

UPEI Campus for Shares of Youth Vote

Mr Robichaud advocated an immediate tuition freeze should be established, much to the delight of the students in attendance, however, as the NDP is shooting to be the official opposition there isn't much hope of that. Mr Robichaud also suggested that Prince Edward Island could adopt a more European outlook to post-secondary education, by this, he was referring to more merit based and publicly subsidized education with the ultimate goal being zero tuition.

Mr Ghiz felt that lowering tuition would take more than giving a few million dollars to the university. Using his time Mr Ghiz concentrated on his tax credit plan that would see graduate students have the entirety of their income tax applied to alleviate their student loan debt. This is a very pro-active idea and one that I believe the government no matter what their party should look into.

Premier Binns reiterated his parties desire to raise the \$600 bursary to \$1000 per year for third and fourth year students. This brought on a

huge round of applause by PC supporters who were clearly in the majority. Mr Binns was quick to point how much the government sponsors nurses and many of the other programs and such that are currently in place. In the end I don't feel Mr Robichaud or Mr Ghiz really took Mr Binns to task for the drastic rise in tuition since he came to office.

The final question in the original set of questions that was of considerable interest was whether or not Prince Edward Island should adopt a proportional representation electoral system. An electoral system that rewards percentage of the over all vote as opposed to our first past the post system where 35% percent of the population voted Liberal in the last election and ended up with only one representative in the legislature.

Mr Ghiz leading the Liberal party, that would have had a much more significant presence in the legislature with a PR electoral system, felt that the system should definitely be examined and

should also be the subject of a plebiscite. On a side note I feel that more decisions should be the subject of a plebiscite.

Premier Binns also showed his concern for the lack of proportional representation and has already started looking into consulting on the topic. This is another hard question for the Premier that could have turned out poorly as his party has benefited greatly over the last two elections from first past the post and an argument might have been made that the Progressive conservative party could have been more pro-active in finding a more balanced electoral system.

It goes without saying that the Island New Democrats were in favour of PR for two main reasons. The first being they would greatly increase their opportunity to have a presence in the legislature as they currently have been receiving higher voter averages it is still not enough to give them a firm foot in the door. The second is their belief that a PR system is more democratic.

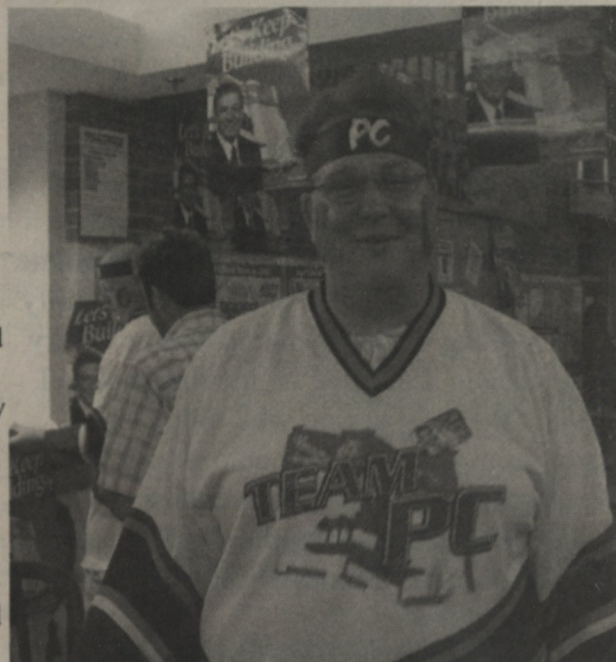
Following some questions from the floor the leaders were given time for closing comments which sounded pretty similar to their opening statements. I should make note that through out the debate the gentlemen became much more relaxed looking at one another, smiling and even joking with one another. In the end Premier Binns came off look-

ing like the experienced and well travelled politician that he is, Mr Ghiz exhibited energy and youth that Prof. Barry Bartman referred to as "fire in the belly" and Mr Robichaud came out

with more credibility and better recognition than he might have had before.

After the debate while Dave spoke with Robert Ghiz I was given the opportunity to sit down and talk with Premier Binns even before the television journalist which impressed me (I could get to like this journalist lifestyle). Premier Binns was eloquent and didn't say too much that we hadn't heard before. When asked about the changes in surrounding he must feel travelling from his local riding to Ottawa and dealing with other premiers he was sure to make it known that to him all the people he encounters carried equal weight....did I already mention he was an experienced politician?

When I pressed Premier Binns on justifying the rise in tuition since 1996 by 66% his reply was fair enough, that UPEI does have one of the lowest tuition costs in the Maritimes and that his government has been doing, and intends to do more to



help with student tuition costs, once gain pointing out his intention of raising the provincial bursary \$400. Asked why I, as a graduating student, should stay on Prince Edward Island, Mr Binns pressed the growing industry on PEI and the lower unemployment rate. In the end I didn't really learn anything that I didn't know, however, Mr Binns was very polite and generous with his time. I just hope he takes to heart the cover of the Cadre he had his photo taken with.

The leadership debate was fun and interesting, however, I am now well over 1500 words and should draw to a close. The net effect was that we learned little we didn't already know, the leaders all treated each other well, and with only a few exceptions, never really pressed each other, there was no clear winner as such and I never spoke with anyone that regretted spending an hour listening to the three gentlemen speak.

