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WHO SAYS WE HAVE MONEY?

by: Kevin Gauthier

The Council of Maritime Premiers (CMP) has just announced that it has accepted the recommendation of the Maritime Provinces' Higher Education Commission regarding levels of university funding for the academic year 1980-81. Son of a gun eh! Now in case you haven't been following the most recent activities and brainstormes of that most venerable body of reasonable, fair-minded, conservative middle-of-the road assorted academic and lay-people, they recommended that the three maritime governments increase financial assistance to universities by 8.1%. Before anybody launches into spasms of uncontrollable joy, allow me to remind ya that the 8.1% increase in funds will only partially satisfy the financial needs of the university. A tuition increase of nearly the same amount is assumed to be forthcoming to supplement the government funds, and the MPHEC at the CMP are expecting universities to increase tuition fees accordingly. Woe is us.

Now, where should one commence placing the blame for the increasing cost to the student of a university education. Obviously, one good place to start would be the MPHEC itself. The Commission, over the past several years, has consistently maintained that tuition fees should increase to reflect the increasing expense of operating a university, suggests that students should continue to supply the same level of support to the institutions as they currently do. To you and me, this means that, as long as inflation continues, tuition like everything else, will continue to rise. Some people, of course, fail to see anything wrong with this attitude, claiming that students are getting a break by only paying as much tuition as we do, and calling us a bunch of over educated spoiled brats who don't know when we've got it good. But I can find two objectives to this attitude. Firstly, I cannot understand why we must pay for a university education in the first place. Recalling my years in school previous to UPEI, it occurs to me that the education I received in public school was terribly inadequate, and yielded to me none of the benefits which I feel UPEI has. It seems that one really does not begin to be educated until one reaches university and for this reason, I feel university, like the schools that one is forced to attend for 12 years,

should be free. A university education is of unlimited value to anyone who chooses to accept it, and financial barriers like an \$800 tuition bill should not be allowed to stand in the way of anybody's desire for an education. Our society believes that education is a universal right, so why must we insist that it end at grade 12? It makes little sense to me.

The second reason why tuition fees should not be tied to the cost of living is simply that our wages are not. It seems grossly unfair to expect us to pay more for an education when the wages that put us through university are shrinking relative to the costs we face. But the Commission has overlooked that point, despite concerted attempts by students to bring this realization to them.

Of course, one could also berate the CMP for this undesirable trend which is evolving. Our premiers should realize that these provinces, now and even moreso in future, need well educated native sons and daughters to improve our economic and social conditions, especially within the next decade when Canada will undergo massive changes in its fabric and structure. Who will conceive original, innovative designs for change if we ourselves are not capable of doing so? Experience has shown that "outsiders" simply cannot make effective, acceptable plans for us. We must do our own building, but we cannot without the proper training and experience.

Our premiers soon must open their eyes and look down the road. When they do, they might realize that we are unprepared, as a society, for the pot-holes and ruts that lie ahead.

On a happier closing note, I would like to encourage the university administration to continue their efforts at cutting expenses and keeping tuition as low as possible. Our President and his advisors did a commendable job last year, and we should all hope that their sympathetic consideration of our problems continues. In the meantime, start looking for a government job, and save your pennies.

WHO SAID WE'VE GOT MONEY?