

McGuinty tuition fee increases no way to pull province out of recession and into knowledge economy

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TORONTO, Ont. – By allowing university tuition fee hikes of 4 to 8 per cent every year, the McGuinty Liberals are going in the wrong direction to pull the province out of recession, says the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario. Instead, the province needs to graduate more students in order to build a strong, knowledge-based economy that will take it out of its new “have-not” status within Canada, according to CUPE Ontario Secretary-Treasurer Fred Hahn.

“Every year that this government raises tuition fees means that less and less young people are entering the workforce with the skills needed to fuel the success of knowledge-based industries,” Hahn told thousands of students gathered at Queen's Park today to stop tuition fee increases. “And with every tuition fee increase, more working families lose the opportunity to send their kids to university.”

The McGuinty government cancelled the tuition fee freeze in 2006 after only two years. Under its *Reaching Higher Framework*, the government has allowed tuition fee hikes of 4 to 8 per cent each year, resulting in the highest fee increases on campuses across Canada.

“Graduate students are not completing their programs and that's a growing problem,” said Hahn. “This is a huge loss of investment for the system because these students just can't afford to stay in university.” Eighty-seven per cent of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater funding for colleges and universities. Yet Ontario ranks second-last of all provinces in terms of funding for post-secondary education as a share of total provincial expenditure.

Hahn contrasted Ontario's record with that of Ireland, which eliminated tuition fees to help propel that country to become one of the strongest knowledge-based economies in Europe. And Ireland is not alone. Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Wales, Scotland, France and Norway all offer free tuition with Germany even extending it to international students.

“Universities are public institutions; we built them with our tax dollars and they are part of the fabric of public services that serve the common good,” added Hahn. “Yet a corporate mentality has taken over campuses. Even in the so called ‘good times’, universities raised all sorts of fees, privatized services and commercialized campuses in part because of federal and provincial underfunding. It's time to turn this thinking on its head and start funding the students that are our province's economic future.”

CUPE members from Brock, York, Ryerson, Trent, McMaster and University of Toronto's Scarborough, Mississauga and St. George campuses all journeyed to the rally at Queen's Park organized by the Canadian Federation of Students Ontario. Other rallies took place at Lakehead and Windsor campuses while Ottawa universities rallied at Parliament Hill.

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