

# CUS and Free Tuition

Malcolm Jackson was President of the Founders College Students Council last year and winner of the Murray G. Ross Award. This year he is beginning an MSc. programme in Physics in York's Centre for Research in Experimental Space Science. We welcome his comment on these issues.

by Malcolm Jackson

## GOVERNMENT

First, before I begin a defence of Free Tuition and CUS, let me state briefly what I feel is the role of an elected representative of the people; for example, if you like, the role of an elected representative on S.R.C. The need to clarify this role became clear in the Nov. 18 issue of Excalibur when Harvey Margel wrote that the S.R.C. should 'take into consideration what the attitudes of York students were to C.U.S.', and went on to say that the question of C.U.S. should be decided by a general student referendum. Whereas I can agree (with reservations) with the first part, I cannot agree with the second.

An elected representative is not a puppet of the people who elect him. Rather he is an individual given the mandate to represent the electorate in the way he believes is best for them. He is judged when he is elected on the basis of the evidence that is present: his past record and his present platform. He may be criticized or lauded and, in that sense, judged, during his term in office, by such media as the press, the radio and equally well by the personal letters he receives from his constituents. However, when decisions must be made for the people it is he who makes them, based on what he, the enlightened expert, the man employed by the people because he is expert--based on what he believes to be right.

For one example let me deal briefly with the question of free tuition. Hypothetically 70% of the people could be against free tuition when asked by the Excalibur staff and 30% could be in favour of free tuition. Should S.R.C. consider this opinion of the students? Yes! Should S.R.C. oppose Free Tuition as a goal? Not necessarily. The S.R.C. members were elected to represent the best interests of the students. They are the best informed people on the issues. In the light of the public opinion of the S.R.C. members must be

all the more certain they are right, but above all, they must do what they believe to be in the best interest of the students they represent. If the students strongly oppose free tuition let the students elect someone to S.R.C. who will make this his platform. Spring Elections are close enough. (Incidentally free tuition was the platform of several S.R.C. members and you gave them office anyway.)

## FREE TUITION

There are many arguments for free tuition. There are few arguments against it that can hold water. Of the arguments against three that come to mind are (1) Tuition fees give the student an incentive to work harder; (2) 'University is the highest form of education and therefore it should be harder to get in, with higher financial and academic standards,' (brilliantly spoken by Ron Cannata F2 in an interview with Excalibur Nov. 18, and echoing the words of our 'progressive' member of parliament and former Minister of Education, Prime Minister Robarts); and (3) The economy cannot afford free tuition at the present.

Now the first of these involves a strange paradox. We all accept that giving money to students for tuition, books, etc. (i.e. in the form of scholarships) provides an incentive to work harder; and now someone is trying to tell us that taking money away from students (in the form of tuition fees) also provides an incentive to work harder. Give me the former type of incentive! Based on the many students with whom I have had contact at university, I would conclude that incentive is due mainly to the social environment from which the student comes. The \$550 tuition fee plays little significant role in determining incentive as far as I can see. Many of those who cannot afford to pay tuition and would, I feel, have incentive to complete a course successfully, lose valuable time worrying and wondering where they can find that \$255

to meet the second instalment. And, lastly, this supposed incentive, (if you could convince me it were such) can give little push to the students for whom tuition fees are a barrier to higher education.

The second argument that I have quoted, is a pompous equivalent to saying that education is a privilege for the rich. It frightens me to think that members of a university community could say this. High academic standards challenge equally this internal ability of every student. High financial barriers challenge, with devastating inequality, the external economic capacities of every student. If tuition fees were any higher you could rename York, The Premier Robarts University and Country Club and poor students and myself would trundle off to Bill Davis' Community Colleges where tuition, if any, we hope will be nominal. (Or perhaps we would go to trade school where we would be paid a subsistence allowance until we were released to the union markets at \$3.00 to \$6.00 per hour.)

The third argument quoted has some sense. We would not expect provincial governments to simultaneously announce Free Tuition for Canada's 200,000 university students. However the economy can stand a reduction in tuition fees (and next year would not be too soon) with eventual total elimination of tuition fees. Furthermore, I believe that the economy would in the long run benefit by such a move.

Now some positive reason in defence of free tuition:

1. U. of T. released a study showing average summer earnings and saving for students, a study which showed an average summer saving at around \$400 and compared this with the \$1600 to \$2100 needed to live during the academic year. How can this barrier be lowered? By Free Tuition.
2. It is recognized in economic circles that the number of people having university degrees can be related directly to prosperity in the country. Canada needs uni-

versity graduates. Let Canada buy some with free tuition. (This should satisfy the men and women who don't want to support non-blood-relations through university. They would, rather, be investing in the growth of their country.)

3. Taking a historical approach, we might look at the acknowledged progress in education in our century. High schools, where once a student was required to pay tuition, are now completely tuition-free (Newfoundland being, I believe, the last province to follow suit). And many high schools now give free text books through all the grades. Does this take away incentive? Are standards lower in our high schools today? Certainly not! Society demanded that her children obtain a high school education and society paid for it. Today society demands her children have post high school training. Again, she must pay for it!

4. There are many other reasons for demanding free tuition, and they can be treated in far more detail than I have attempted here. Ask your S.R.C. to obtain copies of the various studies that have been made in these fields. They will be happy to help you become informed. Read also Porter's Vertical Mosaic to gain some insight into barriers to higher education and ruling classes in Canada. My attempt to convince you that Free Tuition is right must necessarily be brief, for time and space do not permit otherwise.

In concluding my comments on the issue of Free Tuition, I must try to put its importance in perspective. Free tuition is only part of an extensive program being carried out for 'universal accessibility'. It seems easier to most of us to strike at the financial barriers to higher education but the existence of social barriers has not been forgotten. Money must be spent to research and reduce these social barriers as well. I chose to discuss the one aspect, Free Tuition, because it is the aspect of the overall programme which is so often misinterpreted by those who are uninformed.

## Great Success:

# ONE ACT PLAY FESTIVAL at YORK THEATRE



Harvey Gold, Sandra Gold, Garry Miller (Atkinson College) in THE FUNERAL PARLOUR



June Boag, Ian Brooks (Vanier College) in BEDTIME STORY

## One Act Play Festival

Burton Auditorium held its biggest crowd since "Murder in the Cathedral", the plays were diverse and interesting, and the commentary was out of this world. Each of the four colleges presented a one act play. Glendon presented, "I'm Dreaming, But Am I?", Vanier presented "The Bed Time Story", Founders College presented, "The Lover" and Atkinson presented an original play "The Funeral Parlour." Founders Play was chosen as the best production, but it must have been a very difficult decision as every play was of the highest quality. As the adjudicator, Robert Gill said, this evening foreshadows a successful future for the York University Theatre.

Don McKay