

Excalibur

Everything secret degenerates; nothing is safe that does not show it can bear discussion and publicity
—Lord Acton

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Don't blame Stephenson (only a cabinet minister)

It is obviously pointless to argue with someone like the Minister of Education, Colleges and Universities, Bette Stephenson. Her attitude, indeed the attitude of the Davis government to their own education policies, is one of staggering irresponsibility. To claim, as Stephenson does, that she is not to blame for cutbacks

because it is university administrations which decide spending priorities, amounts to a disavowal of responsibility for the impact of her actions as a government minister.

Suffice it to say that Stephenson's performance at York last Friday was but another display of the appalling cynicism with which

government and university administrators bat the ball back and forth into each other's court, in a shiftless game of political ping pong in which an entire society is the loser.

And now a word about the antics of Stephenson's student lackeys, the campus Progressive Conservative Club. Content to mouth government propaganda to the point of actually denying that cutbacks exist, there is apparently

no absurd depth of partisanship to which they are afraid to sink in apologizing for Davis. And never do we hear a word of concern from the Tories about the plight of the university they are lucky enough to attend. How anyone who is capable of exhuming an old Nixonism ("the silent majority") in support of policies which are diametrically opposed to the interests of their fellow students can expect to be taken seriously, is beyond us.

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Open letter to Mr. Steadman on cutbacks

Dear Mr. Steadman,

Your arrogant and misleading claim in last week's Excalibur that there are no cutbacks in post-secondary education requires an answer. It certainly is nice to hear another side to the story. As in many cases, however, one side is often blessed by an unequal amount of 'authority'. In this case it is the government's version which we have had crammed down our throats for some time, and for which you are merely the mouthpiece. A little affirmative discrimination is called for.

Let's look at some other facts which, in your contempt for students, faculty and staff at this university, you find it so easy to overlook. What can we call the termination of contractually limited appointments and part-time instructors Mr. Steadman? "Rationalizations"? Programmes of "restraint"? Cutbacks seems to us a more accurate and honest word. I quote from the Anti-Cutback Coalition's brief to the BOG:

"At Glendon 32 Teaching Assistants, Part-timers and contractually Limited Appointees are not going to be rehired. In Social Science, Arts, part-time hours have been reduced from 70 to 20 hours (in Humanities by over 50 per cent). Sociology, Arts, projects a reduction from 14 to zero part-time hours. Existing programmes are called into question and new innovative programmes are out of the question...Furthermore an increasing proportion of expenses is being passed onto members of York. The cost of course materials, parking, computer time, laboratory fees and residence fees are all exalating. Increased costs to students can only have an adverse effect on enrolments, producing further pressure on the budget..."

What about the library? "The library staff has struggled to maintain the quality of service in the face of a reduction from 260 to 198 people...This has taken place despite an increase in the number of students to books. York library already has the lower ratio of books to full-time students in Ontario."

This is what cutbacks mean Mr. Steadman. Simply quoting to the total amount of money spent by the government in dishonest. (no one claims that \$55 million is peanuts). The relative increase is the important point. According to the Council of Ontario Universities: "no university system can absorb 25 per cent reduction in revenue over a six-year period without

suffering massive readjustments in both level and quality of services."

Your argument relies upon those familiar groups "the silent majority" and "the taxpayers". First, the last OFS march an informational picket, not a demonstration. Representation was not expected to be high, but to cover all the major Ontario institutions, which it did. The Anti-Cutbacks Demonstration of March 16 last year showed that thousands of students, faculty and staff were well aware of and visibly angry about cutbacks. (While we are talking about majorities, you should remember that since 1943 the Progressive Conservative government has never represented more than 49 per cent of the Ontario electorate.)

As for the taxpayers, it is convenient for you to forget that we too are taxpayers. It is not a case of pampered minority—there are about 250,000 post secondary students in Ontario—receiving gifts wrung from hard-working taxpayers. Students also work hard to help their education, whether in summer jobs (less easy to find these days because of government cutbacks) or part-time teaching.

Further, public money spent on students while in university is amply repaid in spending and further taxes when those students graduate into decent jobs.

Education, Mr. Steadman, is a right not a privilege, no matter how much it pains you and your Conservative buddies to think of the swinish multitude becoming educated.

Your comments on how much public money has gone into student aid are also misleading ie. The \$77.7 million for OSAP, which theoretically a budgeted increase of 96 per cent. Actually, your government underspent on OSAP by \$49 million over the last five years. And that money went into general revenue, not into education.

Let me conclude by returning to the COU brief: "Deprived of the base of strong universities, Ontario will be unable to furnish the advanced research and teaching required for an advanced industrial society such as ours...In the final analysis it will be future generations of Ontario citizens who will pay the price of this restraint. And the price will be very high."

Yours fraternally
Michael Michle,
President GAA
Member of Anti-Cutbacks Coalition

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