unionization of faculties that seems to be sweeping the province and the whole idea of the university becoming labour oriented?

DAVIS: I don't know, I must confess that I haven't really thought about it in that respect. I mean I am vitally interested in universities, you don't spend nine years of your life doing almost nothing else and not be interested, in spite of some of the criticisms I may receive. I think that my interest was and still is in the function of programme quality and I'd have to think that through. I don't know, is it true? Is it the Ontario Faculty Association? I'm one of those that is reluctant to express a point of view until he knows more about it.

EXCALIBUR: 1977 will see the lifting of the freeze on university tuitions, will the government move to raise the fees or haven't you discussed it yet?

DAVIS: It's still being discussed but I'm not going to lead anyone astray and say that it's not being discussed and the possibility and I mean, one of the things you have to consider is that there hasn't been a tuition increase since 1972. And the students portion now amounts to 16-17 per cent of total cost, so you now a lot of people would suggest that we should take it up and...well, its an option. It's one of those things that we have to discuss.

EXCALIBUR: I'd like to leave academia for a while and talk about some of the other things that are happening. For instance the Canadian Labour Congress's [CLC] day of protest. What are your views on this?

DAVIS: It's irresponsible. I don't think that it will accomplish anything. It will be a great waste. And it's going to be a hardship on the large numbers in the membership. I just can't, obviously, be in support of it.

EXCALIBUR: What sort of headway has been made in cleaning up the asbestos mines in Northern Ontario?

DAVIS: A great deal of headway and our requirements here are probably the most stringent certainly in North America, and probably in western Europe. We recently had the Hand commission report and by in large it received the support of the government and we'll be dealing with it in a very positive way. And this deals with that whole general area. I'll send you a copy.

EXCALIBUR: What about the Right Honourable Bette Stevenson? I noticed in the

Globe that she would be taking on some of the responsibilities from another ministry.

DAVIS: Well the Hand committee made certain recommendations and they're being looked at. I'll have something more to say about that in two or three weeks. I'd love to be able to give you the exclusive but I can't.

EXCALIBUR: What about Stuart Smith?

DAVIS: Well I'm very reluctant to comment on any of the other leaders in a personal sense. I think that you would have to, as a journalist, assess what he has done so far and the Liberal party where it is going, and if you can describe where it's going, their stands on issues and their change of stands on issues, you know that's what journalism is all about, and I leave it to you, to make your own interpretations.

You know, I'll have to at some point in time but I won't do it here. With that thing (the tape recorder) running I certainly won't.

EXCALIBUR: When would you like to call the next election, do you have any plans or will you sit with the minority government?

DAVIS: No, I think my statement at the time was, and still is, that I think the people expect the minority government to work. It has not been easy, but I don't have any plans to create an artificial issue to go to the polls.

There are some people who would advise us to do that, but I just won't. But you know if some issue emerges in the house and we feel strongly as a government, that something has to be done, that there has to be some determination with other people, and that situation can always emerge, I can't say when and I can't tell you what it might be, it's just that it needn't be a defeat in the house that would send us to the polls.

But I'm not planning any cosmetics in the next three or four weeks. One of the other leaders was suspicious that I was, I don't think he is now. He's not as suspicious after one of his caucus crossed the house.



David Saltmarsh photo

I think the CLC protest is irresponsible. It will be a great waste of time.

EXCALIBUR: What about the results of the Swedish election, it was quite a blow to socialism?

DAVIS: It takes some people longer to learn than others. It took many years there (44). It took British Columbia three or four years, how long was Barrett in power? It is my hope that the province of Ontario never has to learn that very bitter lessons. No, you'd better not use the word bitter.

EXCALIBUR: What issues do you feel will become prominent in the next provincial election?

DAVIS: Well, if I knew I'm not sure that I would necessarily tell you as I am sure that there are two other guys that would just hang on every word and I just don't intend to tell them. No, I don't know. I'm not holding out on you.

A lot depends on when it is.



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