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## The "Rae Review": A Critique

by *Ralph V. Barrett and Howard A. Doughty*

The subject of this article is the report, **Ontario: A Leader in Learning** (Rae, 2005), presented to the government of Ontario by its principal author and key public face of the document, Bob Rae.

The presentation is divided into four main parts:

1. we attempt to summarize the political philosophy of Bob Rae, the former Member of Parliament and federal New Democratic Party foreign affairs critic, former NDP Premier of Ontario, corporate lawyer, mediator, specially chosen investigator of the postsecondary educational system in Ontario and, most recently, advisor on whether or not it would be a good idea to conduct a competent investigation into Canada's most devastating terrorist attack twenty years after the event;
2. we discuss the process whereby Mr. Rae and his associates conducted the review of postsecondary education as a matter of political procedure and symbolic practice;
3. we assess the resulting report and reactions to it as matters of political discourse;
4. we speak about the 2005 Ontario provincial budget as it reflects the influence of the Rae review and sets the stage for educational reform in Ontario.

Finally, we add a few obligatory concluding remarks.

Our focus is primarily upon the Rae Review's treatment of college education. Although only about six of the one hundred and twenty four pages of the final report and recommendations deal directly with the colleges (and about half of that space is devoted to a call for colleges to take over apprenticeship programs in the trades), this segment of the Ontario postsecondary system is of vital importance and deserves more attention than it normally receives from the media, business, government and, of course, the Rae Review.

### Bob Rae: The Politics of "Too Much" and "Too Little"

As Karl Marx pointed out in Volume 1 of **Capital**, the advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws. While educational institutions largely support corporate capitalism, even prominent social democrats in Canada are increasingly accepting of the "natural law" which dictates the operation of our economy. These reform-minded progressives regard working within the "system" as tactically necessary to even the mildest of social and economic reforms. They therefore can be counted upon to endorse strategies that speak

earnestly of improving the quality of life of ordinary citizens while simultaneously advocating policies that promote more efficient management of existing public institutions and monitoring the effectiveness of public servants.

While sometimes harsh in criticism and occasionally visionary in ambition when occupying opposition seats in the legislature, it is not uncommon for "progressive" politicians to display what some may regard as a failure of nerve when they sometimes unexpectedly find themselves winners in a general election. Thus, in 1976, Québec separatist leader René Lévesque surprised many of his supporters by taking himself off to New York immediately after his victory party to reassure nervous international financiers that the Parti Québécois' triumph would in no way jeopardize their investments. Likewise, when he assumed the political leadership of Ontario, one of Bob Rae's first initiatives was to meet with the monied elite in Toronto to set their minds at rest by stressing that he had no plans to radically change economic arrangements in Ontario. Unlike his successor, Mike Harris, who swept to power on the neoliberal platform of a "common sense revolution" and immediately set about pursuing an unapologetic anti-labour, anti-teacher, anti-welfare, anti-environment, anti-Native agenda, Premier Rae, in the alternative, had gone far out of his way to declare that his legislative program would be upsetting to no one except, perhaps, his strongest supporters. His early governmental reforms reached their apex with the passage of "anti-scab" laws that prevented the use of "replacement workers" but, after that rather healthy start (and the dyspeptic reaction of business groups), it was difficult to detect much of a left-wing presence in his governance. Indeed, many in Rae's inner circle openly mocked their more strident colleagues. Thus, Robin Sears, Rae's former chief of staff, recently described what Cliff Scotton, "the always droll aide to Tommy Douglas—called the 'Too little! Too Late! Ain't it awful!' school of political rhetoric on the left," and observed that "Canadian voters, like all normally optimistic human beings" were unimpressed" (quoted in Urquhart, 2005, May 16). In the opinion of such NDP insiders, negativism was plainly counterproductive in a party seeking to win and to hold electoral office. Tired of being a party of principle (and therefore consigned to the political margins in a country in which brokerage politics were deemed essential to any party of success), the New Democrats under Bob Rae sought a fresh, no-nonsense approach that would shake off the party's self-righteous, moralistic image and orient itself to the practicalities of gaining and retaining political power.

Partly to give an ex post facto philosophical rationale for his strategies and tactics in office, Bob Rae, in his reflective book, **The Three Questions: Prosperity and the Public Good** (1999), claimed that he had not fallen into the "capitalist embrace." His position was more nuanced. He was not a social democratic apostate; he was merely realistic and reasonable. He understood, unlike the ideological left, that there simply is no alternative to capitalism, and that there may never be. Capitalism, he felt, is rooted in the native self-interest that sociobiologically inherent in every human being. Selfishness is natural and needs to be recognized as an innate characteristic of our species. The good news is that recognizing that "greed is good" does

not, according to Rae, end the discussion. There is hope for a balance between intrinsically selfish humanity and what might generously be called "humane" behaviour. Capitalism, he insists, can be "red in tooth and claw," or it can be modified to include a decent measure of compassion and species solidarity, which might even turn out, in some cases, to be a successful adaptation, a useful "meme" in our cultural evolution. He therefore rephrases the central question of political economy for the benefit of social democrats: "the issue in the modern world is not between capitalism and socialism. It is about what kind of capitalism we want to have" (Rae, 1999, p. 30). Change within corporate capitalism is possible but changing corporate capitalism is ruled out—social democratic modifications if necessary, but not necessarily social democracy.

In order to understand Rae's most recent intervention in the postsecondary education system, a careful, preliminary reading of **The Three Questions** is essential. Once well out of political office and ensconced in a respected law firm, Rae offered a meditation on the inquiries of Jewish sage Rabbi Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being of my own self, what am I? And if not now, when?" (cf. Shatz, 1970). In Rae's ruminations on these themes, no cliché is avoided, no banality is excluded and no opportunity to offer a course in resignation is turned aside. The limits on social democratic enthusiasms and commitments are sternly outlined. The follies of unrealistic expectations and imprudent demands are explained. The record of his nominally "leftist" government is justified. The perils of exceeding the precincts of pragmatism are made plain for anyone tempted by ideological rigidity, old-fashioned solutions to obsolete problems, and mind-sets that fail to appreciate the genuine options that are available to modify existing socio-economic arrangements in the authentic interests of all citizens. Bored with the depression mentality of the "old left," and affronted by the counter-cultural pretensions of the "new left," Bob Rae sought out a third way.

Rae's analysis of political and economic issues and trends is constructed on a passive acceptance of technological determinism. Globalized corporate capitalism, he believes, is rooted in technological changes that are outside the control of sovereign nations or even international governmental arrangements such as the European Union and that are systematically being turned over to institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization for administration. The state being no more than the executive committee of the ruling class, it becomes a secondary instrument when the ruling class goes international.

Within national boundaries, the political potential to control the behaviour of corporations faces two main restrictions. First, technologies that are at the core of the information economy are inherently "decentralizing"; so, the internal regulatory powers of governments are worn away by centripetal forces (see Rae, 1999, p. 49). Second, the digital economy empowers transnational corporations that do their virtual business beyond the reach of national governments. In fact, the centrifugal forces of global communications technology have already placed multinational mechanisms of control in the hands of corporate-friendly global

regulators which can dictate domestic policy to small nations and may soon impose fiscal discipline on even the most powerful governments on Earth (though not yet upon the largest debtor nation in history, the United States of America).

The bland acceptance of technologically mediated corporate power is important because it implies, in Rae's words, that "social democracy goes astray when it pretends that politics and governments can do very much to stop technological changes and innovations" (1999, p. 7). The technologically mediated productive and distributive policies of the private sector are simply beyond public control. To Rae, technological change is the engine of globalization and, in classic neoliberal fashion, he extols the virtues of the consequent liberation of capital. Globalization, he intones, results in "more open economies, the absence of capital controls [which] set limits on what governments can do, and how they can tax and regulate" (1999, p. 85). This is simply the way things are, and ever more will be so.

In Rae's view, as long as the "core value of social democracy—the sense that communities and equal citizenship matter," (1999, p. 7) does not "go astray" and artificially interfere with the necessities of global technology by attempting to meddle with the corporate market by exerting political power through institutions of government, all will be well or as well as can be expected under these ineluctable circumstances. Of course, Rae does not advocate the total abandonment of governance. He supplies a litany of meandering platitudes about proper balances among technology, equity and human rights but, in practice, he is unwilling to endorse anything more daring than a little tinkering on the margins of techno-market necessities (encouraging, perhaps, more efficient fuels for SUVs).

Thus far, Rae's doctrine could amount to no more than the articulation of a kind of chronic pessimism. He is not, however, willing to settle for a cosmic shrug. Having spurned traditional socialist analyses and alternatives, he engages the dynamics of investment, the vivacity of the entrepreneurial spirit, and the powerful attraction of possessive individualism. Newly energized, Rae's particular interest in legitimizing "self-interest" as the basis of civil society quickly turns into a broad defense of private ownership as the best way to achieve economic growth and public prosperity. For Rae, "the pursuit of self-interest is a healthy and natural start to public life just as it is to psychic health" (1999, p. 197). Thus, he wishes to enhance the opportunities for individuals to improve their lives materially, to express themselves creatively, and to achieve personal dignity and recognition. The fulfillment of personal ambition leads, for Rae, not merely into achievement at the level of the individual, but to the material enhancement of all of society. The rising tide of self-interest raises all above the waterline and floats even the ship of state in the direction of prosperity. Barbara Amiel could not help but agree.

How do Rae's reasonable goals of incremental reformism relate to his point that one of the central lessons of political economy in the twentieth century is that "the surest way to economic growth is through an essentially privately owned, entrepreneurial driven, market

economy" (1999, p. 28)? They do so rather badly. There is, in today's fashionable term, a "disconnect," though apparently obsolete dogmatists might call it a "contradiction." In whatever language, however, it is plain that, in an economy dominated by Wal-mart, Micro-Soft, Disney, Exxon and Pentagon contractors, corporate executives extract billions of dollars annually in "self-interest" rewards while the gap between rich and poor—domestically and globally—widens. The private ownership rights of Magna Corporation's Frank Stronach, to cite one small Canadian example, allowed him to receive fifty-two million dollars in 2004, thus demonstrating the happy consequences of equating the private ownership of major industries with the personal property rights of ordinary individuals. On the other hand, sophisticated capitalists are quick to appreciate the benefits of governments that promote the redistribution of wealth (from the poor to the rich). A timely example is to be found in New York City where Mayor Bloomberg and State Governor George Pataki pooled resources to provide billionaire Robert Wood Johnson IV with an additional \$1.3 billion to build a new stadium for his football team, the New York Jets. Over half the money was to come from the sale of land owned by the cash-strapped Metropolitan Transit Authority which is reducing subway service due to lack of operating funds (cf. Herbert, 2005). Though this scheme failed (as part of the general failure of New York's bid for the 2012 Olympics) it is singular both for its audacity and transparency. Darker (and more successful) examples, arising from what President Dwight D. Eisenhower presciently called the "military-industrial complex," abound. Such mischief does not seem to bother Rae inordinately. He can label it "excessive" and suggest that something be done to restrain such behaviour. His real interests are more expansive. Rae suggests that, instead of becoming obsessed with petty vice and venial sins, we should look to the larger landscape and celebrate, for instance, the recognition of individual property rights by Deng Xiao Ping in China because it marked the end of Mao's economic collectivism. Such merrymaking, we suggest in turn, ought not to ignore the fact that the "market socialism" of contemporary China thrives on foreign export sales by ensuring, through the repression of independent trade unions, enormous supplies of cheap productive labour power (see Hart-Landberg and Burkett, 2004, p. 22).

Rae's ahistorical comments on the role of "self-interest" and "the market" in the furtherance of prosperity ignore the conflict between private corporate interests and the public good in Canada, never mind China. It is a somewhat simplistic exaggeration to claim that "appeals to self-sacrifice, compassion and even generosity are rarely a successful substitute for self-interest" (Rae, 1999, p. 18). From this observation (which, of course, is blind to corporate concentration and corporate collusion in rigging markets, fixing prices and exploiting deregulation at home and abroad), Rae concludes that any notion of a "self-contained, collectively owned command and control economy" has little public appeal and has been "abandoned by virtually every democratic socialist party in the world" (1999, p. 26). No doubt the "command and control economy" of the Roman Emperor Diocletian (284-305) was a disaster, but even the economy of the old Soviet Union was nowhere near achieving the economic nightmare that haunts Rae's analysis of the problems of government intervention in

the economy. Indeed, the main extant examples of "command and control" economies are those dominated by privately owned international cartels. For Rae, the problems of the economy are not those produced by gigantic multinational enterprises as they structure industries from petroleum to pharmaceuticals to their own advantage. He appears to believe that the serious trouble starts when governments interfere excessively by increasing minimum wages, imposing bureaucratic constraints on entrepreneurship and robbing students of their sense of satisfaction by paying their own way through school and, consequently, "owning" their education. "Governments," Rae says, "should not do too little. But we pay a price when they try to do too much" (1999, p. 98). He takes inspiration from three-term British Prime Minister Tony Blair whose Labour Party's abandonment of nationalization as the "endgame" of democratic socialism amounts to a simple acknowledgement of the way things are—a recognition of a world economy of unchallenged and unchallengeable global corporate capitalism.

Perhaps public ownership of the steel industry or fast food chains is not an essential part of the social democratic project, but public funding and control of health, education, welfare and criminal justice must be, if the phrase is to be meaningful at all. How these essential elements of a just society are to be maintained and adequately funded without substantial government intervention (a term that carries the heavy scent of illegitimacy) in the economy is a question that does not seem to merit inclusion in Bob Rae/Rabbi Hillel's big three. Rae's studied vagueness on the issue of how to translate social democratic compassion into practical politics in the absence of vigorous government participation in the economy allows him to support some kinds of government involvement (funding for essential services) while permitting private corporations to dominate that part of the marketplace where a measure of elasticity is to be found. Rae warns that countries where governments intrude too far into the economy by owning too much and by seeking to regulate too much, fall behind economically. Capitalism works! Margaret Thatcher could not help but agree.

Still, Rae has not fully succumbed to the Milton Friedman model of modernity. "The market," Rae admits, "cannot, and should not do everything" (1999, p. 52). Unfortunately, the politics of determining what counts as "too little" or "too much" is too precious to produce a useful guide to policy making in the interest of either prosperity or the public good. On the other hand, in economies where governments intrude too little and regulate too little—especially in health care and education—there is ample concrete evidence of public deprivation and private abundance, a fact not lost on, for example, the forty million citizens of the world's most prosperous country who do not have medical insurance.

Rae—like most liberals, in or out of the closet—is prepared to support government spending on health, education, economic infrastructure and other public goods and services that enhance universally the quality of life (read possession of marketable "skill sets") of citizens (thus making profitable corporations possible). Also like most liberals, he is skeptical of social democrats who are attached

to "nostrums" such as "government ownership, a particular method of regulation, one system of taxation or another." He continues: "these people fail to see that these policies are just tools. They are not the idea of social democracy itself" (1999, p. 8). Social democracy, for Rae, is about equal rights, personal freedom, a sense of community and the opportunity for everyone "to enjoy the good things of life." Thus, there is a categorical distinction between the idea or essence of social democracy and the tools that can and should be used to achieve it. In Rae's view, means such as large, centralized government, higher and more progressive taxation and public ownership "have been challenged by every social democratic party in the Western world. They cannot," he adds, "be what social democracy is all about, because they are not palatable recipes for governing." Not pausing to explain which economic interests find them unpalatable, he states that policies are merely mechanisms to achieve the goal of "necessary countervailing balances to private excess" (1999, p. 39). As long as essential services are supported and the most egregious malefactions of corrupt private interests are curbed, state intervention has fulfilled its responsibilities; additional initiatives can be labeled social engineering and should be curtailed. George W. Bush could not help but agree.

Despite the fact that Rae adds an abbreviated critique of what can happen when cut-backs in government funding devastate some aspect of health, education, welfare and public debt management, the overall thrust of his argument is that there is no place in the modern world for the "age-old" social democratic idea that problems can be solved by spending money. Not only do "tax-and-spend" policies sap productive energies from the economy (except, perhaps, when the revenue is used to purchase armaments, guarantee loans to businesses, fund tax breaks for industry and bail commercial enterprises out of bankruptcy), but they are apt to be politically unacceptable as well. Using the state to steer the economy, Rae says, would mean "higher taxes, bigger governments, more intervention, more social engineering, more laws, and more regulation" (1999, pp. 94-95). This is to be avoided at almost any cost. Steve Harper could not help but agree.

Rae therefore expresses the opinion that governments of all political views must sensibly assess the current situation and refocus their efforts to provide an effective state in support of strong market-driven enterprises. Roads (where they have not been sold to private interests) must be repaired. Workers must be trained and kept relatively healthy. The poor must not become so visible that their presence on the streets harms tourism, or so desperate in their despair that, armed with water buckets and squeegees, they threaten public safety.

In attending to government's proper duties, however, pragmatic principles must prevail. "When confronting challenges," says Rae, "there is no one big ideological 'answer,' but there are better [and worse] approaches" (1999, p. 98). Devolving power to local communities, providing affordable tax relief and reducing the workweek or providing flexible hours and job-sharing are some of the neo-utopian bromides that emerge as specific recommendations for

social democratic action. They are the stuff of Bob Rae's politics of "too little/too much." Why "old tools" such as progressive personal income taxes and equitable corporate taxes are no longer either appropriate or adequate is not clearly explained. Instead, Rae merely acquiesces in the consequences of corporate capitalism's constant and relatively successful attacks on both social democratic means and ends. He tells us little about any proposals for new methods to achieve and maintain the so-called "core values" of social democracy. He is, however, willing to engage in endless debate about practical policy innovations and funding solutions, provided that they seek neither to restore the obsolete socialist commitment to an activist state, nor to encourage unduly any remaining socialist activists.

A limited state that provides services in the interest of facilitating the continued success of corporate capitalism is a goal that social democrats and corporate capitalists can apparently share; indeed, from Rae's perspective there is no other option. He states flatly that "globalization and unprecedented technological change make education and training more critical to the success of our society than ever before" (1999, p. 122). The socialist influence in this matter must be (and must only be) to make education and training widely available so that every citizen gets a fair chance to win employment in the corporate sector. The question of to whom "our" society really belongs is ignored; merely to ask it amounts to a manifestation of irresponsibility.

No one can deny that, in recent years, Mr. Rae has expressed his positive views in speech and in print with extraordinary candor. Impressed by the vitality of global capitalism and convinced that the social democracy is out-of-step with contemporary political and economic realities, he insists that the left does "not yet have a politics that is equal to the economics around us" (1999, p. 40). In a glowing review of his tome, Victoria Stasiuk says that "Rae goes further, stating that the old policy instruments of social democracy cannot function in open economies with the accumulated indebtedness we now face." She adds that, in Rae's view, "the accumulated debt has left little policy room for legislators to move; we cannot continue to maintain a European level of social and health care with an American level of taxes" (Stasiuk, 2003). Why this is the only acceptable definition of our collective dilemma is unstated. It is not meant to be logical; it is meant as tough talk and is all the more compelling since it comes from a putative Canadian social democrat. Increasingly, however, Canadians are prepared to stand at some distance from those who are in thrall to talk of the primacy of deficits and debt reduction as matters of public policy (cf. McQuaig, 2001). By standing his ground, Bob Rae has invited public comment. Some, like Toronto Star columnist Thomas Walkom, have been highly critical (1999, February 28). They wonder what is the point of transforming the New Democratic Party into a party of Blairist skepticism with roots going back to Edmund Burke and George Orwell. Both Canada and the province of Ontario, Walkom suggests, already has such a beast. It is called The Liberal Party. To move the NDP to the centre is, they say, to miss the point of what the NDP is supposed to represent.

Rae disagrees and he is especially sensitive to the role of



education in accomplishing the modest modifications of capitalism that he supports.

Rae sees education as a "key priority, the key investment" which could be the basis of progressive social change, but how we might go about increasing accessibility, providing every child with a lap-top computer and creating a seamless world wherein "a steelworker's sabbatical would be as normal as a college professor's" without a massive increase of progressive taxation is never explained.

Rae's commitment to idealistic educational goals, his dismissal of the "nostrums" of state intervention and his eagerness to mull over "what kind of capitalism we want to have," made him the perfect choice for the position of head of the review of postsecondary education initiated by the Government of Ontario in the Autumn of 2004. The political and economic beliefs that were articulated in **The Three Questions** were rehearsed as a subtext in **Ontario: A Leader in Learning**. Before considering his actual recommendations, however, it is important to examine the process through which the document was constructed.

### **Rae, Rae, Rae Your Boat**

Conducting a comprehensive review of postsecondary education in Ontario or, indeed, engaging in any serious discussion of the purpose, practices and performance of colleges and universities is necessarily a political exercise. The word "political" does not here connote what that term has commonly and discredibly come to mean—namely, a partisan contest of wills resulting in an authoritative distribution of goods and services ("values") based upon winning governmental power and influence—but an open and reasoned discourse in which people of good will but differing opinions can come together to deliberate upon the nature of the common good. This was the way in which the ancient progenitors of modern democracy (at their best) understood politics. It was the common pursuit of the best interests of the polis. Described and defended in the antique speeches and writings of politicians and philosophers from Pericles to Crates, it was our highest secular calling.

If talk of the nobility of the political process is too heady for the current circumstances, we can at least advance the observation that education is a political issue in a more mundane sense. Despite recent trends toward stiff increases in tuition and efforts by colleges and universities to seek out corporate partnerships to minimize the impact of reduced public spending, the fact remains that tax-payers' dollars continue to supply the major share of the costs of postsecondary education. Although we are witnessing a trend toward privatization of education and the corporate control of teaching and learning that is entailed ("He who pays the piper", and all that), we believe that, for the foreseeable future, the public purse will continue to fund the preponderance of higher education. There is therefore an identifiable public (political) interest in what is done, how it is done and—perhaps most important—why it is done. We must still consider whose interests are being served in the ongoing provision of higher education. Are they those of the students, the general public, the

educational institutions and their internal constituencies, potential employers of graduates, the dominant socioeconomic elites or some combination of these?

In its deliberations, the Rae Review addressed none of these issues at length. It merely assumed that the interests of all segments of society, while discordant, were nevertheless reconcilable within the context of a mixed (but mainly market-driven) economy. Thus, Rae's mandate was relatively narrow. It was to focus on the fiscal strategies needed to maintain, where possible to improve, but most assuredly to stabilize postsecondary education. The Harris years had, in addition to its own reactionary agenda for the structure of educational institutions and the curricula "delivered" therein, been years of constant and open contestation. The government did not respect education—especially in the humanities and social sciences—and it is probably fair to say that educators did not much respect the government either.

The Liberal administration of Premier Dalton McGuinty, when it appointed Mr. Rae, could not have been insensitive to this background and to the serious issues that were involved. Matters of finance were important, but so were questions about governance, social goals, management-labour relationships, the social goals of education, the individual development of students, curricula and much else. All these aspects of postsecondary education deserved systematic attention and none could be fully understood except in terms of the pattern that connects them all (cf. Skolnik, Marcotte and Sharples, 1985 and Pitman, 1986).

In striking the Rae Review, McGuinty plainly focused upon fiscal matters, but he did not bind Mr. Rae completely. There was ample opportunity to address related issues and, to be fair, the final report did mention some of them (though without altogether satisfactory results). What was obvious from the outset, however, was that the purpose of the review was constrained more by time than by an inflexible mandate. The job was to be done expeditiously. It was to be the supportive centerpiece for a government eager to win support (after a year of broken promises) for a new and popular budget.

To produce the document that would become the focal point of the government's plan to recoup losses in popular support following an unpopular first budget in which the government (which had promised no new taxes in its election) promptly imposed a health care "premium" on unsuspecting voters, Premier McGuinty selected Mr. Rae as the public face of the review and gave him seven impressive supporters, not least of whom was former Premier William G. Davis who, as Minister of Education and later as Progressive Conservative Premier of Ontario, was generally credited with the creation of the Ontario college system. Other members of the team were: Richard Johnston, a former NDP provincial leadership candidate, legislative education critic, college president and chair of the Ontario Council of Regents; Leslie Church, a former student activist, a law student and board member of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation; Inez Elliston, a former civil servant and a Director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation; Huguette Labelle, Chancellor of the

University of Ottawa and former President of the Canadian International Development Agency; Ian Davidson, Chief of Police of Sudbury, Ontario; and Don Drummond, Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist for the TD Bank Financial Group. Representing a variety of political views, areas of expertise, and interest groups, this group displayed diversity, experience and inclusiveness. Their recommendations would have the aura of authority.

The presence of Rae and Davis was crucial for, with McGuinty at the fulcrum, it permitted a variation on President William Clinton's favorite strategy of triangulation. By approaching postsecondary education from three distinct organizational positions in terms of political party background, an appearance of compromise and consensus could be effected which would permit any dissent to be excluded as disruptive, obstructionist, dogmatic or (perhaps worst of all) special pleading on the part of some special interest group. With all three political parties "on side," criticism could be pre-dismissed.

Once the players were chosen, the games could begin. The timelines were tight, but the necessity of adhering to them was coyly expressed. As Rae put it in his submission letter accompanying the review, "we agreed to do this over a compressed period of time so that decisions could happen as early as Budget 2005 (Rae, 2005, p. i).

The review panel was entrusted with the exploration of five themes: accessibility, quality, system design, funding and accountability (Rae, 2005, p. 2). Each of these themes could have been interpreted as distinct parts of a larger whole and treated on their own terms and merits or they could have been subsumed under one dominant theme. It is apparent that the section option was chosen. It is plain that the Rae Review intended to examine only the management of the existing system to determine whether it was expeditiously meeting pre-established goals and to restrict its analysis and recommendations to these administrative affairs. The exploration of quality, therefore, meant inquiry into how well colleges were meeting their appointed tasks as defined by previous administrations. The question of whether these tasks were appropriate was not seriously addressed.

The method the Rae Review adopted was to:

- spend a few months (June to September, 2004) pouring over past studies and learning what the government bureaucracies had to say about postsecondary education;
- consult with the public and receive formal submissions from associations, institutions and individuals (October to mid-December, 2004);
- draft recommendations and deliver the final report (Mid-December, 2004 to February, 2005).(Rae, 2005, p. 108).

The Rae Review did not disappoint; it was nothing if not punctual and punctilious. It had a job to do and it did it in a timely fashion. It also claimed to have fulfilled each portion of its mandate including:

- informing the public and opening debate about postsecondary education;
- engaging in "innovative and meaningful public and stakeholder consultation";
- building an electronic data base filled with research and "input" acquired over the six months during which the review panel was active. (Rae, 2005, p. 107).

Deliberations and debate about education are as complex as any field of public policy. Part of the process is best carried on in talk about principles and policies in the abstract. Part needs to be accomplished in the context of detailed and possibly rather technical appraisals of such concrete problems as capital and operating budgets, demographics, various needs assessments, and the like. Part is best undertaken by inquiry into the perceptions and viewpoints of the participants—both groups (now fashionably called "communities" or "stakeholders"), and individuals who are uncommonly important to or interested in the process.

Created to recommend refinements of the extant postsecondary educational system in Ontario, the Rae Review's implicit goal was to give contemporary shape to venerable ideas such as "the learning society" that were conceptually mature close to forty years ago (no innovative, much less critical, thinking was contemplated), to link them to demographic and labour market (human capital) needs, and to refine the existing system in order to make it more politically accountable, financially stable and ideologically contiguous with the business climate of privatization and globalization. No serious time was allotted to consider deeper issues and therefore it was pointless from the outset for anyone to urge the adoption of a transformative educational program. To suggest that the Rae Review would look attentively at fundamental issues at this time and in this forum was to indulge in fantasy. As a result, there was considerable disaffection and cynicism about the exercise from the outset among rank-and-file college teachers, support staff and those few students who were aware of the review panel's existence.

At this point, it needs to be stressed that relations between college faculty and the provincial government (whether Liberal, Conservative or New Democrat) have been exceedingly strained for many years. All those who have the seniority to recall Bob Rae's "social contract" know not only were their wages rolled back but that the effects of the roll back will follow them to the grave since no wage increases were received for almost a decade and, as a result, pensions will continue to reflect the temporary nullification of collective bargaining rights throughout retirement. There was and is much moral outrage at the manner in which college education has been managed from Queen's Park by governments of all parties, but moral outrage, as George Grant never tired of reminding us, "is too valuable a commodity not to be put in the service of reality" (Grant, 1966, p. 123). Utopian idealists can count on nothing except having their ideals discounted, disregarded or dismissed. For this reason, the vast majority of college employees and an even larger proportion of students ignored the Rae Review's call for participation. The same could not be said for the college and union leaders. From the outset, it

was recognized that this was an important ritual. The government understood that it had to win popular approval by partly redressing the grievances that were expressed during the Harris era. A significant injection of funds and an expression of apparently sincere concern about the state of postsecondary education would be well received by the electorate. Besides, it was necessary. The previous government was eager to assist the private sector, but at no time did it grasp the idea that postsecondary education was an important social investment, unless funding was directly related to those fields that, it sensed, were critical to a buoyant economy, namely mathematics, science, business studies and vocational education. The current government had no interest in shifting the emphasis away from the private sector agenda, but it did understand that the parsimonious practices of the previous regime had hardened the attitudes of educators to the point where any apparent change in direction would be received with relief, if not outright rapture. All that was needed, therefore, was a document that would express disapproval of a horrid past, celebrate a splendid future and speak enthusiastically about new perceptions, new initiatives, new technology and new (but affordable) funding.

Cynics (who were plentiful) made it clear that they believed that the work that the Rae Review undertook was wholly scripted, that its solicitation of public comment was nothing but a symbolic rite of passage from research to recommendation and was mainly intended to give the illusion of participation in a process the end result of which was predetermined. Some went far as to hint that the structure of final report had already been set before the process began. All that was required was to go through the motions of public consultation. They pointed to widely publicized suggestions that, after only a few weeks of work, the members of this body were complaining of becoming exhausted. Considering the brevity of their time on the job and their vast experience with boring speeches, bad motel meals and big briefing books, their somnambulism could best be explained if were clear to them from the outset that they were engaged in meaningless activity. As anyone familiar with the routinized toil in Taylorized workplaces can attest, nothing is as tedious as dull, repetitious and ultimately pointless labor. If these cynics are right, our hearts go out to the members of the Rae Review, for they surely became experientially acquainted with the true meaning of alienation.

The fatigue of the Rae reviewers placed college administrators in a delicate dilemma. Knowing that their part was to generate massive support for the government's predetermined position, college presidents actively solicited faculty, staff and student participation in the Rae ritual. In an e-mail to faculty urging them to drum up student support, Seneca College president Rick Miner informed the college community that he had "personally sought the support of our students through e-mail." He also "launched a poster campaign" and offered to supply any student willing to show up at a Rae Review "town meeting" with a t-shirt, pizza and bus transportation" (Miner, 2004). Faculty were originally urged to contact the Rae Review and a list of "talking points" was made available in case they were lost for words. By November, however, management acceded to the expressed desire of the Rae reviewers to be relieved of their burden. Although

employees were still encouraged to keep up the pressure, it was intimated that long letters, bulky briefs and massive manifestoes would be counterproductive. The Review members (or their staff) evidently preferred to get post cards with messages in point form. Of course there were also an average of eight Town Hall meetings per week over a period of three months (Rae, 2005, p. 124). Employees who wished to address Rae reviewers directly were encouraged to be polite and to be concise. It seemed that the managerial cheerleaders thought that the Rae reviewers had neither the wit nor the will to suffer through detailed and closely reasoned arguments; hence employees were encouraged to make short, simple and, if possible, entertaining PowerPoint presentations.

Somehow, the Rae reviewers survived and, in short order, the massive amount of research, the enormous number of submissions and the onerous weight of evidence that emerged from the innovative, interactive encounters with customers and stakeholders and so on were transformed into a report with excellent production values, glossy paper and four-color print.

### **The Mantra of Marketable Skills**

The Rae Report's treatment of Ontario colleges is skimpy at best. Here, however, is a summary of what it does say.

1. Colleges should seek out "at-risk" high school students and lure them to college;
2. Colleges should "partner" with school boards, industry, the Ministry of Education and anyone able to promote a "vocational focus";
3. Colleges should offer high school drop-outs the opportunity to complete their diplomas in a "college environment."

The Rae Review seems to think that the problem with colleges is attracting students, or at least the sort of student that fits their mandate. Though no evidence is supplied to sustain his assertion (indeed, evidence of any sort is notably lacking throughout the document), Rae states that college enrolments have gone flat," and that students are increasingly selecting universities as their "destination of choice for postsecondary education." Grudgingly, the Rae Report says that colleges may be allowed to offer "applied degrees" and to continue "institutional evolution"; however, the clear focus, he believes, should be on school-college-work initiatives as the proper way to drum up customers. The Rae Report, for example, sees tremendous promise in "Techno Expo" events that entice Grade 7 and 8 students to participate in "hands-on workshops about a variety of college programs" (2005, p. 45).

The emphasis on vocational skills training comes partly from Rae's misreading of the colleges' original mandate and his apparent desire to continue the rigid vocational focus that has increasingly distorted that mandate over four decades of operation. Ignoring the actual mandate as set out in government documents and legislation in 1965, Rae at least acknowledges that he is adding a new twist. Rae "recommends a major new role for colleges in reaching out to young

learners aged 16 and 17 years who are at risk of dropping out of school" (2005, p. 47). Additional emphasis will, according to Rae, be necessary in addressing problems with immigrants. "About 70% of adult immigrants," he adds, have at least some postsecondary education or training," but "need additional training or language skills to succeed in the labour market." This, then, is also part of the revised mandate.

Rae's rigid vocationalism also derives in part from the way in which college administrations have chosen to structure personnel management, teaching and learning methods and fundamental curricula. Eager to do education on the cheap, to sacrifice academic credibility to the gods of fiscal responsibility and to eviscerate both vocational and avocational curricula in the quest to maximize productivity without concern about "quality control," any students deciding to "vote with their feet," have done so in response to the forced reduction of college education. False economies of educational degradation, if Rae is right about enrolment, is simply "blowback" from potential students who may have seen through the advertising, glimpsed the reality and headed in another direction. On the other hand, for all its alleged commitment to "great education," the Rae Review is noticeably silent on what it means by this phrase. This seems to be the result of the fact that the government does not know what it is doing and apparently needs to find out. Rae recommends a legislated "mission" for postsecondary education. Following Rae's counsel, the provincial government would "develop and refine, in consultation with stakeholders and the public, its thinking on the overall mission" (2005, p. 39). This politicization of postsecondary education is an extraordinary step toward the reduction of academia (especially the universities) to a service provider working in the interest of corporate employers and accountable to bureaucrats for their performance. If such scholars and intellectuals as remain in university teaching think about the implications of this initiative for what remains of academic freedom, they will properly be appalled. College teachers, of course, have seen it all before.

The political economy of Ontario has set the stage for Rae's reforms. The political inclinations of the present government, the material interests of the commercial and manufacturing elites, the beliefs of educational bureaucrats, the pragmatics of current college Boards and administrators, and the ideological predispositions of public opinion leaders in the print and broadcast media whose function it is to establish the parameters within which citizens are encouraged to think, are cut from the same ideological cloth. This is not an allegation of conspiracy; it is merely an assessment of a situation in which like-minded people are committed to similar ideas. We do think, however, that those ideas could stand a little re-thinking.

In order to re-think anything, however, it is important to have a thought from which to start. Anything else is twisting in the winds of the specious present. We would therefore like to draw attention to the original conception of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology as they were expressed in the Founding Documents that established them about forty years ago. This is not done as an exercise in nostalgia, or in the faint hope that the past can be reclaimed. It is

intended merely to establish a sort of cultural benchmark from which we can measure the distance and the direction in which we have traveled and the destination which the members of the Rae Review have in mind for us. This destination is, of course, nothing new. It has been in the minds of those who insist that colleges are primarily, if not exclusively vocational schools for "the walking wounded" of the provincial educational system.

This was not the original intent.

Perhaps responding in part to John Porter's seminal work (1965) on social class and ethnicity in Canada, the Progressive Conservative government of the mid-1960s took the bold and imaginative step of creating, through massive public investment, the college system. William Davis' sympathetic biographer, Clare Hoy was skeptical of many of Mr. Davis' initiatives as Ontario's Minister of Education. He was particularly distressed at such new institutions as the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education which, he amusingly declared, is little but "a haven for radical left-wing professors." The colleges, however, were another matter and, in Hoy's opinion were apt to be Mr. Davis' "most lasting" contribution to the province (Hoy, 1985, p. 59). The colleges were described and justified in a number of ways. Four of their foundations invite special attention.

First, colleges were created, in part, in reaction to the immense economic and technological changes that were already perceived to be fundamentally altering the political economy of Ontario. In the very near future, it was correctly believed, a work force composed of people with high levels of sophisticated skills would be necessary if Ontario was to live up to its economic potential. So, colleges were introduced to supply a competent and up-to-date labour pool in the interest of both personal and provincial prosperity.

Second, colleges were established to provide accessibility to postsecondary education that was otherwise likely to be denied (especially to lower middle class and working class youth) because of the prohibitive costs of university. A skilled workforce was needed and it was understood to be necessary to make the colleges appealing for both educational and financial reasons. Too long had Ontario relied on the importation of "human resources" from overseas. Not only was the immigration of skilled workers unpredictable but many viewed the need to enhance opportunities for Canadians as a matter of equity.

Third, accessibility was not intended to compromise the intellectual quality of teaching and learning. Colleges were designed to provide an equal but different postsecondary experience from the one traditionally supplied by universities. The emphasis was to be on practical (rather than theoretical) education, but the stated goal was to ensure rough equivalency in the quality of the education itself. Despite what can only be called a preternatural snobbishness on the part of some university educators (some of whom predicted the demise or, at least, the hardening of second class status of the colleges), colleges were urged to maintain high academic standards. Mr. Davis, of course, did not think that, for example, Seneca College would become the M.I.T. to the University of Toronto's Harvard. He was explicit,



however, in his rejection of criticism that he had established a "lesser" system.

Finally, the colleges were not meant to be narrowly focused "trade schools." In addition to vocational training, it was explicitly demanded that a substantial portion of the curriculum be taken up with what was called "avocational" or, later, "general" education. College graduates were expected to have acquired specific marketable skills, but they were also expected to have been exposed to a range of academic subjects that would lead to their becoming culturally literate, socially aware, communicatively competent and politically effective citizens. That was the core of the mandate. It was a noble enterprise. Some may say that we are naïve and that the provincial government's dedication to accessibility, equality and academic excellence was merely cosmetic. Some insist that the colleges were never truly intended as anything more than training factories for a postmodern proletariat. We cannot believe this. We take the government of middle-and late-1960s at its word. We believe that Mr. William Davis and others were sincere when they put their names to this endeavour. We are just sorry that they (and we) have been betrayed. We appreciate that the language of betrayal is strong. We do not think it is inappropriate, for the mandate of the colleges has been systematically undermined where it has not been wholly ignored. We find it especially poignant that Mr. Davis is a co-author of the most recent and the most potentially powerful instrument of betrayal.

For each of the four basic elements of the mandate, there is corresponding evidence of betrayal. First, there are the results of government inquiries into the performance of the colleges. Through a variety of questionnaires, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and has tested the quality of college education through the measurement of "key performance indicators" (KPI). These data suggest that the colleges have met the first objective of graduating students with "skill sets" that make them employable. Unfortunately, the KPI results are unreliable. There is evident bias in the questions and the manner in which college administrations cajole, threaten and otherwise pester students to present a positive image of their college (school spirit and all that!). So, although the KPI results present a generally rosy portrait of college accomplishments (current students, graduates and employers all express a reasonable measure of satisfaction with college education), the data must be treated with skepticism. From a purely methodological perspective, the "empiricism" of the KPI exercise is quite easy to criticize. More important than the positive evaluation of colleges, however, are some of the main factors that have contributed to them. We note, for example, unacceptably high attrition rates despite constant grade inflation, and the degradation of educational quality even as represented by the inherently flawed mechanism of quantified "learning outcomes" so clearly prized by bureaucrats, administrators and Bob Rae (cf. Rae, 2005, p. 42). Since graduates and not drop-outs form the basis of post-college respondents to the government's questionnaires, it is expected that happy results would be forthcoming. The KPI results, however, mask the chronic underfunding and the decline in academic standards that are the inevitable results of governance according to fiscal rather than educational

priorities and have resulted in a decline in the real value of a college diploma. There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern. In the current chaos of frenzied re-definition, many colleges are attempting to provide credible degree-granting programs (albeit as a prelude to what many fear is an emerging "two-tier" system of college education and training). Moreover, there are courses in which high academic and vocational standards have been more or less maintained. Where, however, such programs are to be found, their continued existence is testimony to the extraordinary dedication of both teachers and students struggling to achieve excellence under increasingly trying conditions. Success is won in spite (and not because) of the conditions imposed by government policy. This is not enough.

Second, with respect to accessibility, we challenge the Rae Review's assertion that colleges are in trouble because of falling recruitment numbers. There is no great shortage of applicants for places in college programs. This is partly the result of the fact that young people still believe in the efficacy of college certification as a precondition for employment. In fact, a growing proportion of college students come from universities (some as drop-outs, some with degrees) because they perceive a college diploma to be useful in winning access to the job market. Alternative and more troubling interpretations are, however, available. Students may be motivated less by a positive opinion of college education than by a dreary or even a desperate absence of alternatives. They may simply be taking a chance rather than pursuing a goal. Put simply, attending classes could seem marginally better than hanging around a shopping mall or taking a menial "dead-end" job. This, too, is not enough. The colleges were established as robust institutions with the obligation and the opportunity to play an important part in the dynamic economy that "high tech" capitalism promised. Unfortunately, even before the bursting of the "e-bubble," it was apparent that the real growth sectors were in fast food and low-end retail trade. Creative computer applications were supplanted by the irksome greeting: "Welcome to Wal-mart." As a result, the colleges have come to serve the first generation of students who did not and could not expect to achieve a level of personal prosperity equal to that of their parents.

Adding long-term injury to immediate insult, applicants must take their places in college under the cloud of an increasing burden of personal debt. Crushing rises in tuition and other fees combine with the need to compromise the educational experience by holding part-time or even full-time jobs. Together, they put the lie to authentic accessibility. We do not, of course, blame the college system for general economic trends toward a de-skilled population with few prospects of permanent, well-paid and satisfying jobs. This is a direct product of a corporate economy that devalues respect for people while paying homage to the temporary attractions of the "bottom line." What colleges (and governments, as well) must do is act in concert to stimulate as much economic well being as can be won in the fearsome world of late capitalism. Uncritically reacting to the demands of corporate priorities, the colleges have become complicit in what some social critics call the "manufacture of consent." Serving as willing ideological allies of a political economy that is driving a

population downward, eviscerating an increasingly fragile middle class and placing the burden of harder times firmly on the shoulders of the poor and the otherwise disadvantaged is not the noble purpose of education once embodied in the colleges' mandate. Far from failing to meet demands for systemic social change, we are in danger of failing to meet even "materialistic, bourgeois" ambitions. The best that may be said is that colleges can help brake the process of downward mobility for those who graduate; they no longer afford meaningful opportunity for upward mobility for those who enter.

Third, educational quality is a difficult matter to assess, especially given complaints from universities concerning under-prepared students. In college, however, the constant pattern has been to undermine education quality in the interest of "paper productivity." At our workplace, for instance, the reorganization of the semester system has resulted in the reduction of classroom instruction by roughly half. Our courses used to require as a minimum of eighty classroom hours per semester; they now require a maximum of forty-two. Yet, management comes perilously close to open deceit when it states that the same quantity of material can be taught and at the same level of quality. Faculty, under these circumstances, have no choice but to suffer the hypocrisy or learn to lecture twice as fast. Of course, under these conditions (known conventionally in factory work as "speed up"), it is impossible to give individual attention to students (class sizes having grown from a maximum of fifteen in 1970 to an average of thirty-five in 2005). This is bad enough in "regular" classes, but it is hideous in "remedial" English classes that are increasingly required to bring college entrants with inadequate reading and writing skills up to a minimal college level. "Doing more with less" has become more than a corporate cliché; it is now a cruel joke.

Educational quality is also demeaned by the frantic drive toward computer-assisted instruction. In the colleges, the tendency has clearly been to adapt not only the content but also the "delivery" mechanisms to the corporate production process. The "Taylorization" of education is manifest in the reduction of synthetic curriculum into sequential learning units over which students are to exercise "mastery." In the process, the role of the college "professor" has become unmistakably similar to a mass production line worker. This is a logical continuation of the original management view of labour relations. Dismissing the "collegial" model of employer-employee relationships, college officials from the outset gleefully embraced the "industrial" model, which, over the years, produced adversarial and often bitter relationships between management (both at the provincial and the local level) and labour (cf. Barrett and Meaghan, 1990). Now, the "factory" system seems to be being superseded by the "Wal-mart" model (cf. Head, 2004). Being—by management standards—the most conspicuously productive workers in the entire educational system—Rae refers to colleges as the "poster child" for productivity and efficiency (2005, p. 48)—administration is increasingly using the tactic of refusing to hire full-time faculty. Preferring sessional and part-time teachers (low wages, no benefits), the colleges have embarked on a process of de-skilling a workforce that is already suffering from low morale and "burn-out." With a labour force that is compelled to work under worsening conditions, it is impossible for many to resist the

automated production process that involves teaching to discrete "learning outcomes" as measured by the capacity to respond correctly to multiple choice questions and not to reflect critically upon the content of what has been taught. Harkening back to a discredited form of behavioural education that originated in the theory of operant conditioning and turns classrooms into postsecondary Skinner boxes, the entire enterprise of liberal education is under pressure to distort its critical and emancipatory purpose and be remade into an exercise in corporate human relations. At a time when, we are constantly being told, the structure of the provincial, the national and the global economy are being redefined in accordance with new technological and organizational formations, students are being deprived of precisely the kind of intellectual insights that would permit them to make sense of (much less to question) this brave new world. This concern, of course, has lately intensified but is not new (Doughty, 1977, Barrett and Doughty, 1977).

High tech education is third-rate education. Clifford Stoll put the case with elegant simplicity when, with regard to the enthusiasm for the Internet displayed by "edbiz" entrepreneurs, he proposed his persuasive intellectual taxonomy based on the existence of both differences and relationships among data, information, knowledge and wisdom. Wrote Stoll (1995, p. 193): Our networks are awash in data. A little of it is information. A smidgen of this shows up as knowledge. Combined with ideas, some of that is actually useful. Mix in experience, context, compassion, discipline, humour, tolerance, and humility, and perhaps knowledge becomes wisdom. Minds think with ideas, not information. No amount of data, bandwidth, or processing power can substitute for inspired thought. Dazzled by computers and communications theory, we have been misled into thinking that experience can be broken down into bits and bytes. Those with the most information have the most power. This is patently false. The Internet, that great digital dumpster, confers not power, not prosperity, not perspicacity.

Let it be plainly stated: the study of English Literature cannot be replaced by courses in corporate communications ("letter writing"); inquiry into Canadian social structure cannot be replaced by courses in human relations ("people skills"); and, ecological awareness cannot be replaced by courses in innovative technology and PowerPoint presentations. This phenomenon is displayed at its worst in the effort to adopt electronic learning. There is certainly a place for technologically mediated education. When making the effort to bring courses to people in remote areas, to people who are unable to attend classes because they are physically unable to travel, and to people who are incarcerated within the criminal justice system, there is a defined and discrete role for "distance education." These "heroic measures" are not, however, desirable in any but the most extreme situations. They rely on pedagogical processes that are wholly in disrepute. There is, in short, more to college education than the dissemination of measurable skills in production and consumption. People are more than producers and consumers; they are citizens as well, and there is very little left in the college curricula that equips young people to take their place at any point other than the crass nexus of cash relations. The training of a part of a person is not the

education of the whole person.

Finally, to put the matter more precisely, there has been a systematic attack on the general education component of college education. The proportion of "avocational" education was originally set at between 33% and 50% of a student's curriculum (at our college the proportion was 40%). Now there is no common standard but a rough estimate can be derived from the fact that students who once needed a minimum of eight English and Liberal Studies courses to graduate now require three. The eight basic areas of general education established by the College Standards and Accreditation Council in 1994 have been reduced to five and, most telling, the one basic theme that has been completely eliminated are courses focusing on "Work and the Economy." It is not ironic that institutions intended to produce a practical, skilled work force are being denied an understanding of the very workplaces they will enter; it is an instance of blatant ideological manipulation.

As teachers with a combined total of more than seventy years in college classrooms, we are aware of our roots. What is now frequently called "general education" was based not only on Mr. Davis' advocacy of "avocational" education but more explicitly on the fundamental undergraduate program at Glendon College of York University. It was rooted in the tradition of liberal education, the concept of the free exchange of ideas and the ideal of personal development that resonated from John Milton to J. S. Mill and into the humanistic educational philosophies of the twentieth century. The York undergraduate program insisted that all undergraduates be exposed to a mixture of English, the Humanities, the Natural and the Social Sciences prior to selecting an undergraduate "major" in their second year. Peter J. Spratt, the first Chair of Liberal Studies at Seneca, was a product of that Glendon system (dedicated, in the admittedly sexist language of the day, to the education of the "whole man") and adapted its program to the College. In the published "philosophy of the college," it was made plain that students were to develop a critical awareness of the society of which they were a part (Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology, 1969, pp. 5-6). It was therefore explicitly stated that, although "a high degree of cooperation and technical expertise is required within any society if it is to realize the benefits of scientific and technological development ... the resulting need for organization ... threaten[s] to undermine the successful realization of the human values technology was designed to serve. In particular," it went on, "the coercive aspects of our social and economic systems, reinforced by the pressures of mass culture threaten our individual identity." Always focused on liberal individualism, the college nonetheless acknowledged that "individual self-development demands awareness of the social and natural environments in which we function. Not only must we know the areas of activity that are open to us but we must also be conscious of the restrictions encountered in our day to day existence." As interpreted by Seneca College in its original declaration of its mandate, both "critical and analytical faculties" must be developed if each student were to fulfill his or her "responsibilities as a citizen." This statement of the purpose of the liberal arts in a college education was not universally applauded in theory and was quickly disdained in practice.

Almost from the outset, this remarkable program (which included a mandatory thematic, interdisciplinary and team-taught Canadian Studies component as a condition for graduation) was put under attack. As time wore on, ideological opponents, vocationalist advocates and careerist administrators combined to reduce the general education part of a Seneca education to the point where it now constitutes a small fragment of its original form. This is not to say that excellence in education is equivalent to the proportion of English and Liberal Studies subjects in the curriculum. It is, however, to assert that the diminution and demeaning of this aspect of a college education is to cripple the original mandate and distort what the colleges were intended to do. At each stage of its evolution the college system has weakened the role of the liberal arts. The Rae Review accords this dimension of college education no role at all. Instead, a purely vocational mandate is affirmed even as the history of the colleges is distorted. The Rae Review, for example, baldly states that colleges were created to "deliver occupation-oriented programs, be responsive to employer and student needs, and contribute to the economic and social well-being of the province." Again and again there is talk of "careers" and "training" and "finding and keeping employment." There is flexibility, but it is to be exercised along "a continuum of vocational learning from basic skills upgrading to applied degrees" (Rae, 2005, p. 47).

In this context, the corruption of language is almost as damaging as the corruption of education. Some of the new lexicon is simply silly. Some of it is meant to suggest technological sophistication where none exists. Some is conscious distortion. Some is unintended confusion. Some is "code" for anticipated, or at least desired, changes in power relations (e.g., for "organizational flexibility," read "union-busting"). Some of it can easily be satirized. To have "visions" is to hallucinate. To be "virtual" is to be less than real. So, scientist, computer system manager, and all-round good fellow, Clifford Stoll advises us to pause before we log on: "You are entering a non-existent universe. Consider the consequences" (Stoll, 1995, p. 4). That non-existent universe, of course, is a high priority in college programs and planning. Indifferent to the fact that technologically mediated education provides a low quality "product," academic accountancy breeds only cheap results. Colleges trade in completed course transcripts. Rather than admit that they are putting shoddy goods on the market, colleges prefer to target the reduction of production values.

This sort of thing is not new. In self-serving attempts to make their ideas appear at least "up to speed" and preferably "cutting edge," the hucksters of technologically mediated education regularly chuck linguistic lumps begged, borrowed or stolen from cybernetics, systems theory, communications theory (including both the real stuff going back to Claude Shannon (1948), the latest buzz from **Wired** magazine, and the delusions of artificial intelligence addicts (cf. Dreyfus, 1967, 1992) into an insipid anti-intellectual broth and pour it out as an oily, indigestible soup. They escape perpetual embarrassment only because their jargon is never the same from year to year and none of them have (human) memory enough to recall their past fads and foibles. "To archive" (which until about 1934 was not

even a verb) is not one of their "best practices." Today, if they do history at all, they do it digitally through the medium of the computer, which has no memory in the sense of having political judgment and aesthetic reflection. Absent pattern, chronology, and coherence in the assembly of information, we are vulnerable to memory crash and the hopelessness of endless recombinant stories masquerading as history. Arthur Kroker (quoted in Doughty, 1999), one of Canada's most perceptive interpreters of communications technology once explained the symbolic relationship between the technological innovations of Bill Gates and the horror of genocide.

Windows 95 opens out onto the dominant ideology and privileged life position of digital flesh. It installs the new codes of the master occupants of virtual worlds: frenzied devotion to cyber-business, life in a multimedia virtual context, digital tunnel vision, and, most of all, embedded deep in the cerebral cortex of the virtual elite an I-chip: I, that is, for complete indifference. Technological acceleration is accompanied by a big shutting-down of ethical perception.

Lacking an education that can permit the development of a critical, much less a moral, frame, our students are largely destined not only to live poorer lives but to fail to understand the reasons why. In the absence of the language needed for competent self-expression and the analytical capacity to interpret events, the most we can expect may be the sort of shame expressed by Prime Minister Paul Martin when he spoke of the Canadian failure (we were not alone!) to deal adequately with the genocide in Rwanda and the notion that a greater international intervention should have been launched: the world, he said, "absolutely probably should have done that" (quoted in Travers, 2004, December 24, p. H-2). As an expression of either ethics or politics (to say nothing of coherent English), this is not enough.

Mr. Davis has, of course, never been anything other than a devotee of capitalism. His political life, however, displayed a tendency toward a capitalism that was moderated by a sense of social conscience and a willingness to provide for the common weal. Some might venture that Mr. Davis' efforts to improve the quality of life of ordinary citizens was motivated mainly by a desire to ensure social and political stability by providing a measure of economic security to working people. We would prefer to believe that his brand of conservatism embodied a genuine concern for all members of society, not merely for the wealthy and well connected. We would like to think that it was more common for conservatives of his sort to embrace a communitarian ethic in the days before the "neo-conservative" revolution. We would like to imagine that the recent policies of both federal and provincial conservatives are expressions of a transformed political tradition that has been put temporarily in the hands of people who resemble American Republicans far more than Canadian "Red Tories," including people like Mr. Davis himself. Unfortunately, it is clear that Mr. Davis has taken his direction from the sort of conservatism that is displayed by the Reform / Alliance / Conservative hybrid and its "common sense" equivalent in the province of Ontario. That is a shame.

Mr. Rae must be seen in a somewhat different light. There seems to have been a time when the phrase "social class" resonated with Mr. Rae's political associates. If Mr. Rae did not see social class as a defining dynamic, we understand that he at least understood some of its social and personal consequences. We have heard that, as a younger man, he spent some time working among the poor in the United Kingdom. We have been told that his sympathy was sincere and that he did commendable charitable work. We choose to believe that he felt their pain. Later, as a putative social democrat, Mr. Rae was associated with people of the political "left." Some were more or less radical in their objectives. Some were more or less militant in the methods. Some declared their solidarity with and demonstrated their support for working people through workers organizations such as trade unions. Some pointedly and poignantly opposed the excesses of capitalism. Some even opposed the perpetuation of capitalism itself. Mr. Rae stopped short of recommending complete social transformation, but he did once seem to think that something was seriously wrong with the way in which goods and services were produced and distributed. In his ideal world, inequality would necessarily remain, but inequity would be at least arithmetically reduced. Colleges which not only taught students marketable skills but also taught them about the capitalist labour market had an important part to play in the process. No more.

For both Mr. Rae and Mr. Davis and for Mr. McGuinty to whom they have reported, the role of education was and is crucial both as an instrument of social development and as a means of individual achievement. In the hands of the Rae Review, however, neither of these concepts rise even to the level of bourgeois individualism in which college education was originally grounded. Education is training and an element in human capital development.

The colleges, of course, were not put in place to promote the replacement of private enterprise. Quite the contrary, they were explicitly designed to create a cadre of workers whose future would be linked to the capitalist mode of production and the technological imperative that sustains it. What Rae and his colleagues have produced, however, is a corporate document that goes one step beyond the familiar human capital model of individual achievement in an open market. It mimics the corporatism of the Wal-Mart model of capitalism. Within colleges, the Rae Review remains silent on the wages and working conditions of employees. It remains silent on the proliferation of part-time workers. It remains silent on the ideology that is imposed and that teachers are expected to celebrate. It does nothing to reduce the economic exploitation of teachers. It uses the slogan "great education" but it permits its further evisceration.

As a result, the Rae Review participates in the decline of citizenship that has been a common theme among attentive observers of liberal democratic politics and government for some time. At the beginning of the 1960s, books by American sociologists Daniel Bell and Seymour Martin Lipset offered reassuring news about perceived voter apathy. Bell proclaimed that the burdens of active public participation were too onerous for most people. Lipset insisted that the absence of public involvement was testimony to a general satisfaction



with existing arrangements. They thus abandoned the liberal ideal of an active and informed citizenry that had been canonical at least since J. S. Mill mused about the challenges of representative government and insisted that worker education was essential if the franchise was to be responsibly exercised. They preferred the studies of behavioural social scientists who wished to make more "realistic" assessments of political life in North America. Though strongly opposed by those who saw such studies as unwarranted concessions to what C. Wright Mills had already defined as the "power elite" and criticized by political philosophers who continued to believe in the nobility of the Athenian ideal of citizenship, revisionist democrats generally set the tone for elected officials, appointed civil servants and the business elite. The Rae Review, by ignoring any important role for the liberal arts consents to this desertion of democratic ideals.

According to Rae's soothing vision, the art of government was conceived as the cheerful allocation and reallocation of values among a variety of organized groups that adequately represent the needs and wishes of the polity. Within the arena of pluralist democracy, governance is construed as a mechanism for distributing public goods. Little account is taken of the inherent satisfactions of political life. This is a betrayal of the classical theory of democracy which, according to Peter Bachrach, "is based on the supposition that man's [sic] dignity, and indeed his growth and development as a functioning and responsive individual in a free society, is dependent upon an opportunity to participate in decisions that significantly affect him" (Bachrach, 1966, p. 98). In the truncated version of democracy that has enveloped us for the past half century, no theoretical or practical room is left for politics in other than the most incompetent of forms, the shallowest of symbolic rituals. Political thinkers and planners from Hannah Arendt to Jane Jacobs have stressed the importance of the public sphere, but public spaces have been privatized; the open-ended expanse of the village square or town common have been replaced first by the corporate shopping malls and now by big box stores. It is becoming more difficult to shop—not to mention to think—outside the box. The college graduate that the Rae Review envisions is an apolitical recipient of "delivered" curriculum, a purchaser of "skill sets," and an uncritical participant in an unreflective culture.

The substitution of the language of consumerism for citizenship is no accident. Like the "teen-ager," the "consumer" is a social construct, brought into existence to serve special political and economic interests. The mass of the population once understood themselves to be workers in the economy and citizens in the polity. As Liza Featherstone has written, "the invention of the 'consumer' identity has been an important part of a long process of eroding workers' power, and it's one reason working people now have so little power against business." According to the social historian Stuart Ewen, in the early years of mass production, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modernizing capitalism sought to turn people who thought of themselves primarily as 'workers' into 'consumers.' Business elites wanted people to dream not of satisfying work and egalitarian societies—as many did at that time—but of the beautiful things they could buy with their paychecks. Business was quite

successful in this project, which influenced much early advertising and continued throughout the twentieth century. In addition to replacing the 'worker,' the 'consumer' has also effectively displaced the citizen. And, we would argue, the concept of the educational consumer has effectively replaced the student. Education, when improperly understood and practiced, becomes nothing more than a device for ideological reproduction. Part of that ideology is the illusion of free choice. We are free to select among interchangeable products, interchangeable political parties and interchangeable academic courses, all of which are made from similar molds. We are not as free to reflect, create and criticize. This is not enough.

## Reactions

Let us first deal with the union. Bob Rae did not explicitly address the exploitation of part-time workers in the colleges. Upon its release, however, Leah Casselman, President of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (collective bargaining agent for college faculty and staff), issued a press release that was highly supportive of the Rae Report in general and noted the importance of the issue of part-time employees: "We hope the government will take the report seriously and ensure that they increase full-time faculty numbers. The current rampant use of part-timers undermines the quality of education." She did have reservations. "The report ... fails to address the unchecked discrimination, harassment and human rights abuses against part-time workers, who should have the right to join a union like other workers," Casselman said. "OPSEU supports Rae's plans to reinvest in post-secondary education, hire additional faculty, decrease class size, reform the funding formula, and include universities in Freedom of Information legislation" (OPSEU, 2005, February 7).

In general, though, Rae's report was received warmly. In Casselman's view it "validates what OPSEU members have been saying about the quality of post-secondary education in Ontario, and sets out the necessary funding to catch up with other jurisdictions." Furthermore, she was pleased with the proposed creation of a higher education council, provided the union was adequately represented: "We support the creation of a higher education council, but to be effective it must be representative of all stakeholders. We have shown we can make an ongoing contribution to the council."

The union's satisfaction is reflected in the fact that negotiations bulletins distributed to members over the Spring and early Summer of 2005 have been peppered with Rae quotes that seem supportive of union demands.

The initial cheerfulness has been sustained through the presentation of the provincial budget that has been seen as being influenced by the Rae Report. The spirit behind the budget was nicely captured in Finance Minister Greg Sorbara's choice of a cobbler to build the new shoes he would wear to read his new budget. His high technology "take" on a tradition that dates back to federal Finance Minister Mitchell Sharp in 1966 was to have his fiscally friendly footwear designed by a Sheridan College student on a computer. When the student remarked that he was having trouble finding the

'penny' to put in the penny loafers, "the minister smiled. 'That'll change tomorrow,' muttered Sorbara" (Benzie and Gillespie (2005, May 11, p. A-7).

Among management, campus leaders were virtually unanimous in their praise (Brown, 2005, May 12, p. A-9). Calling it 'a historic day' for higher learning, interim University of Toronto president Frank Iacobucci said the budget "puts us on the road to making universities more competitive in the global world we live in." In the budget, he gushed, "the winners are the students and the people of Ontario."

Carleton University president Rick Van Loon called the budget "courageous," despite the fact that Ontario's operating grants remain about ten percent below the Canadian average. Seneca College president Rick Miner acknowledged that the budget did not "accommodate the full Rae recommendations, but," he promised, "our students can look forward to improved access and better services."

Even the usually critical Canadian Federation of Students in Ontario praised the government for pumping so much into operating grants. Only an occasional dissenting voice was heard. One belonged to University of Waterloo computer engineering professor Mohamed Elmasry (2005, April, p. A-11). Noting the financial burden now to be assumed by students, he lamented the subtle but unmistakable implication of the Rae Report that "universal access to postsecondary education is no longer a fundamental and unquestioned Canadian value." In encouraging means-tested student loans, Elmasry says, "Rae's report completely misses the point ... [that] education should be regarded as a universal right." In Elmasry's account, "education can be either a great equalizer that recognizes the unique intellectual and creative value of every citizen, or a great divider that reinforces the subtle discrimination of a class system we are so unwilling to acknowledge. Rae's report has sadly run aground on the same old divisive faults of the latter, and this is wrong."

In his final report, Rae claims that he supports increased systemic financial support for postsecondary education. He insists that he wants "new funding [that] is not a one-time infusion to make up for previous cutbacks" (Rae, 2005, p. 20). The mechanisms to achieve this end amount to technical trifling, not substantial reorganization. Addressing student costs, for example, he does not recommend a freeze or even a reduction of tuition fees with the needed revenue coming from increased corporate taxation. Instead, he offers complex, means test based grants and loans to students. He endorses the federal government's "Education Bond" program that improves opportunities for RESP investment by low-income families. He opens the door to increased philanthropy by way of the Ontario Student Opportunity Trust Fund to make possible bursaries, with the proviso that "only students in financial need should be eligible for a government match." Acknowledging that some of his ideas "will take time to establish because of the need for federal-provincial consensus," (2005, p. 22), Rae advocates measures that would develop formulae for student loan repayment based on a repayment-gear-to-income plan that would ensure the collection of outstanding loans through payroll deductions. In short, what Rae envisions is a

crazy quilt of incentives, tax credits, claw-backs and voluntary corporate gifts to funnel educational start-up money to the "deserving poor." He opens his discussion with a concern that increased funding has a tendency to "disappear into the administrative apparatus," but he presents a plan in which an appeal to an eclectic array of "best practices" makes such diversion and disappearance almost inevitable. Ralph Klein could not help but agree.

In terms of practical consequences, it is worth mentioning that the college teachers' union has embraced the Rae Review and has picked and chosen specific sections to bolster its collective bargaining demands. In a twenty-one page "wish list" of sixty-five specific bargaining goals ranging from salary increases and workload limits to issues associated with academic freedom and intellectual property rights, the exclusive external basis for demands was the Rae Review. (OPSEU, 2005, March 30). Relying on selected quotations to address the "quality deficit," the combination of "increased student numbers" (contrary to Rae's assertion of "flatlining") and increased faculty-student ratios are the substantive basis for demands for increased expenditures. Visible concern about ensuring that students receive a "great education" thus blends nicely with "bread-and-butter" union issues. Ignoring other aspects of the Rae Review, the union is attempting to use the Rae-McGuinty rhetoric against the McGuinty-Rae budgetary priorities in college education.

The strategy of holding the authorities to the test of their own public declarations of principle, of course, is lost on the government's negotiators.

## Conclusion

It would be foolish to attribute the McGuinty government's current thought and action about the funding of public services to the Rae Review; the matter is quite the reverse. Liberal policy sets the theme; the Rae Review is an important variation, but a variation nonetheless. One recent development merits attention. The Rae Review, like other documents and discussions that have led to promised increases in public spending, faces the same fiscal problems—real or imagined—that caused the government to abandon many of its campaign pledges during its first year in office. There can be little doubt that its predecessor—the "cut taxes-but-spend-anyway"—Conservatives left the province in a financial deficit position far larger than anticipated. Preferring "fiscal responsibility" to social investment, the Liberals appear to be on the way toward a corporate-friendly solution. Rather than use progressive personal income tax or more equitable corporate taxes to fund social investment, McGuinty would prefer to mortgage the future. That, at least, was the metaphor used by Public Infrastructure Renewal Minister David Caplan when he announced a \$30 billion spending plan to be repaid over forty to sixty years. The money, of course, will come from private sector lenders. The result will be, he said, a "renaissance for public infrastructure" (McGran, 2005, May 26, p. A-4).

The real result will be profits for the private financial sector and a

hedge against tax increases for the wealthy. Thus, the "progressive" aspects of the Rae plan will be secured at the expense of working and middle class Ontarians and to the advantage of already prosperous individuals and private sector institutions. Plans call for one-third of the money (\$10 billion) to be spent on education, with the colleges and universities share being \$540 million "to renew university and college facilities" and \$600 million for the expansion of graduate schools, especially in medicine. All of this money, of course, seems suspiciously like a simple amplification of the Conservative "Superbuild" projects and mean very little for operating expenses. Meanwhile, the Collective Agreement between college teachers and the College Compensation and Appointments Council (previously the Council of Regents) will soon come to an end as negotiations for a new contract continue. Management, of course, has tabled its demands for concessions. No salary offer has been made. Instead, the government seems interested only in increasing workload, removing job security protections and maximizing managerial flexibility in teaching assignments. If there was any room for the Rae Review to make a positive contribution of college life from the point of view of faculty, the message has certainly not made it to the negotiation process.

Instead, it would appear that business will be conducted as usual, and that means that college education will remain materially, rhetorically and ideologically a business. Some may wonder why much of our discussion has been cast in personal terms, why the ideas and actions of Mr. Rae and Mr. Davis have been so consciously placed in the narrative. The answer is simplicity itself. Politics is personal. It is personal to the young woman who can no longer afford college tuition and must choose either to forego further education or assume significant debt. It is personal to the teacher who must pretend to meet the academic standards of a few decades ago when teachers were normally assigned four classes, the maximum student-teacher ratio was 15:1, a semester was seventeen weeks and a full month was devoted to professional development as contrasted today when teachers are normally assigned five classes, the student-teacher ratio is 35:1, the semester is fourteen weeks (thus forcing teachers to teach three semesters rather than two) and professional development is done while on weekends or on vacation. No doubt productivity (grades assigned per year) is up, but teaching and learning are down. That is not acceptable. If the ideology of individual responsibility is to be applied to students and teachers, it must equally be applied to those who help to design the systems in which students and workers function.

**Note:** The final report of the Rae Review **Ontario A Leader in Learning** is posted at <[www.raereview.on.ca](http://www.raereview.on.ca)>.

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