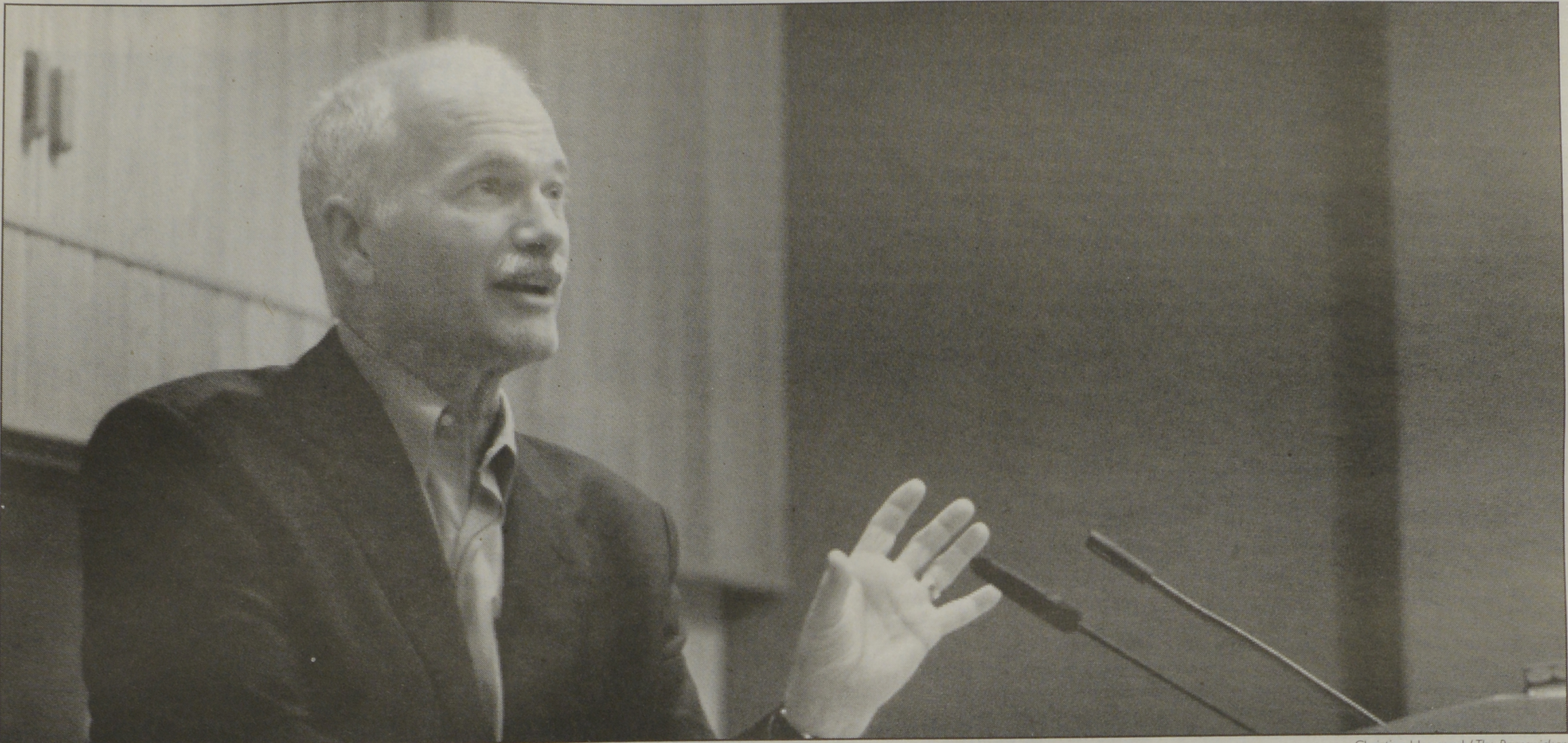


Sitting down with Jack Layton



Christian Hapgood / The Brunswickan

New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton spoke at UNB's Wu Centre last Monday night. In an interview with the Brunswickan, Layton addressed issues of post-secondary education and voiced concerns regarding the Conservative budget. He said that while the \$2 billion allocated to PSE infrastructure is undeniably a good thing, the terms of its expenditure are far too vague.

JOSH O'KANE
THE BRUNSWICKAN

Following Jack Layton's appearance at UNB last week, the NDP leader sat down with the Brunswickan to talk about the federal budget and issues surrounding post-secondary education. Layton was more than kind to chat after an hour of posing for photos that people would later upload to Facebook and tag him in. Here's what he had to say:

Brunswickan: You have a lot of qualms with the recent Conservative budget. What are your thoughts on the \$2 billion allocated to maintenance and upgrades to post-secondary education facilities?

Jack Layton: Well, it's good that there's some investment in the infrastructure, but let's remember, there'll be competition for that. We don't imagine that it's going to be adequate for the job, but it's a start.

The key will be: are they going to find a way to make the money move quickly, or are they going to put a lot of conditions in front of it – like if it has to be public-private partnerships with some of their friends in the private sector. Or is the university or province going to have to match the money? If that's the condition, well, the province hasn't got the money. And the money won't flow. These are the worries we have about the way the program has been designed.

B: Do you think the infrastructure money is allocated properly, or do you think it could better go to funding post-secondary education itself to lower tuition?

JL: You need both, because the physical facilities are falling apart across the country. The physical facility work will create jobs now. The affordable education piece will create the kind of jobs we want for the 21st century. That's why I said the budget should be evaluated against protecting the vulnerable, keeping jobs now for people

who are losing their jobs – getting them into the workforce. That's the infrastructure piece. Preparing jobs for the future – that's the post-secondary education piece as I see it.

B: In New Brunswick, there's one federal riding represented by the NDP, so –

JL: Yvon Godin, he's our member. He does a great job. [Godin is MP for Acadie-Bathurst.]

B: With just one member, how can the NDP be a viable option for New Brunswick voters?

JL: We have to keep building at the grassroots level. Some of our candidates did particularly well this election. In fact, we had a good percentage, overall, but because we don't have proportional representation in Canada, we can get – I'm not sure what we had, 20% across the province? Well, that way, we should have had two or three seats. It's a question of continuing to build. I think Roger Duguay coming in as our provincial leader could be a real help. And our teams are building.

You know, I ran three times before I won federally. My wife [Olivia Chow, MP for Toronto's Trinity-Spadina riding] ran three times before she won federally. You build these things. We had no seats in Ontario in 1999. Not one. Now we have 17. We weren't even an official party in 1993, in that election. Now we've built up to being a major and significant force.

B: Was proportional representation something you were hoping to pursue if the coalition went forward?

JL: Yes.

B: You criticized lobbying groups in your presentation for not necessarily representing the individual people of Canada. Do you think the efforts of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations and the Canadian Federation of Students as lobbying groups are effective? Is one any more effective in the other in its methodology?

JL: I'm not going to judge groups, but I can certainly say that they've both been on the hill. I've always encouraged students as much as possible to work together, if that can be done. Our policies are a bit more in tune with CFS policies, but we've also worked with the Alliance as well on some key issues.

Students should make their own democratic choice. My only encouragement is, where it's possible, students working across the country together are more likely to have an impact. Otherwise, you end up with a divide and conquer approach by the government. But our bill is one which I'm pretty sure has been endorsed by the CFS. I don't know if the Alliance has endorsed it or not. It calls for needs-based grants, and we were not in favour of the Millennium Scholarship approach. We thought that there were better ways to use the funds. The CFS won that battle, I guess you could say.

B: You have a PhD in political science. How important is that level of education for you in your role as a politician?

JL: It's been extremely helpful. I'm sure there are people with other kinds of education and backgrounds who would do, or have done in the past, good jobs for our party. It gave me a chance to study the ebb and flow of politics in this country, and social change and how we can work to achieve it, and better economic and environmental policies, and how we can achieve it. My education was working to learn more about how to make change happen. I've now had quite a few years working on making that change happen. It was a nice fit in my case.

My wife, on the other hand, she's a trained sculptor, and a fellow of the Ontario College of Arts. She didn't really study political science at all, and yet she's my Member of Parliament. Yvon Godin was a miner. He worked underground for six years, and became a shop steward, and learned how to be a leader by standing up against companies that wouldn't bring in safe working conditions. He's a terrific Member of Parliament. There are many different ways to learn, and I think the diversity in our caucus, different experiences of working people, has been very helpful.

B: One last question. What's the worst joke anyone's made about your moustache?

JL: That's a funny question, and I'm not sure that I can answer it. I probably haven't heard the worst one, because nobody told it to me directly. That's my answer.

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