

Prying Open the Privatisation Door: The Rae Report on Post-Secondary Education

“We shall not achieve greater autonomy, flexibility and competition within the system – all desirable goals – so long as all tuition decisions are made centrally.” p. 23

—Former Ontario Premier Bob Rae, *Ontario: A Leader in Learning*

Former Ontario Premier Bob Rae’s Report on post-secondary education has received accolades from university and college presidents alike. And while many groups have praised the report, a sober digestion of the document reveals that Rae’s report at best recommends the thorough entrenchment of the status quo and mediocre levels of funding and at worst proposes to throw Ontario’s college and university system onto the mercy of a fully competitive and privatised education market. Rae’s formulation that tuition fees will continue to be the stopgap for government underfunding, simply cements existing practice for the past fifteen years.

Funding and Tuition Fees

First, Rae’s document calls for a provincial reinvestment of \$1.3 billion by 2007-08 and at the same time calls for per-student revenue to be “at least” “comparable” to other provinces requiring \$1.5 billion in new revenues to institutions.

The approximately \$200 million difference in revenue can only mean that tuition fee hikes are expected to make up the difference. Using figures provided by Rae himself (p.103), it is clear that a minimum double-digit tuition fee increase (10%) would be required to increase tuition fee revenue to \$200 million.

Rae goes on to note that, in addition to the \$1.5 billion recommendation another \$700 million would be required to actually bring per-student revenue up to the level of public institutions in peer North American jurisdictions. Rae’s vision for raising these

additional funds is clearly predicated on a combination of rising tuition fees and “philanthropy” or public-private partnerships:

“The provincial government should set out its commitment to help the institutions meet their revenue needs. It is this multi-year commitment that will allow the institutions to assess the degree of help they will need from students and the private sector.” (p. 20)

Fundamental to all of Rae’s proposals is the re-affirmation of the role that tuition fees have played in funding colleges and universities as the bridge between what is required and the actual level of public funding provided.

“...tuition fees can then be adjusted to address the institution’s remaining budgetary requirements.”

This is precisely the formula that has led to a decade of unprecedented tuition fee increases for Ontario students. Even if implemented, Rae’s funding recommendations—still short of the system’s actual needs—will mean the persistence, not disappearance, of the climate of underfunding that has caused tuition fees to rise so dramatically over the past 15 years.

This last point is important. The fanfare with which Rae’s call for less-than-average funding was met among a variety of post-secondary education sectors might leave Ontarians with a false sense of security in the future affordability of higher education. Nothing could be further from the truth. The very fact that Rae’s funding recommendations fall short of the amount required to raise per-student

funding to the national average should be cause for concern. It will necessitate further tuition fee hikes and less affordability for modest and low income Ontarians. It will leave staff and faculty competing for scarce resources and sow divisions within the post-secondary education community.

Rae's vision has neatly cut out any semblance of democratic accountability. The proposed Higher Education Council is clearly an appointed body, not an elected body, even if only through the organisations of stakeholder groups. By removing authority from the Ontario government to set tuition fees, Ontario voters are removed from any debate on the affordability of higher education. Instead these decisions will be left to local governing bodies comprised, in their majority, by political and administrative appointees accountable only to those who appointed them.

The new catch-phrases of "quality" and "accountability" are much more about pricing-out and costing units of higher education production in a competitive global market than about ensuring genuine democratic accountability to all Ontarians. In this regard, Rae makes three points that should give staff, students and faculty pause:

The goal should not focus on being first in spending on post-secondary education, but on being first in quality. (p. 93)

There needs to be a candid discussion—and consequent decisions—to ensure that new money does not simply translate into much higher, across-the-board salary increases. (p.17)

Opportunities to identify savings strategies will also be included in this exercise. ... A concerted examination of institutional costs, cost drivers and cost savings

opportunities should be conducted..." (p. 95).

The "Regulatory Framework" for the De-regulation of Tuition Fees

Regularising De-regulation

The so-called "Regulatory Framework" for tuition fees is, in fact, an unabashed call for the complete de-regulation of tuition fees. Long a campaign of university presidents from the universities of Toronto, Western Ontario, Queen's and Waterloo, the closest any Ontario government was able to advance in this area was when the previous Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris partially de-regulated tuition fees for certain programmes. Then, students of varying political stripes banded together to oppose it. Public opinion, galvanized by the Canadian Federation of Students, forced McGuinty to re-regulate and freeze all tuition fees upon taking office.

There is much truth in the observations of National Post columnist Andrew Coyne when he wrote (February 19, 2005):

Bob Rae's proposals for reform of postsecondary education provoked a variety of responses, almost all of them positive. On the one hand, the former premier's review of how Ontario's universities are funded was praised by the Globe and Mail as refreshingly "blunt" and full of "smart ideas." On the other hand, the Toronto Star called it a "sensible blueprint" that makes "a series of meaningful recommendations." This, for a report whose central recommendation is to deregulate tuition fees: that is, to let universities charge what the market will bear.

...try to imagine the conservative politician, retired or otherwise, who could

get this kind of coverage for this kind of report.

Despite the rhetoric of tuition fee regulation and enshrining a commitment to access in law, the only criteria Rae sets out for tuition fee hikes are that such increases must be “transparent, predictable and affordable.” These criteria would certainly not have stopped the 2001 decision by the University of Toronto to increase Law School tuition fees to \$22,000 per year. According to Rae’s vision, as expressed by Mr. Coyne, it will be market forces that determine affordability, not ordinary Ontarians.

It should be noted that the Black Law Students’ Association of Canada launched a human rights complaint against the proposed Law School tuition fee increases at the University of Toronto. Only the two-year tuition fee freeze—implemented by elected MPPs—stopped fees from increasing to \$22,000 per year. By circumventing democratically accountable Members of Provincial Parliament from the decision-making process involving tuition fee hikes, Mr. Rae is actually reducing, not increasing, accountability.

It should also be noted that at the college level, aside from programmes where tuition fees were previously de-regulated, most students pay less than \$2,000 per year in tuition fees. Given that there are few specific funding recommendations earmarked for colleges in Rae’s funding proposals, and given that the tuition fee threshold in the student aid package has been established at \$6,000 per year, one can only assume that college students in particular will be facing significant tuition fee increases if the freeze expires.

Enshrining “Affordability” in Legislation?

Finally, Rae recommends that new legislation be adopted that “guarantees the right of all qualified students to education.” While only a

small detail in Rae’s overall scheme, such a disingenuous proposal should not go without comment.

First, every Ontario government for the past 15 years or more has operated under a “policy” that guaranteed no willing and qualified student would be denied a place in college or university for want of financial resources. Indeed, most institutions in Ontario, including the University of Toronto, have similar policies. At U of T, the policy states: “No student offered admission to a program at the University of Toronto should be unable to enter or complete the program due to lack of financial means.”

These policy abstractions provided no protection whatsoever for students negatively affected by the double and triple digit tuition fee increases that followed the government’s decision to de-regulate tuition fees for certain programmes. Deans of Ontario law schools documented declining enrolment among students from Northern communities, aboriginal students and students from modest-income families, successfully passing-off these findings as inconsequential. To suggest such policies will make any measurable difference in safe-guarding access by enshrining them in provincial law is laughable, especially since Rae has recommended reducing the Ontario Legislature’s authority in this regard.

As noted previously, the Black Law Students’ Association of Canada launched a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission to challenge the phase-in of \$22,000 annual tuition fees for Law School at the University of Toronto. The decision is still pending. Clearly, lodging a human rights complaint—let alone mounting a legal challenge against the provincial government—is a time consuming and expensive undertaking. As a mechanism for ensuring affordability for low and modest income students—it is insulting.

Grants, Student Aid and Tuition Fees

Grants for the Poor

Much has been made about Rae's recommendation to partially restore the grants he cut in 1993-94. He recommends up-front grants of \$6,000 for the sliver of students whose family earns up to \$22,600 per year and a sharp reduction in grant aid for those earning between \$22,600 and \$35,000. Those earning more must rely exclusively on loans.

Higher Fees for Everyone Else

To put this in context: a family of four where both parents work full-time for \$9.00 an hour will *not qualify* for a grant. Instead, they will simply pay higher fees and borrow more money. This should be of concern—a recent study of accessibility to Ontario law schools in the era of deregulation demonstrated quite clearly that rising tuition fees were associated with an increase in participation among high income families, but a decrease in the proportion of students whose parents earned incomes in the middle 20 percent of the distribution.

Rae recommends that any institution that chooses to charge tuition fees in excess of \$6,000 will be required to provide additional assistance for “low-income students.” We can presume that such a definition will correspond to Mr. Rae's definition of “low-income”—those whose families earn less than \$35,000—and it will be left to the institution to determine how this assistance will be funded and provided.

More Students Deeper in Debt

Mr. Rae recommends reducing the amount of money parents from middle-income families are expected to contribute to their dependent children's education, thus making more students eligible for “student assistance.” But anyone with a family income of \$35,000 or

more will be required to rely *exclusively* on higher loans to pay the higher tuition fees. Reductions in the expected parental contribution will mean that more students from family incomes of over \$50,000 will be able to qualify for loans.

Increasing Dependency

Rae is recommending a change to the definition of “independent” status for students applying for aid. Currently, students can be assessed for student aid independent of their parent's income if they have lived away from home for four years. This was an improvement to the previous government's regulation that a student must have lived away from home for five years before qualifying for independent status. Rae is recommending that the definition of dependent student be changed to any single student, 25 years of age or younger and who has no dependents. Rae further recommends that this change be implemented both provincially and federally. In other words, if a student left home at 18, they could apply for student assistance independent of their parents' income by age 22. Under the new scheme, that same student would have to wait an *additional three years* before qualifying as independent. If a student left home at age 16, then such a student would be rendered dependent on their parents for a total of *nine years*.

Private Loan Schemes for Parents and Students

This particular change goes hand in hand with the establishment of a non-subsidized parental student loan programme. On the one hand, extending the definition of dependent will force more students into dependency on their parents for essentially a mandatory contribution to their education, *thereby reducing the amount of subsidised loan available to them*. At the same time, parents who do not have the money to make the contribution can avail themselves of a parallel,

unsubsidized private loan in which interest begins accumulating the day the loan is negotiated. Students, whose parental relationship is strained beyond repair, would be permitted to apply for and receive this *unsubsidised, interest bearing loan* themselves.

Scrapping Ontario Loan Remission for Modest Working Families

Currently all students who qualify for Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and who borrow more than \$7,000 (\$6,500 if the student is a Millennium Scholarship recipient) receive loan forgiveness on the amount over \$7,000 (or \$6,500) as long as they continue to be full-time students and have not defaulted on a previous student loan. This is presently known as the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant.

Rae argues for the elimination of this programme. He states: “In time, the new system of up-front grants should entirely replace the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant, the current loan remission program run by the province.” (p.73)

Eliminating the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant can only mean vastly greater debt loads for students—most likely those with family incomes of between \$35,000 and \$50,000 (since students in these thresholds will not be eligible for the up-front grants nor be required to make use of parental contributions that would reduce the size of their annual loan). Students from these kinds of working families are the very students who will pay more in fees, accrue higher debt and, eventually under Rae’s model, lose access to loan remission.

Although Rae calls for additional debt reduction in repayment through the federal loan programme, the federal debt reduction in repayment is much less generous. But Rae also recommends tying repayment to the income tax system. This measure would eliminate even the most miniscule amount of discretion

left to poor students as they try to manage both their living and debt expenditures. Tying debt repayment to payroll deductions will ensure that the first payment any student loan holder makes from their earnings will be to service their debt, regardless of any other competing demands such as rent, food, or child care.

“Philanthropy” AKA: Public Private Partnerships

Throughout the document, Rae uses the term “philanthropy” as a euphemism for public-private partnership or private fundraising.

The Ontario Student Opportunities Trust Fund is a case in point. The Trust Fund is a public-private partnership that sees public funds matched to institutional fundraising initiatives. It has been widely criticised for creating gross inequities in the disbursement of public student aid dollars. Under this programme two institutions—Queen’s University and the University of Toronto—receive nearly 50% of all public matched funding available and the remaining public funds are disbursed among every other college and university in the province. Last summer, the Ontario government backed away from the programme that was initiated by the former Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris.

Despite widespread concern with the programme and despite the fact that such a programme ensures that public dollars flow to those institutions with the best fundraising capacities, Rae has recommended that this flawed public-private partnership become permanent.

Rae recommends that the overall institutional funding matches for this programme be maintained, but that underperforming institutions receive a top-up for two years and that only bursaries for students in financial need should be eligible for a government

match. It is unlikely that these measures will do anything address the long-term consequences for colleges and newer universities who will be expected to compete for scarce private dollars with their more well-established counterparts. Matching only bursaries for students in financial need but not limiting the overall match for institutions will likely mean larger bursaries for students at institutions with higher fundraising capacities, not a better disbursal of public funds.

Study Now, Pay Forever

Rae has gone on the offensive in recommending the discredited Income-Contingent Loan Repayment (ICLRs) scheme as his vision of increasing funding for higher education. ICLR schemes are inherently regressive since they result in a situation where those who, because their parents weren't wealthy must borrow more for the costs of their education, also pay the most in interest after graduation over an extended period of time. This model ensures that only students whose parents were not wealthy enough to pay the up-front costs of their education will be taxed for their use of the system. Students who had wealthy parents will not face such a tax when they graduate.

In addition, these loan models have paved the way for massive tuition fee increases in countries around the world where such loan schemes have been adopted. The sky-rocketing tuition fees and corresponding explosion in student debt have been disastrous in such countries. Rae's report suggests that plans to implement an ICLR scheme in cooperation with provincial and federal governments are close at hand.

While proponents of study now, pay forever schemes argue that there is nothing inherent in ICLR schemes that will necessarily trigger tuition fee increases, Rae's report clearly acknowledges the connection when he states: "Tuition should not increase at all until the

system of student financial aid is repaired" (p.23) and later "...changes to tuition regulation must be preceded by student aid reform..." (p.99) In other words, the models of student financial aid Rae conceptualises are designed to assist students in absorbing even more of the cost of their education. If this weren't the case—if the tuition fee hikes that are anticipated were truly "affordable"—then he would not need the caveat of "student aid reform" as his prelude to tuition fee increases.

We Already Have an Effective Model: a System of Progressive Taxation

Finally, Rae suggests that "Lurking behind some of the arguments against this new approach is the core objection that graduates, who have benefited from attending college or university, should not be expected to bear reasonable share of the costs of higher education." Nothing could be further from the truth. Proponents of tuition fee reductions have consistently argued for a proper system of progressive taxation as a means of ensuring that those who benefit from higher education contribute to the costs. The higher one's income the more one pays in tax. Rae's model would see a decrease in tax on the wealthy and an increase in the tax on those from low and modest income families. In fact, lurking behind Rae's arguments is a core objection to appropriate taxation for wealthy individuals and profitable corporations.

Ontario Works

A short note about the reference Rae has made to students who are currently Ontario Works (OW) recipients. He recognises that student loan moneys are clawed back from the OW allowances and that this has led to hardship for those on the programme seeking higher education. But his solution is to reduce the living allowance portion of the student loan at source. While this may reduce the overall debt accumulated by students in the OW programme over the long run, it does not address the very real financial difficulties faced

by those on Ontario Works who are also attempting to pursue post-secondary education. For the time the Ontario Works recipient spends in school, the recommendation is, more or less a reaffirmation of the status quo.

Ontario Learning Bonds / Registered Educations Savings Plans

Last year, the Federal government introduced the Canada Learning Bond for new-borns from low income families. With a \$500 bursary at birth and an additional \$100 deposit every year for 15 years, the first recipients of the Bond will not have access to such funds until the year 2022.

Mr. Rae suggests that the Ontario government mirror this paltry programme in Ontario. He states “Ontario should continue to support both philanthropy and saving.” To this end he proposes the Ontario Savings Bond programme on the same terms as the federal programme. Yet if tuition fees continue to rise, the money generated by the programme will provide little in the way of relief for students from low-income families, covering only a fraction of tuition fees for one year.

Implicit in these kinds of savings incentive programmes is that families could and should be saving more for their children’s education. In reality, families don’t save because they can’t. Statistics Canada suggests that the income gap between the top income earners and the lower and bottom income earners is widening, and that seven in 10 Canadians are worried about personal debt. Canadians now borrow \$103 for every after-tax dollar earned. The study also shows that over 75 per cent of Canadians are not making headway in paying down their debt. Yet, Mr. Rae somehow suggests that incentives for savings will somehow allow those living at the poverty line to save money for their kids futures. The

working poor or lower-middle income families will simply not qualify for any measure of relief.

The Higher Education Council

Mr. Rae’s vision for the Higher Education Council is a body that will develop and entrench key performance indicators. So while centrally set tuition fees according to Rae is anathema to the autonomy and flexibility of colleges and universities, centrally controlled and set benchmarks are clearly not.

The Higher Education Council is explicitly not intended to be a stakeholder body that helps develop meaningful accountability to Ontario families, students, staff or faculty. Instead, this body will be comprised of “experts,” leaders from the private sector and other government appointees. The model used for appointing local unaccountable college and university governing boards is being extended for use at the provincial level, minus the election of students, staff and faculty.

The Council will be mandated with the establishment and implementation of performance indicators that will determine the criteria for the “results-based” funding envelopes that are also set out in Mr. Rae’s report.

Equally worrisome is the prospect that this unaccountable body will be called upon to develop research projects, as defined and determined by the Council. Given the ideological nature of the research undertaken by the Millennium Scholarship Foundation this aspect of the Council bears close monitoring.

Finally, Rae recommends explicitly that the Council continue to allow private universities to sell degrees. Mr. Rae states:

Recent legislation has allowed colleges to apply to the ministry for degree-granting status in applied arts and technology, as well as open the possibility to other institutions to be able to grant degrees ... I would not recommend any change from the permissive nature of this approach. (p. 15)

Colleges

Ontario colleges have suffered intolerable funding shortfalls over the past 15 years. Between 1992-93 and 2002-03 full-time college enrolment grew by 31% while the value of operating grants in constant 2003-04 dollars decreased by \$211 million.

The Report recommends at the outset that base funding for colleges and universities be simplified and streamlined so that there will no longer be un-funded students. This issue has been of particular concern in the college sector. In addition, the report recommends but provides no specific funding allocations for the colleges to take on a renewed mandate for in-school apprenticeships and a new mandate to market themselves to “at-risk” K to 12 students. The most specific funding allocation in Mr. Rae’s report appears to be the earmarking of \$40 million annually over three years for equipment renewal within the college sector. A figure far short of the estimated \$150 million of need identified within the college sector.

It should be noted that Mr. Rae is proposing only \$88 million for enrolment growth to be divided among colleges and universities. It is unlikely that this amount of funding will be sufficient if the new enrolment targets set out in Mr. Rae’s report are to be met. It seems clear that tuition fee revenue in the context of de-regulation and a student aid threshold of \$6,000 (triple current college tuition) will take on even greater importance as a funding mechanism for colleges.

College students who borrowed less because of lower tuition fees still face greater difficulty in loan repayment since college graduates earn less, on average, than their university educated counterparts. Far from becoming wealthy after graduation, college education appears to secure average wages for college graduates. Yet the contours of Rae’s report should be cause for alarm for college students whose tuition fees and subsequent debt are likely to increase significantly if Rae’s proposals are adopted.

Concern should also lie in the recurring theme of performance indicators and funding tied to outcomes. Key Performance Indicator-based funding has not been beneficial for colleges. Throughout the consultation process, many college representatives cited various examples where costly college effort to conform to such indicators failed to translate into the hoped-for KPI funding. Most notably, this was a case in point with the boom and bust of the high tech sector. No sooner had colleges redesigned their programming to graduate more students in this field than the market turned and tossed such graduates into unemployment. This should be of particular concern for northern and rural colleges since Rae’s vision here is clearly premised on “targeted incentive funding.”

The only change to the existing model of funding tied to performance indicators Rae proposes is replacing the student satisfaction survey with the Community College Survey of Student Engagement.

Finally, further investigation is required to flesh out the implications of drawing “at-risk” students from the publicly paid for school system into the user-fee based college system. Rae’s report calls for a new mandate for colleges to market themselves to high school students and set out alternative pathways to higher learning. Given recent alarm being raised in the public school system about the

return of “streaming,” especially as it relates to visible minority and poor students, this particular proposition will have to be closely watched.

Graduate Education and Research

Rae calls for the doubling of graduate students within the post-secondary education system over ten years. He calls for two rounds of funding envelopes: \$21 million for 2005-06 and \$180 million in 2007-08, but these funding packages would be available on a proposal by proposal basis and allocated to those institutions where a proven capacity already exists. This market-based vision will likely place northern and newer universities at a competitive disadvantage. If an institution meets their original business plan that secured them a portion of the funding envelope, then that funding will become automatic and the university can apply for additional funds in the future. It is unclear as to what fate will meet those universities who fail to meet the targets established in their business plan and what will become of the funding they had hoped to acquire.

It should also be noted that Rae has explicitly excluded graduate students from eligibility for the up-front grants programme that he is recommending. Up-front grants will only be available to students in the “first four years of study.” (p.72) Moreover, he proposes that student funding would be capped at a maximum length of study for each student, with the final payment being made after the student completes her programme. There is no discussion on the impact high tuition fees have had on graduate student completion rates.

Rae wants to see the immediate creation of a Research Council that will report to the Premier and advise and co-ordinate research priorities. As in the case of the Higher Education Council, membership for the

Research Council would be drawn from so-called experts in applied and commercial research as well as from the private sector.

Targeted Enrolment

Rae has recommended additional funding envelopes to target increased enrolment for aboriginal, francophone, students with disabilities, and first generation students. While such increased funding recommendations are welcome, there is a contradiction between these measures and Rae’s goal of increasing user fees and debt. All international evidence demonstrates that debt aversion (driven in large part by escalating tuition fees) are significant barriers to higher education among the groups Rae has identified.

Recently, Statistics Canada reported that:

In addition, the mid-1990s saw an unexpected increase in the low-income rate in Canada as it deviated from its expected trend based on the unemployment rate. As unemployment fell in the mid-1990s, the low-income rate continued to rise. ...

Persistent low income tends to be concentrated among five groups: single parents, recent immigrants, people with work disabilities, unattached people aged between 45 and 64, and Aboriginal people.

Recent increases in low-income rates were concentrated among recent immigrants. In 1980, 25% of recent immigrants were living in low income. By 2000, this proportion had increased to 36%. (*The Daily*, Trends in income inequality in Canada from an international perspective. February 10, 2005)

Rae has ensured that low and modest income families, particularly those with incomes ranging between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year, will see at least double-digit tuition fee increases and an explosion of debt.

Finally, Rae has completely omitted any discussion on access and affordability for students from racialised communities. Such students face compounded financial and systemic barriers both inside and outside the post-secondary education system.

Deferred Maintenance, New Facilities, Staffing and Faculty

While many groups praised Rae for calling for an additional \$200 million annually for three years to address the estimated \$1.8 billion price tag for deferred maintenance, it must be clearly stated that Rae has called for only one-third of the necessary funding required to address the issue of deferred maintenance. For new facilities, Rae has called for an additional \$300 million per year for ten years. Although not stated explicitly, there is no doubt that colleges and universities will be compelled to increase tuition fees as a means of generating the additional funds required.

Quietly and conveniently missing from the document is any discussion of staffing needs of universities and colleges for building repair and maintenance. At the same time, a persistent climate of underfunding combined with pressures to reduce costs may well mean downward pressure on wages, less use of full-time unionised staff and faculty, and increased pressure to contract out. For example Rae himself states the following:

There needs to be a candid discussion—and consequent decisions—to ensure that new money does not simply translate into much higher, across-the-board salary increases. Pay systems should be sufficiently flexible that real merit and

outstanding performance can be appropriately rewarded. (p.17)

The acknowledgement of inflation does not mean that savings cannot be found over time.... A concerted examination of institutional costs, cost drivers and cost savings opportunities should be conducted to arrive at a better understanding of savings opportunities that do not jeopardize core goals. (p.95)

This aspect of Rae's report should send shivers down the spines of support staff and faculty. Legitimate pay increases for staff and faculty can easily be translated into "cost drivers." Ontario's colleges and university staff already face huge workload increases, while contracting out and the downloading of services has reduced the overall numbers of unionised staff. A significant and meaningful investment in expanded enrolment simply cannot be conceptualised without an equally significant investment in staff and faculty. If the drive to reduce costs translates into increased contracting out and reliance on part-time staff and faculty such measures will be detrimental in the extreme to the learning conditions of students.

Right to Organise for students and staff

Rae's vision has been to decentralise the fight for affordable, high quality education down to the level of the institution. At the same time, two groups in particular have no legislation protecting their right to organise. Students and part-time workers in the colleges.

Students

Students' right to form students' unions is not protected by legislation. Currently, a students' union's existence is wholly dependent on the college or university administration collecting their democratically set members dues. Recently, on campuses in Ontario,

administrations have been interfering internally in the affairs of local students' unions. Such interference has occurred in the area of elections, fee collections up to and including placing students' unions in "trusteeship." History has shown time and again that students' unions that take positions that differ from college and university administrations are at risk of losing autonomy.

A move to further decentralisation of our public post-secondary education system must anticipate increased engagement between students, staff, faculty and the administrations. It is more urgent than ever to insist that students right to organise through their students' union be protected in legislation.

Part-time Staff within the Colleges

The past 15 years of underfunding have led to significant increases in the number of part-time staff and faculty used by the college system. In a climate of underfunding, part-time workers are increasingly exploited as colleges attempt to produce more with less real dollars. In fact, these workers now comprise the majority of staff within the college sector. Yet such part-time staff are prevented by legislation from organising into trade unions. Because these people cannot bargain collectively, the benefits are few, the pay is low and inconsistent and there is absolutely no formal mechanism through which unfair management practice can be resolved. Even cases of discrimination cannot be resolved outside of formal human rights complaints. This fact undermines the quality of students learning conditions. Many part-time faculty do not even have a desk, let alone an office. Without adequate office space, it is difficult for students to be able to meet regularly with their instructors to discuss their course material.

Students, Staff and Faculty under attack?

Rae's document makes no mention of the importance of protecting collective bargaining, let alone legalising it for part-time workers in the college sector. In fact, Rae cites Alberta's overarching *Post-Secondary Learning Act, 2003* as an example of "legislation setting parameters for tuition fee setting, financial aid, access targets and performance measures." (p.41) Students, staff and faculty should know that the *Post-Secondary Learning Act, 2003* also allows the government to audit, investigate, and *dissolve elected students unions*, the Act *outlaws the right of graduate students to join trade unions* and it *eliminates the right to strike for all academic staff and students*.

Conclusion

On February 22 Bob Rae revealed his real agenda during his appearing on the Report on Business television programme *Squeeze Play*:

Kevin O'Leary: As a director, I was a little worried as a director when you started this process that you weren't going to move towards a free-market education...now that seems to be what you've done...you've actually opened this up. So I'm in...I applaud you first of all...I'm in...

Bob Rae: (laughing) State of shock.

Kevin O'Leary: I am in a little bit of a state of shock...On the other hand this is a **free market system** you're endorsing. Now, let's talk about one of the really contentious issues first...this freeze on education...was **really bad** for the education market? Wouldn't you agree with this?

Bob Rae: ... I've said that the freeze should not continue and I think the Premier accepts that.

There is absolutely no doubt that de-regulating tuition fees is the heart and soul of Rae's report on post-secondary education. From Jeffrey Simpson to Andrew Coyne, from Queen's University to the University of Toronto, those who have been advocating for higher tuition fees and higher debt are celebrating in the aftermath of Rae's report. In an environment of tuition fee de-regulation the rhetoric of "modest" tuition fee increases and flippant remarks that "some tuition fees will go down" flies in the face of all international experience.

Rae's public funding recommendations are conspicuously low at \$ 1.3 billion, especially for a system that has already lost over \$2 billion since 1996. Rae's definitive vision will ensure that the much needed additional revenues required to bring our colleges and universities back to health will be generated not from government but from tuition fees, public-private partnerships and contracting out. The veneer is new and progressive, but the content is thoroughly imbued with the drive toward differentiation, competition and survival of the fittest. In short, by ushering in tuition fee de-regulation, Rae is attempting to do what the previous Conservative government could not fully accomplish: pry open the door to privatisation.