

Paying the piper



To the editor:

I would like to take exception to a statement made by Sean McQuaid, in the editorial column of the X-Press of January 21, 1993. Mr. McQuaid states that in Canada, "There's no one cultural or political ideology that everyone can swear unwavering allegiance to, nor should there be necessarily. "I would argue that there is just such an ideology which all of us in this "free" country are forced, although not overtly, to pledge allegiance to, and that is Capitalism. Both our cultural and political institutions are suffused with this ideology, not least of which are our universities.

Cultural institutions are judged according to the profit motive standard, and governments stand or fall on their ability to meet the demands of Big Business, and the demand for jobs. Whether P.C. or N.D.P., the first priority is always the economy and employment. As to our Universities, how many students would deny that their primary motivation in getting a university education is to better their prospects of landing a good "job". This job will supposedly supply them with the means with which to consume all the fine products which the system has conned us into believing are necessary in order to lead a happy, contented life. Bread and circuses indeed.

Although I realize that this issue is not the primary point of Mr. McQuaid's article, I believe that the endless anxiety over the future of our country, which he does address, is meaningless if we do not first define which kind of country we wish to live in, and not simply conform to an ideology which is accepted without question, and which I believe is an insult to the human spirit. The country I wish to live in is one where the concern for human well being outweighs the concern for profit, and where the maintenance of an elite lifestyle for the rich and powerful is not purchased at the cost of the poor.

Greg Murray

Dear S. Livingstone,

Since you decided to use a public forum to address the fact that I could not obtain for you an interview with "Blue Rodeo" I feel it is necessary to reply to you using the same format. There are a number of points that I would like to address and some others that I would like to make. In answer to some of your points of dispute, as appeared in your piece "The Blue Rodeo interview", the X-Press, p 22.:

1. Your piece makes it seem as if you were the only one doing anything to get you an

In a society where virtually everything can be bought and sold, it's easy to be skeptical about that old saying: the best things in life are free. Life, love, and the like are indeed freebies, but what concerns many of us in life are not the best things, but the essential things...and there is perhaps nothing more essential for a person's future than education. As jobs become fewer and more specialized, high school diplomas are taken for granted and university education has come to be more and more a commonplace requirement in the job market. If you want a good life, the first step is usually a good education; however, this increasingly necessary asset is becoming harder and harder to attain. More and more people are attending university, but as universities try to meet the demands of inflation and rising enrolment they are faced with rapidly growing costs. In the absence of outside funding the cost falls on students as increased tuition, so that fewer people can afford higher education at a time when they need it more than ever.

The need for higher education is apparent in that enrolment is higher each year despite rising costs. In 1988 the University of Prince Edward Island had 2181 full-time students registered for the Fall semester. This has grown steadily in subsequent years to 2332 students in 1989, 2535 in 1990, 2609 in 1991, and 2724 in the latest Fall semester, 1992. That's roughly a twenty-five per cent increase over a span of four years, and the university has to try and keep pace with sufficient facilities and services for its growing student body. Inflation is also an eternal nemesis, with costs rising every year for equipment, facilities and services. Under these conditions, it's sadly inevitable that it becomes more and more expensive to run this university.

As a result, university becomes more and more expensive for students. In the fall of '88, a single semester course would set you back about \$164.00. This increased to \$172.00 in '89, \$184.00 in '90, \$212.00 in '91, and a whopping \$228.00 per course in the Fall of 1992. That's a forty per cent increase over that timespan, and it's a safe bet that student resources have not increased proportionately. Factor into this such additional expenses as residence fees (or off-campus accommodations), ridiculously pricey textbooks, and such basics as food and clothing, and it all adds up to a bill that fewer people are able to afford to pay.

So, what's the solution? There's no magic formula to resolve this problem, unless you can dope out a solution to inflation (in which case you can probably start your own school and watch Brian Mulroney lead the world in beating a path to your door). Universities can't make up the difference themselves if they want to maintain standards of quality service, and at the same time it is rather taxing for students to try and absorb the costs.

Someone has to take responsibility, and ultimately responsibility for our communities lies with the governments we elect. Education is a provincial government responsibility though, and there are no uniform federal standards to regulate spending on higher education. About eighty per cent of this university's budget is government funding, and the maintenance of higher education should remain a government priority. Of late there have been no increases in government funding for U.P.E.I., despite the recommendations of such bodies as the Maritime Commission on Higher Education, and as costs rise government should realize the necessity of increasing funding to compensate. Catherine Callbeck has stressed education and economic development as key priorities in her new provincial government, and the two ideas are mutually compatible: a better educated populace is better able to contribute to a strong economy. Higher education is indeed a necessity, and government should recognize that and take steps to provide for it. If education is neglected in the here and now it will be future generations that will learn a hard lesson.

Sean McQuaid
Editor-in-Chief