

Rae on higher education

Even though Premier David Peterson captured a lot more seats than the New Democratic Party in last September's election, NDP leader Bob Rae still managed to gain just as much voter attention as the Liberals. Rae, who became NDP leader in November of 1982, represents the Metro riding of York South. His academic background is admirable, to say the least. After obtaining a law degree in political science, and he went on to work at a legal aid clinic in London. It's these kind of credentials which help vault Rae to the top of the NDP, and last week *Excalibur's* Kevin Connolly and James Flagal got a chance to talk with Rae

EXCALIBUR: A recent report published by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) says that the post secondary system requires an injection of \$500 million dollars worth of funds in order to produce world class academic institutions. If that's the case, and it looks like government is not willing to give that sort of money to the post secondary education, should universities start relying more on the private sector for their funding needs?

Rae: I think everybody's entitled to expect public funding, but whether it will happen or not is basically a political question. One of the tough realities about Canada is that up until now the private sector and alumni have not given to the extent that is true in the United States. We don't have any private universities with a large endowment. We have some colleges that have some private endowment or private means, but nothing that would compare to the United States. So the reality is, is it doesn't come from the public sector or governments, whether that's federal or provincial, it really means that universities are going to be left in the lurch.

I think the universities should do what all of them have started to do for the last three to four years, and that is to recognize that they are going to need to draw on as much public funding as they possibly can. The University of Toronto, for instance, has launched a major drive, York has a drive, most universities have a drive that go on from time to time in order to restock the library or whatever that need might be. I think it's important to try to get the private sector to give more. I mean I think the record of the private sector in giving whether it's to universities or any other charity is basically lousy compared to what happens in US, and then people turn around and complain about high taxes and how much lower they are in the US. The fact is that the pattern of giving in the US is much more generous than it is here.

EXCALIBUR: But with that said, that perhaps the private sector should play a larger role in post secondary funding, how do you feel about the matching grant formula used to fund university research. (The formula means that the government will only contribute half of the amount of money needed for a certain research project, thus leaving the institution to look for the rest of the funds in the private sector. This means that only that research which can attract private sector backing can be conducted.) Do you think this kind of formula allows corporations to exercise too much influence over university research priorities?

Rae: I think it's very troubling for any institution that wants to have a degree of independence in setting its own priorities, to have its research constantly jerked around by what somebody else thinks is important. I think you find a balance, I mean a lot of universities have complained about governments trying to have a lot of applied research (research which has a certain goal in mind). And there's a debate within the scientific community about to what extent basic research (research that is conducted entirely for learning) is

being lost, because people are more interested in the immediate results than they are in long-term, theoretical work. Given the nature of the economy right now, and the financial bind universities find themselves in, I don't think anybody can blame universities for trying to get as much funding as they can.

EXCALIBUR: The provincial government has a written policy that every graduating high school student with an average over 60% deserves a post secondary education. Do you support that kind of policy, and is that sort of accessibility truly possible?

Rae: My basic approach to universities is that they should be relatively easier to get into, and relatively harder to get out of. I mean it's better to give the chance to get in, and see what they can do, and make sure that you do that throughout the province, rather than establish higher entrance requirements. We've always got to remember that there are a lot of people who may not have found themselves in high school. You've got to create that opportunity for people.

EXCALIBUR: But isn't that ideal thinking given the increasing amount of applicants which universities are facing every year. For instance, more mature students and ethnic minorities are participating in the post secondary system, and on top of that, next year the new high school fast-tracking system will allow students to complete their university requirements in four years. Without the funds, how can an institution truly offer a space for all these applicants?

Rae: I don't think it's unrealistic to say that as a matter of right, students have a right to go to university if they want to go, and if their marks are good enough to get in. In the early 1970's university funding went down in relationship to other sectors which the government funds. You've got to remember that the university expansion period was through the 60's in terms of increasing capital funding and enrollments growing.

And that it was only in '71-'72 that that curve started to come down. And I think we have to recognize now that that curve has come down so long and so low, what we're experiencing now is not just one or two years of underfunding. It's like a generation of underfunding, and it affects access, turnover amongst teachers and professors, the ability of younger people to get teaching jobs and research jobs. It also affects our overall research capability.

EXCALIBUR: But with the great emphasis placed on acquiring a skill and the establishment of programmes like the entrepreneurial centres, do you feel that the importance of a liberal arts education has been forgotten?

Rae: I don't like the idea of universities becoming handmaidens of business or anybody else. I don't think that's what universities are all about. But we all have to recognize that universities are connected to society, and aren't totally immune from it, and if students want to go into these programmes and to a considerable extent the fact that there's a

lot of pressure on admin. courses and commerce and finance courses, is driven by what students want to go into. And I also think that's starting to change. I think the boom in those courses was in the early 80's, now people are looking at a wider range of things to get into.

It's certainly different from the patterns when I went to school. I was in university 20 years ago, it was a very different mood, a very different atmosphere. From my point of view, that was a great time, and it would be nice if there was more of that type of activism on our campuses. But my feeling is that there is, yet it's differ-

Rae: First of all, the Manitoba public plans have basically operated on a more affordable basis than the private plans have, and even now that is true. The basic arguments are economic. If the insurance companies say they are losing money on car insurance in Ontario, and the rates are what they are, imagine what they're going to be when the Rate Review Board says that every insurance company has a right to make a profit, which is what the Board is designated to say. And so the Board says that, and subsequently rates will go up 20-30%, or even higher.

And basically I think the question

EXCALIBUR: How do you read the Liberal electoral landslide of last September given the fact that your party even lost some seats and if you had a chance to do it again would you sign the accord to form the coalition?

Rae: I think it says that people wanted a change in '85, and I think it says they liked the change, and the only way they felt they could have expressed that was to confirm their support for the government and for the Liberals. I think that's one of the dilemmas of the three-party system, that's what can happen.

Really, the only other alternative was to support Frank Miller, and I think that would have posed incredible problems for us after a month or so since we believed that the PC's didn't have it in terms of support and credibility with the public. The build-up in support for the Liberals would have decreased, and in fact the Liberals would have had an overwhelming argument to make on the doorstep that if you want to vote for change, you can't vote for the NDP, because when push comes to shove, the NDP will always support the Tories. I felt it was important to break that. My gut judgement is that we didn't have a lot of choice in '85, and we made some good changes between '85 and '87. In that sense, I think the experience has been worthwhile.

One of the things which the party is going to have to wrestle with is how do you maintain your identity and clear profile with the public, and at the same time force the government to do things and get the credit for some of the things the government has done. It's tough. On the other hand, I went into politics to do some things for people. One of the first cases that I ever handled in my riding was a woman who'd been charged \$600 for an operation on her shoulder, and she doesn't have to pay that now. And I don't think that would have happened under any other circumstance, unless we forced it to happen (through our coalition with the Liberals).

EXCALIBUR: With the respect to the federal NDP, now they're reconsidering their NATO policy. Do you think that Broadbent will move the party too far to the centre in his quest for more votes?

Rae: No I don't think so. I think what Ed is doing is asking the party to look hard at everything we say in light of the fact that we are running for government. And that we have an obligation to be clear and straight with ourselves and the public about



BABAK AMIRBEZ

PUBLIC AUTO INSURANCE WILL WORK: Despite recent problems with the insurance system in Manitoba, Provincial New Democrat leader Bob Rae insists a public system will work. "Does it really make any sense having 25 companies offering that service when there's little competition?" Rae said.

ent. However if you take issues like South Africa, some broader political issues, I found students, for example at a seminar I was at the other day at UoT on the homeless, there's a

that everyone has to ask him/herself is that if you have a compulsory service that everyone is supposed to have, does it really make a lot of sense to have up to 25 major com-

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greater awareness of what our society's is really all about, and how just looking out for yourself, and just looking out for number one and figuring out when you can buy your first Porche is really not what life is all about.

We had a kind of a glut in materialism in the early 80's, and it would be impossible for universities to avoid reflecting some of that in terms of what courses people take and what their interests are.

EXCALIBUR: One of your main planks in the last provincial election was public auto insurance, yet in Manitoba that government's Autopac has been suffering from a fifty million dollar deficit, forcing the New Democrats to increase rates substantially. How do you defend public auto insurance given the Manitoba scenario, and the fact that this industry experienced financial loss in Ontario last year?

panies offering that service when there's very little competition, and with the Rate Review Board there's going to be even less. So you basically have a cartel that is going to be supported by the government, and that's going to end up charging everyone a lot more. I still think that if you're looking at a common sense system, starting from scratch, you'd run a service like OHIP, as a basic insurance service. I mean, why don't we have a bunch of different private insurers offering health care, because it wouldn't work efficiently. We think we can do the same thing with a public auto insurance company. And I am certainly prepared to admit that when increases did take place in Manitoba, that makes the selling case harder. But believe me, when we get the rate increases that we're going to get in Ontario which are now at 4.5%, and when that ceiling comes off, they're going to go right through the roof.

what we can do.

One of the things that I think has ruined Mulroney is overblowing it, that 'I'm going to do this and the sky is going to open up, and then there's going to be this beach over here and a summer palace over here.' And people look at this guy and say 'what is this bullshit.' And I think what Broadbent is quite rightly saying is let's just tell it like it is. If anything, let's underpromise, let's make it clear to people that it's not going to be snap and automatic. We can promise better government, we can promise a different approach to NATO, and one I think that is realistic. I think that's Ed's biggest strength right now is that he is an honest person and people recognize that.

In the next *Excalibur*, PC interim leader Andrew Bradt discusses his views on the issues facing Ontario and the Liberal government.