

Charest Visits Journal of a Protester

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by Peter Gillis

constitution pretzel." Charest was emotional on the Quebec issue, but is still optimistic that if the sides sat down, a solution could be worked out.

At this point Charest entertained questions from the audience. Charest addressed the issue of Quebec bi-elections. Realistically, he does not expect to win, but the Conservatives would contest the seats and get their message out. Charest was asked about the recent suggestion of a Reform-PC alliance. He laughed "it's very confusing when you talk of alliances in Ottawa, because initially Elsie Wayne and I, when there was talk of a merger we thought the Liberals were coming over to us. . . I would become leader and Elsie would become deputy leader." The recent events brought on by frustration at the fact that the Conservatives have no voice in the House.

Another question raised dealt with what the PC party's view was towards Quebec and how this is distinguished from the others. Charest has two agendas: devolution and decentralization, and then to work on strengthen economy; and secondly, recognize the French language culture that is "alive and well and dynamic" and "represents a jewel for the world." Charest believed that this culture is part of everyone's identity as Canadians. This recognition does not mean special status.

Charest's next question was asked in French and brought up the issue of reconciling the two languages. He believes that as Canadians, we have the added freedom of opportunities that arise because we can learn two languages. He was asked about health care and responded by saying the PCs want to find out what do we want for a health system, and then how do we pay for this system. Questions about Quebec and special powers and the partition issue (the Cree for example), how the PC party was different from the other parties and the issue of paying for higher education and health care were also raised.

Charest had to conclude rather quickly, as he had a meeting downtown. He departed with an appreciative round of applause. Special thanks to all those who attended and to those who made the visit possible.

On Wednesday February 7, I participated in the student protest at Province House. This is Peter Gillis standing out here in front of the UPEI barn. I'm about to start my march with some one hundred and fifty other students here. Everyone has got a sign and some are carrying banners. My sign is homemade, saying "Is there no more to life than Kraft Dinner and Student loans?" To emphasize this, I'm carrying a box of macaroni and cheese. I guess it's supposed to reflect student poverty, or something. Great idea, Peter.

Walking through the UPEI campus is a little depressing. It seems pretty bare, with few people looking out the windows. If it wasn't for the occasional student walking to the library you would think that UPEI is attended by ghosts. It's hard to believe that with cuts affecting so many people on this campus, there aren't more people out protesting today.

We now have our police escort leading us down University avenue. The traffic has picked up over the last few minutes and many cars are forced to wait while we walk by. The looks on their faces reflect little sympathy for our cause. I guess they're too concerned with their own world to worry about ours. It seems to me that they are more amused than interested. I'm beginning, to feel a little stupid waving my box of macaroni and cheese. . .

Getting closer to University Plaza now. The chants of "Stop the Cuts" and "Education is a Right" are almost non-stop now. I didn't think there would be this much emotion when I set out today. Many of the protesters are first or second year students. Perhaps it's because they have the most to lose when tuition rises. Funny, but it also seems that there are more women than men. I wonder what that has to do with anything.

We've walked by quite a few high school students lately. They're shouting sound slogans of their own. I can hear cries of "Losers!" and "Get a life!" from a few of them. I'm rather surprised by the distain we're getting. Either they don't realize that increases in tuition will affect them as well, or they just don't care. Kind of sad, really. I feel like throwing my box of macaroni at them.

We're getting into the heart of

downtown Charlottetown. Our police officer is getting a bit upset at us. We're constantly straying off the sidewalk, and I don't think he likes that. Protests should be orderly, don't-you know.

We've just reached Province house and we're being directed around back for some reason. I guess they don't want the speeches in front where everyone can see them. The provincial legislature isn't even sitting today. I'm beginning to wonder if anyone is listening to us, besides ourselves, that is.

The speeches have started right on time. Wasn't really listening to the first one; but boy can Leo Broderick catch your attention. Our student council president is talking right now. I wish someone would tell her that her mike is not working.

It's the end of the protest for most. The speeches are over and the buses are coming to take us all back to UPEI. My friend Rita Jackson has just convinced a small group to go with her to see George Proud. If we're lucky we'll all get arrested

and make the national news.

I'm standing in front of George Proud's office door, staring at his 'closed' sign. I guess Mr. Proud doesn't do Wednesdays. We marched up six flights of stairs to be met by secretary full of "sympathy" and "concern". "And what are you protesting?" she asked, "the provincial sales tax'?" WHAT??? You'd think that the signs would have been an obvious clue. On the way out I gave her my macaroni and cheese. I wonder if Mr. Proud can afford better.

I'm sitting in a in a local bar with two of my friends who I've just convinced to join me for a post rebellion drink. All in all, I'd have to say that the march was very interesting. Yet, when I sit here and think about it, I wonder what bit of good the protest is actually going to do. I'm starting to realize that the only people more apathetic than my generation are politicians. They don't seem to listen to anybody. Well, I guess I'll just sit here and drink my scotch, smoke a cigarette or two, and think about life in the good ol' days. You know, the days when people could go to university and afford more than macaroni and cheese.

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