

# Axing student education

On October 5, the Federal government released its long-awaited discussion paper on Canada's social safety net, "Improving Social Security in Canada." After months of "public consultation" and endless internal discussions, the Federal Minister responsible for Human Resource Development, Lloyd Axworthy, has laid out the Liberals' plan to reduce the \$38.7 billion they are expected to spend this year on post-secondary education, student loans, unemployment insurance, the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) that funds social assistance, and other programs that include adult training and reintegration into the workforce, and child care subsidization.

When the Liberals were elected last year, they offered themselves as an alternative after nine years of Tory austerity and elitism. Supposedly the gentler and kinder of our two most powerful political parties, the Liberals seemed intent on creating "jobs, jobs, jobs" and on upholding the principle that the government has a degree of responsibility in helping individual Canadians to develop their full potential. To many of us, and particularly to many students, it seemed that this principle included redressing inequities in Canadian society that prevent some of us from getting a quality education, finding quality child care, getting financial help while looking for work, and receiving social assistance when there just aren't any jobs available.

Unfortunately, fairness doesn't seem to be part of Axworthy's plan. Neither does the idea that everyone who is capable and willing should be able to go to university or college, and not have to spend the rest of their lives in a debt cycle trying to pay off their education. Students need to know and need to voice their opposition to the implications of two of Axworthy's proposals, especially those students who are just begin-

ning their university careers.

First, the Social Security Review proposes to phase out the Established Programs Financing (EPF) Act. This is the Agreement by which the federal government transfers funds, in cash and through tax breaks, to the provinces for post-secondary education and health care. It is because Nova Scotia receives EPF transfers that an undergraduate Arts student pays only between a quarter and a third of the actual cost of her education. The assumption behind EPF is that all of society, and not just individual students, benefits from having a population that is educated enough to be thoughtful, creative, and productive members of the workforce.

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Second, the Social Security Review suggests the implementation of Income Contingent Loans Repayment Plans (ICLRPs). Although the paper does appear to be merely suggesting ICLRPs, the fact is that this proposal is being considered by so many provincial ministers and bureaucrats that it will soon become a reality. At first glance, it may seem like ICLRPs are a great idea—students pay back their loans depending on whether or not they can get a job after graduation, at a rate contingent on their earnings. But ICLRPs are not a good idea. In fact, they are a very bad idea designed not to fund students so they can get an education, but to fund universities so they no longer have to rely on EPF to stay

afloat.

There are two main reasons why ICLRPs should be opposed. One is that they will lead to substantially higher student debt loans because universities will be free to increase tuition fees dramatically, and because there will not be any loan interest relief. This means that the wealthy who have personal and family resources to pay for a very expensive education up front will ultimately pay far less than those who are equally deserving, but less wealthy. Students who must spend thirty years paying off devastating student loan debts (like \$30,000–\$40,000) will also never have the opportunity to contribute to society as effective consumers and taxpayers.

The second reason ICLRPs are bad is that they will severely disadvantage women and other sectors of society who traditionally have lower levels of life-time earnings. Every time an individual is unemployed or leaves the work force to raise a family, she will accumulate interest on her debt.

Axworthy's proposal to phase out the EPF to fund universities, and essentially replace it with ICLRPs, means that our government is no longer willing to assume responsibility for education. This means that in Canada, the burden of having a population who is educated enough to be responsible citizens and to compete globally will be passed off to individuals. And not all individuals are rich enough to pay exorbitant tuition fees. And not all individuals are willing to spend the rest of their lives in a debt cycle to pay off their education.

What the Liberals don't seem to realize is that they're shooting themselves in the foot. Although it may seem like a good short-term decision, the Social Security Review's proposal for post-secondary education can only lead Canadians into a

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Forget taking an arm and a leg, just take my heart instead!



downward spiral—into a system where you have to have money to be a student so that you can get the education you need to get a good job to make money to contribute to the economy and to pay taxes. And those individuals, the "average" Canadians who don't have the money will never even get to play that game, let alone have the chance to become educated.

Lloyd Axworthy may think that his plans will save the country money, but his calculator doesn't even go

high enough to total the human deficit that will result when his government stops caring about education. If students don't want to start carrying the expensive burden for an educated society next year, we have to start today by forcing our governments to take back that responsibility. Write your MP. Write your MLA. Write Lloyd Axworthy. Write your mother and tell her to write her MP. Don't let them slip this one by on us.

Candida Rifkind

## Your money—What do you care?

Hello, is anyone there? Do any of you know who your representatives to council are? I hope so, because you should ask them why the hell they were not at council last Sunday night. Although a lot of you may not think that the work done by council is all that important, many organizations on campus depend on it. The fact that a number of important reports involving thousands of dollars could not be given due a lack of attendance, indicates that a number of elected representatives do not take their positions seriously.

Oh sure, you are all ready to scream if you're not given the opportunity to have your say, but once you have it, you don't use it. So, in the interest of your interests, take a minute and ask your councillors if they were there last Sunday night. And then go check the roll call and see if they were at the previous meeting. But what the hell, it's only your money, what do you care?

Word has it that there is going to be something of a rumble on the third floor of the Grad House. Apparently, there are some major accounting problems, with thousands of dollars unaccounted for. Apparently, there are no receipts. Apparently, thousands of dollars were spent and simply marked as 'stuff' in the

ledger. Apparently, charges have been suggested. Wow, what an interesting accounting practice, lets just create a new Tax deduction called 'stuff'. If I were you, I'd be at that meeting tonight (Thursday, October 20), and I'd be asking a few questions. But what the hell, it's only your money, what do you care?

As a final note, I've really got to say something about a derisive comment I heard about the 'tent city' commercial extravaganza that was on the lawns in front of the A&B Building. This person suggested that it was improper for the DSU to ex-

pose students to commercialism. Oh please, where the hell do you think money comes from? Does it fall from heaven like manna? Or does it grow on trees in the DSU offices? An integral part of the financing of student services comes in the form of corporate sponsorship, and without it, students would be asked to fork out more cash directly from their pockets. If you want to go to students and ask them for the extra money, be my guest. I'll send some flowers to your hospital room.

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province. I wince when I hear Bloc Quebecois MPs such as Michel Guimond happily earmarking unavoidable economic conditions (in his case, Via Rail job cuts) as ammunition for the separatist cannons. One day after an independent study showed that Quebec is a net recipient from the federal government to the tune of \$5 billion, Guimond stated that Quebec puts \$28 billion in taxes into Canada without any visible return; if only such whiners would read the newspaper.

I've seen every province except Newfoundland (and I've neglected

the territories as well); I enjoy being a tourist in my own country. When you have a nation that is five thousand kilometres across, the diversity is part of the attraction. It wouldn't hurt us to see our own country in lieu of those much-coveted tours of Europe or the Caribbean.

Never mind the delusions of economic revisionists like Michel Guimond, Quebec does benefit from being part of Canada. But also realize that Quebec contributes to Canada's character, both commercially and culturally. Every Canadian should take the time to experience that fact.

Richard Lim

## Ask Joe and Jo

A number of students have approached us with the question: *Where is the NO campaign?* And to that question, we don't have a very good answer.

By the time you actually get to read our article, it'll basically be too late for our words to do much good, but they still must be said.

The students of Dalhousie are victims of a great injustice, an injustice which was practically sanctioned by the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU). The injustice about which we speak is the injustice of being denied a fair and impartial Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) Referendum. It is the responsibility of the DSU to ensure that the students that voted them in, that are paying them to do their jobs, have all of the information that they need to vote impartially. Now, you might say that the DSU should not take a stand in the CFS Referendum to give an unfair advantage to the NO side. We might even agree with you. HOWEVER, when it was known by the DSU that the full resources of CFS (including paid CFS staff) would be used to sway students, a call to action should have been issued.

We are quite sure that we are not alone among the student population in our view that some money should have been spent on our behalf to at least balance the heightened level of propaganda.

In the interest of fairness, it must be pointed out that the DSU did finance the publication of a referendum supplement in which both sides were allowed an equal amount of space to voice their opinions. Neither of us actually saw a copy of this supplement (we couldn't find a copy), but we were told that it was quite fair and balanced.

Unfortunately, this was not enough for CFS, who subsequently made a point of illegally campaigning on behalf of the YES campaign, by going from class to class talking about CFS services. (It is ironic, that for a number of students, it was the first time they had ever heard of CFS.)

They (CFS) made a point of not discussing the issue of the referendum, just CFS services. Yeah, whatever. When this action by CFS is factored in, it is obvious that more should have been done on the part of the DSU. What about those of us that would've been more annoyed at the inadequacies of CFS had we been able to read about it on the wall, but who don't care enough to flip through the paper for all of the facts?

Hell, the majority of the DSU executive are on record as being against CFS, so why didn't they speak up? Isn't that their job? These are questions that Jo & Joe can't answer.

If you've got a question you just can't figure out, ask Jo & Joe. Our email address is: TRATNIK@is.dal.ca

Joe Tratnik and Jo Mirsky