

Education and election platforms Part II:

If elected, what would the other parties do?

In the last issue this column examined the record and proposed policies on education of the Progressive Conservatives. This week's column is an overview of the policy alternatives proposed (or promised) by the other parties. The information for this overview comes from a wide variety of sources obtained over the last three weeks. It should be remembered that these policies are election platform and are presented here without any investigation as to their realism or the parties' ability to implement them.

The Liberal Party:

Although skimming the shiny new Liberal Red Book of policies does not reveal much information on the specific issues of student aid and transfer payments, the Liberals appear to have definite action in mind, at least for student aid. The Malpeque Campaign Office (candidate Wayne Easter's) reported to me the following points.

The Liberals claim to be opposed to the privatization of the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP). A policy adviser indicated to me that they were committed to keeping the CSLP a Federal Government program, with the Federal Government assuming the full risk for Student Loans (as opposed to the "risk sharing" with banks and the provinces that the Conservatives have made a commitment to in their policies). Paradoxically, my contact at the campaign office also indicated that the Liberals might not increase the money available under the CSLP - their preference being to tackle the problem using other means. On the issue of loan repayment the Liberals have said they would reinstate the six-month interest free grace period students received after graduation. As stated in last issue's column, this grace period was eliminated by the Federal Government this past Spring. The elimination of this period meant that students would have to start repaying the interest on a student loan or loans immediately after graduation and its elimination was proposed as a cost-cutting measure by the government. The statement that the Liberals

disagree with banks being able to collect Federal Student Loans (instead of the government) was also made.

When asked about education funding, my contact at the campaign office replied that if elected the Liberals would seek better "cooperation" with the provinces in funding education. Other proposed Liberal programs would affect education. National apprenticeship programs would be implemented. My contact at the Malpeque campaign office indicated that this would be similar to cooperative programs offered at many universities. Students from a variety of fields of study (including those offered at universities) would be able to get credit and make some money at the same time. The other program would be a national youth corps that would provide young Canadians with experience while doing community service work. The

New Democratic Party:

According to a statement released by New Democratic Hillsborough candidate Delores Crane to the U.P.E.I. Student Union, the New Democrats continue in their traditional opposition to tuition fees. The NDP "favours free post-secondary education," as she put it. Traditionally the NDP has viewed the very existence of tuition fees as a barrier to accessible post-secondary education. More immediately, the NDP is strongly opposed to the privatization of Student Loans, although they "would look favourably on the role of credit unions in the area."

Ms. Crane's statement also reported that her party is opposed to students having to repay their loans upon graduation. Presumably, this would mean that the six-month interest free period would be reinstated.

This statement was echoed by the comments made by NDP leader Audrey MacLaughlin on the CBC Radio program "Cross-Country Check-Up" on September 19. When asked about her party's education policies by a caller, Ms. MacLaughlin was critical of decreases in education funding and called for a stabilization of transfer payments. She went on to state that her party would ensure the restoration of the

six month grace period and that it was strongly opposed to the privatization of Student Loans, a move that she referred to as a move to an American type system.

The National Party:

Policy statements by the National Party as well as answers given in an interview by Hillsborough candidate David Patterson shed some light on the education policies of the only other party that has much of a profile on P.E.I. Mr. Patterson stated that the National Party was opposed to education becoming "universities for the rich" and that (similar to the NDP) it favours an eventual free tuition policy (commonly referred to as a "zero tuition policy").

In the short term the National Party opposes not only privatization of Student Loans, but also participation by banks in Student Loans. Instead National Party Policy maintains that the Federal Government "should assume all such loans as an investment in the future of our country." These loans would apparently be recovered in an income-contingent component of income tax. The eventual zero-tuition model of education that the National Party favours would also be financed through former students' income tax, Mr. Patterson reported.

The zero tuition model proposed by the National Party would also contain two further elements. The first is the establishment of a system of national standards in education to attempt, as their policy states, to "ensure that all those entering or leaving post-secondary institutions have a common level of relative expertise." The other side of this would be that the National Party would seek to impose "more selective academic standards" as prerequisites for entry into university.

The Reform Party:

Although, the profile of the Reform Party on P.E.I. is very negligible (due in no small part to the lack of campaign publicity being generated by the Hillsborough candidate Freeman Witty) the party does have policy on post-secondary edu-