



Public Post-Secondary Education

The key to future prosperity, equality and innovation



Back to the negotiating table

Federal transfer payments to the provinces, through the Canada Social Transfer (CST), help fund public colleges and institutes among other important public services. ■ This important block of funding will be re-negotiated in 2014 by Harper and the Premiers. We need to ensure this transfer is protected and strengthened.

IN 1995, the federal government axed funding to the provinces and the CST was reduced by \$7 billion. Today, federal transfers for education are \$1.3 billion short of 1992 levels.

The result has been skyrocketing tuition fees, a reduction in the number of full-time faculty, larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, diminished library holdings and a deteriorating infrastructure.

Where has the “public” gone in public post-secondary education?

Tuition fees have climbed year after year for these past two decades. According to a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) 2011 report, tuition fees have increased at more than double the rate of inflation since the mid-90s.

A growing proportion of Canada's spending on post-secondary education is coming from private sources. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that more than 43% of Canadian spending on education came from private sources, primarily tuition fees.

Who's getting shut out?

Accessibility of public post-secondary education is a growing issue. When Canadian colleges and universities were springing up all across the country, the principle of accessibility was paramount. Access to post-secondary education was based on

a student's desire and ability to pursue studies, not on financial means.

Besides significant differences in average tuition costs between provinces, a Statistics Canada study showed that students from low-income families are less than half as likely to pursue a university education than those from high-income households. In addition, the most frequently reported reason high school students don't pursue post-secondary education was financial.

Crumbling campuses and overloaded classrooms

Class sizes are growing, jeopardizing the assurance of a quality education experience. Shortcuts to certificates and the fragmentation of whole trades threaten the quality of the Canadian apprenticeship programs.

The range of public academic programs is diminishing. Loss of programs from the arts and humanities to engineering and professional programs, and from social sciences to natural sciences, makes it more difficult to receive a quality education.

Decreased funding has also slowed campus maintenance schedules. The results have been ageing and inaccessible buildings, with inadequate classroom space. Even with recent capital grants for

new buildings on campuses, deferred maintenance on older buildings has reached epic proportions.

Rising costs

Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) student debt skyrocketed between 1999 and 2004, from \$21,177 to over \$28,000—an increase of more than 33% in just five years.

Student debt from the Canada Student Loan program has exceeded \$14 billion. These debt levels influence whether a student will complete a program or advance to post-graduate programs.

We CAN afford it!

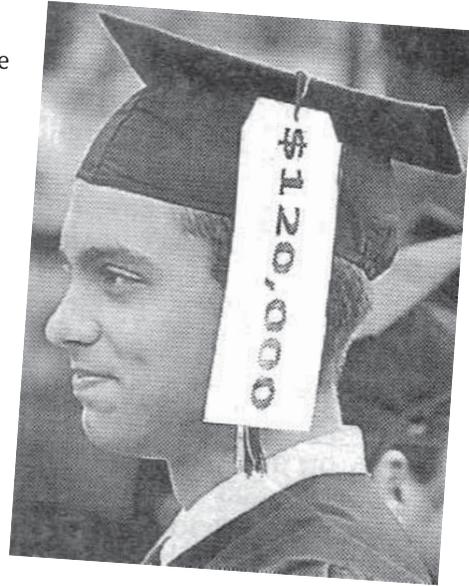
A move towards tax fairness would provide revenue to increase post-secondary education funding. The 2012 Alternative Federal Budget calculates that by 2013 the federal government spending on corporate tax cuts will cost \$13.7 billion.

Off-shore tax havens in 2010 meant a \$16 billion loss in Canadian taxes. It's time to re-evaluate our principles and priorities: do we continue to benefit the wealthy and corporations or do we invest in education and shape a society that all Canadians can share in?

National standards

Modelled after the Canada Health Act, a Canada Post-Secondary Education Act would create consistency in institutions between provinces. A proposed Act was introduced into parliament as a Private Member's Bill, C-265, in June 2011. It would require provinces to ensure the quality, accessibility, public administration and accountability of those post-secondary programs.

The National Union of Public and General Employees has been calling for a Post-Secondary Education Act for more than a decade. A Harris-Decima survey done in 2011 showed 66% of Canadians felt that some kind of conditions should be attached to federal-provincial transfers, whether in the form of an Act or otherwise. A guaranteed sharing of costs would create a more sustainable education system where students could count on consistency of quality and costs.



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