

Bob Clark SOCREDS

A Social Credit government would make only one change in the Department of Advanced Education—they would eliminate it.

Bob Clark, leader of the Alberta Social Credit Party spoke to the midway between stops on a tour of Edmonton shopping centers. He outlined Social Credit policy concerning advanced education.

"There is no Santa Claus. Students should have a sense of paying towards their education."

The Socreds would replace the department with a post-secondary education commission, consisting of "a very few people." It would have representatives from both the community and the university. Clark said government people tend to take over a group they are represented on. Institutions would be given more control of their own affairs with the commission acting as a buffer between universities, the community, and the government.



Tuition fees would be kept at 10% of the total cost of University education. "There is no Santa Claus," said Clark, "students should have a sense of paying towards their education." He called the Grantham Commission's suggestion of financing fees "idiotic." He said his party was in favor of an adequate student assistance program.

Quotas are "ridiculous" in some faculties according to Clark, especially in engineering, forestry, and commerce which are tied to growth industries. "This government seems to be anti-post-secondary despite the fact they've all had their chance," he said. "They forget that most of their front bench people have benefited from a university education."

Student loans would be made more available and a Social Credit would be willing to write off a portion of the loan for students who go to work in underserved areas. For summer student employment, they would start an ecology crew for students who cannot do other work.

Grant Notley NDP

Gateway: What do you see as the major issues in the upcoming election?

Notley: I suppose there a number of issues that Albertans will want to send a message to the government on, on the March Fourteenth. One would be the whole question of housing. We have the highest priced housing in Canada and we've now reached the point where even people out of ten don't earn enough to qualify for mortgage or don't own a home of their own. I think that's an important issue. Surely the cutbacks that we've seen in health, education and social services is an issue.

We had 5000 students on the porsteps of the legislature last March and the students' tuition hasn't improved since then. We find cutbacks in a whole range of social services all over the province.

In addition to that I'd say that labor relations are an issue. For the first time we find that trade unions are not only paying lip service to the NDP but are

actively campaigning for us because we have bills like Bill 41 which makes second class citizens out of 40,000 Albertans.

We have a lot of discontent in rural Alberta because farmers are a little troubled about seeing their industry play second fiddle to the oil industry for far too long a time. We have a total lack of any long term economic development policy in this province and this is particularly inexcusable because with the Heritage Trust Fund we have an invaluable investment tool.

Gateway: You mentioned the Heritage Trust Fund. Could you tell us what your plans are for use of the fund?

Notley: First of all, the NDP argues that the fund should be controlled by the legislature, not the cabinet. In Saskatchewan they have a Heritage Trust Fund and it's the legislature that makes the decisions on how that money is invested. Secondly, we would like to see a number of major changes. Right now the bulk of the fund is tied up in short term securities. Much of the money is earning less than the inflation rate of 7.7%. A lot of it is in 30 day, 60 day and 90 bankrates. The banks that take it, loan it back to us at 14%, which doesn't make much sense for us. It makes a lot of sense for the banks but I didn't know that we were supposed to be using our Heritage Trust Fund to help chartered banks make even more money than they're presently making. We say that there should be an emphasis placed on renewable resources, and that's not something you can just talk about and not plan for.

We are calling for the creation of an economic council of Alberta so that we can do an inventory of what's possible in this province. We don't want to get into producing sports cars like the New Brunswick government did but there are certain things we can do.

It's obvious that we should begin shifting to renewable resources. That doesn't mean that we should ignore our non-renewable resources, but we're going to have to look forward to the day when the oil and gas are gone.

Gateway: Premier Lougheed claimed in a recent interview that there have been no cutbacks in post secondary education funding, but rather increases. Do you agree with his statement?

Notley: Well, first of all the premier is being rather mischievous in his statement because of course there have been cutbacks in the quality of services. We've debated this matter in the legislature many times. The Tories try to use the argument that there haven't been cutbacks because more money has been made available. That's true, but if the money made available doesn't equal the inflation rate, then the money doesn't buy as much and the inevitable result is that you have to cut back the services. This has occurred all across the province. We've had cutbacks in services because grants haven't kept pace with the inflation rate. That's the kind of elementary logic that even a Tory backbencher should be able to understand. I think it's just a massive insult to students at any post secondary institution in the province that you have the premier trying to use that kind of argument. If the inflation rate is 10% and you make available 7 or 8% there has to be a cutback in services. It's as simple as that.

Incidentally, last year when we discussed this matter in the legislature I discovered we ranked fourth among the provinces in per capita expenditure on post secondary education. The premier got up and said we ranked first. So we checked. We rank first by taking a 10 year composite average. In other words reaching right back into the past, including three years into the former government. Well, what happened 10 years ago is very interesting, but it's not terribly relevant today.

Other provinces have been moving ahead; Alberta is lagging behind. The fact is that we're allowing not just post secondary education, but the whole range of social services to slip back, because this government quite frankly isn't very interested in people.

Gateway: What do you think should be done to reconcile the financial problems of the U of A and other post secondary institutions?

Notley: Well, I think there are a couple

of major things that have to be done. We have to recognize that if we're going to have an inflation rate of 9 or 10% the funds available from the provincial government must at least equal the inflation rate. I think in addition to that we have to look at what has occurred in our post secondary institutions in the last four or five years. For example, we've seen the imposition of quotas in a number of faculties. I think there should be a quality improvement factor so that we can once again restore education to its proper place.

The share of the Alberta budget being allocated to education has dropped in recent years. We say that there should be at least a \$167 million increase in money allocated to education. That way we can restore the education system in this province to where it was when this government took office.

Gateway: What are your views on the recommendations of the Grantham Task Force?

Notley: We don't agree with the Grantham Task Force report. Their basic argument is that there should be a substantial increase in tuition fees at NAIT, SAIT and the colleges, and a lesser increase at the universities. They are presupposing that it's essential that the individual come up with a share of the cost of running these institutions.

The concern I've always had on this matter is that because the public pays for the bulk of the cost of operating post secondary institutions you don't want a fee level which tends to be a barrier for low income people. An increase of 50% for a person from a wealthy home doesn't mean much, but if that person comes from a low income home it can mean the difference between going to university and not going. Our view has always been that we should move towards the elimination of tuition fees, since the bulk of the system has to be financed by taxpayers anyway.

It is wrong in our view that we should have a tuition system which tends to make it more difficult for low income people to attend.

We also oppose the government's differential fee system. We think it's totally wrong, particularly for a university, which should be a cosmopolitan institution. After all, challenging the minds of students is part of the role of a university. It's important to have people from different creeds, colours and backgrounds.

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To increase fees for people from other lands is in my view not only poor politics. It borders on being immoral.

Gateway: One of the recommendations of the Grantham Task Force was the establishment of a student's assistance trust fund which would be totally funded by a 50% surcharge on all loans. Do you support this recommendation?

Notley: Well, I think that we should be looking at a slightly different approach to student finance. Right now we have a system of loans with remissions on the provincial share of the loans. Our view is that we should have a grant and loan system, something like the old system we had in the province of Alberta.

I remember when I went to university here twenty years ago. Fifty per cent of the money I got was in the form of a grant and I think that kind of system is better than the rather cumbersome remission system we have at the moment.

We think that the proposal made by FAS (the Federation of Alberta Students) is a good one and we tend to support it.

Gateway: What groups do you see as the NDP's strongest supporters in the upcoming election?

Notley: Well, I think that there are a large number of people who may not traditionally support the NDP ideologically but who recognize that in this campaign there really is only one way of sending the government a message: voting for the NDP. To vote Social Credit or Liberal is essentially to waste one's vote in Northern Alberta. The NDP is the runner-up party throughout Northern Alberta.



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Take Strathcona, for example. Last election the NDP made a very good run in this constituency. The Social Crediters and the Liberals were non-existent. Students who vote Social Credit or Liberal in this campaign could very well split the opposition vote, so that the Minister of Education might narrowly win. But the best way of sending a message to Mr. Lougheed about his government's lack of commitment to education would be for students in this constituency to rally behind the only party that has a chance of beating him. That's NDP.

Gateway: Do you expect a tough fight in your own riding?

Notley: Well I always look forward to a challenging situation. A person in politics should never take anything for granted. That's one thing I do agree with Peter Lougheed on. Fight a campaign like you're fifty votes behind. Never assume you've got everything in the bag. Certainly the signs are very encouraging. We have many people who supported the Conservatives last time who are supporting us this time.

I'm pretty confident about being reelected to the legislature and I think there's a very strong possibility that the NDP will emerge as the official opposition.

That is very important for a number of reasons. There really isn't much point in having an opposition that is essentially composed of people who have the same point of view as the government. They tend to clutter up the legislature. What you need is a party of the moderate left on the one hand and a party of the moderate right on the other.

That way, instead of discussing personalities we can get down to the business of debating options, of debating policies, of debating principles, of debating directions for this province.

I think that something exciting can happen in Alberta this time. I think that for the first time in 40 years we can have the kind of legitimate debate between ideas that this province has so long needed.

