

Leaders give few answers

by Sean McQuaid

Liberal Premier Catherine Callbeck joined Conservative Leader Pat Mella and NDP Leader Larry Duchesne for a question-and-answer forum on education in the Robertson Library "Pit" this past Wednesday, with University President Doctor Eliot moderating.

The forum opened with each leader making an overall statement. Duchesne acknowledged that post-secondary education is increasingly unaffordable and promised such reforms as an end to the funding freeze, freezing tuition costs, and maintaining loan and bursary programs, though he did not explain precisely how he would accomplish this. Mella made similar promises, praised the university's efforts at cultivating research and development, and promised to cut money from government salaries to increase academic funding. Callbeck, characteristically, promised nothing and laid out no plans, asking voters to trust in her and the Liberal Party's record and saying that education was a priority.

Students were generally unimpressed with the answers or lack thereof provided by the leaders. Kelly Lamrock of CFS asked Duchesne how he can guarantee his promises in light of the economic track record of the provincial NDP in Ontario. He also questioned the record of Callbeck and the PEI Liberals, under whom

tuition increased a staggering seventy-five percent, and he reminded Mella of her affiliation with a federal government that has gutted education spending.

Another observer asked how youth can become more involved in actual government, and when Larry Duchesne found himself unable to answer "what it came down to" Dr. Eliot jumped in to say that what it came down to was that "the future of Canada (the students) is in this room."

When asked for a definite statement, the opposition leaders were quick to offer promises, while the best bottom line Callbeck could offer was that education would be "a priority". In response to a final question concerning the Cass Chemistry building's out-datedness, Duchesne said he was unfamiliar with the problem, while Mella and Callbeck claimed awareness of the situation and a willingness to look into it. Dr. Eliot jumped in before the forum closed to point out that the building had never failed a safety inspection.

Students who left the forum generally expressed dissatisfaction with there being no guarantees (or at least no believable ones) for the future of education no matter who took office, and the election of the Liberals (whose standing on education remains vague at best) will probably do nothing to ease most students' concerns. ●

three of them, and feel that their reasons for resigning were explained fully. Nothing was hidden!

Forth, I'd like to deal with the comments on what the unsigned letter makes on the allegedly "unfair hiring practices" of the Student Union. Must be more of this evil conspiracy... Whoever this unnamed and supposedly irate letter writer is, his or her remarks are as insulting as they are untrue. The Student Union hiring procedures could serve as a model for many private corporations and educational institutions. Applicants are initially screened without the name (and therefore gender) on each application form being visible. Interviews are conducted very objectively, and if memory serves me correctly, the largest single voting group on the interviewers is students-at-large. These people are not chosen for their size, but rather because they are not Student Union staff or elected officials. Training for hiring board members has been conducted by Employment and Immigration Canada who are not I'm quite sure part of our conspiracy. As someone who believes in complete objectivity in hiring practices, I can assure the unsigned letter's author that the Student Union Hiring practices are FAIR and OBJECTIVE. This unnamed author's assertion that only members of some select clique are hired are very untrue. After the wild, unfounded, and possibly libelous accusations made about the Student Union hiring practices made in this letter, I can certainly see why the letter was left unsigned.

Finally, in response to the author's request for the Student Union Council to be accountable for its decisions, yes - I agree VERY STRONGLY. I hope we are. I'm fully prepared to be called on anything that I've done or failed to do, that's my job. The work I've been doing for students over the past eleven months has come before my academic career. Letting students know exactly what I'm doing and finding out what they want me to do is and has been very important to me and I know this is also true for Tara O'Connor who will be taking over as Vice President External on May 1st. However, this is seldom an easy thing to do and something that we need help with. We need your ideas on how we can better communicate what we're doing! Again, my door is always open, so to whomever wrote the unsigned letter, we need your ideas on how to do this as much as anyone else's.

Sincerely,
Bruce Davison

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