

Stem The Tide of Rising Tuition Fees

For Camille Thériault it was toll booths.

For Bernard Lord, if he isn't careful, it could be automobile insurance – "it" being, of course, losing one's place at the helm of the province over one issue, while otherwise riding comfortably high in the polls.

Why?

In March of this year, the Lord government passed legislation amending the Insurance Act. Now, if we are injured in a car accident caused by someone else's negligence, we cannot recover damages from them for "minor personal injuries" or "soft tissue injuries".

The definitions of these two terms will be found in the revised Regulations to the Act; these, however, will not be announced until after the election results are in.

Also, even though we may not be at all responsible for the accident, if we are badly enough injured that we have to take time from work we now have to use up any accumulated sick leave we may have.

We can't claim it back from the other driver either, so the next time we get sick for any reason and lose time from work, it will have to be at our own expense.

Insurance rates have not come crashing down, though, despite these measures. Therefore, it isn't too great a stretch of the imagination to conjecture that voters who don't know if, for example, irreversible nerve damage causing chronic lifelong pain is a "soft tissue injury", or who may be obliged to lose time from work at their own expense as a result of injuries caused by some other drivers' recklessness, will clamour for more pre-election action on this issue.

How ironic.

Like insurance premiums, university tuition fees in New Brunswick have been rising so rapidly over the last few years that they have more than doubled in the last decade.

This year, students at Mount Allison University will be paying \$380 more in tuition fees than they

did last year; Université de Moncton students \$306 more; University of New Brunswick students \$245 more; and St. Thomas University students \$175 more.

So, while the percentage comparisons are different, students and their parents will have to come up with similar sums of extra money to pay both the recent increases in their car insurance premiums and this year's tuition fee increases.

The difference is, they have had to do the latter every year for the last ten years or more.

Most families in this province own at least one car. Believe it or not, a majority of them also has at least one member who has attended, or is attending, a university.

According to a recently-released report prepared by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, in New Brunswick the unemployment rate of university graduates in June 2001 was less than half that of the general public. Their average earnings from employment had risen by more than 30 per cent to \$36,192 in only four years.

In other words, the importance of the universities in our economy cannot be overlooked.

Despite this, though, there has been no public outcry about the constant tuition fee increases we have had to endure since the early 1990's.

In a laudable attempt to stem the tide of rising tuition fees, Premier Bernard Lord is reported to have promised increased government funding for our universities of 3.25 per cent over the next four years. Yet, if his government were instead to give only 1.75 per cent more, tuition fee increases would be completely unnecessary.

When we are clamouring for government-inspired rollbacks and freezes, then, we should be looking much further than automobile insurance rates.

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