

Jack Layton woos Wu Centre crowd

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THE BRUNSWICKAN

Federal NDP leader Jack Layton charmed an above-capacity crowd at UNB's Wu Centre on Monday with various quips and tales, but had one resounding message: he and his party are not happy with January's federal budget.

His presentation, he said, was part of a cross-country consultation with Canadians on how to deal with the present economic crisis facing the country. While lobbyists do have a major presence on Parliament Hill, Layton said that "I have found that the average citizen doesn't have many paid lobbyists on the hill."

The party leader reflected on the federal budget in light of the economic crisis. While many jobs could be created by the government, he says the government is not working in the right direction. Middle class jobs in workplaces such as factories continue to be lost in light of dwindling product sales, Layton says. The jobs being created are low-income, often part-time jobs, he says, at places such as Tim Hortons.

"But if you lay off enough of the middle class, they don't go to Tim Hortons for coffee - they make it at home."

Layton also compared Harper's request to the Governor General to prorogue parliament to "asking a professor for an extension, even if the excuse is questionable."

Abundant flaws riddle the new budget, he said, including its proposal to revoke the ability of federal civil servants to use the human rights commission for pay equity complaints, instead redirecting them to the court system.

"(Harper) knows the economic crisis will shadow the issue," Layton warned. The NDP will move to remove the item from the budget, he said.

He also said that the party also opposes the budget's take on student loans, as it will allow collection agencies in charge of loans to obtain as much information on borrowers and their families as they feel necessary.

"We think this is wrong. This is the opposite of what should go on," he said.

Layton also went into detail about three important tests he believes the budget fails.

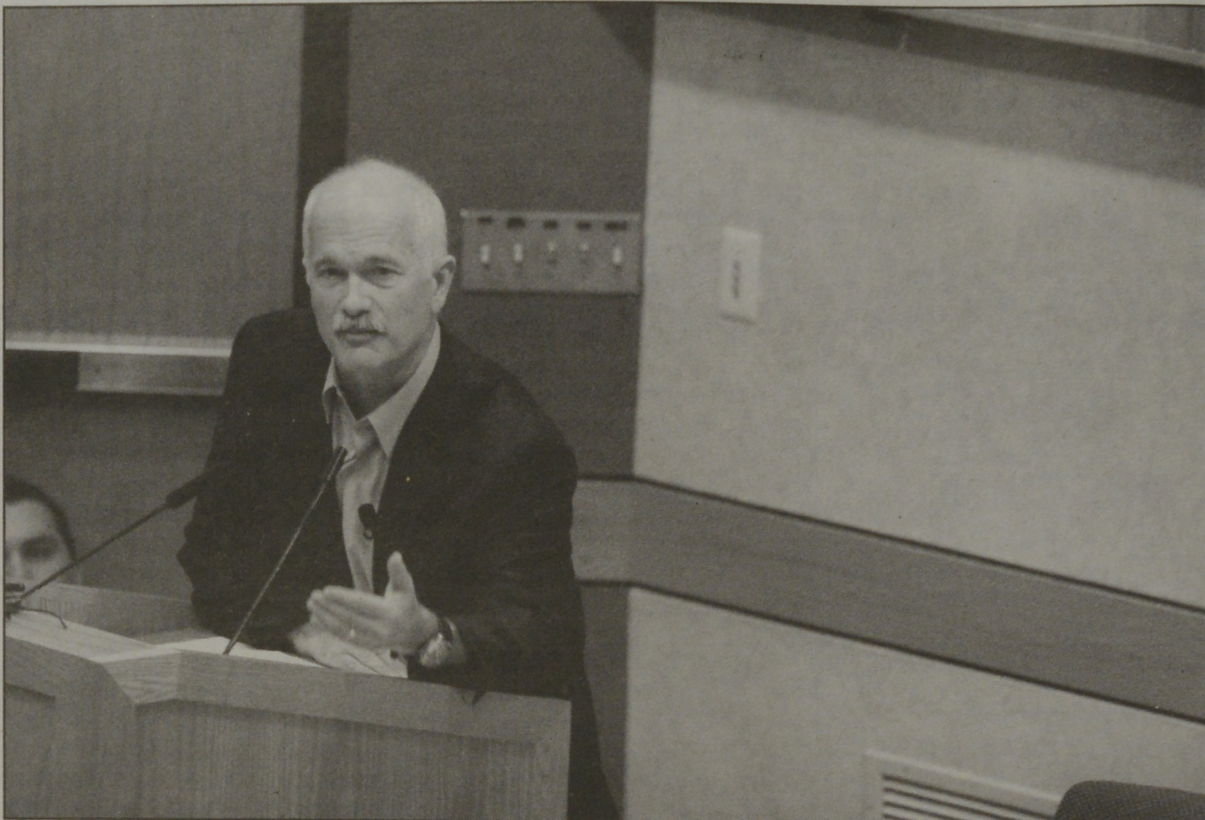
"Does it protect the vulnerable from the economic crisis? Does it safeguard jobs today? And does it pave the way to have more jobs tomorrow?"

The budget failed all three tests, said the party leader.

Closed sawmills that sold lumber to the U.S. before the end of its housing boom could be reopened in order to produce supplies to build affordable housing for students or seniors, or persons affected by the harsh economic times. Thus, he said, jobs could be created while lessening the economic crisis' strain on other citizens.

Layton also suggested a program, currently implemented in Germany and some Canadian cities, to refurbish buildings across the country to be more energy efficient.

"The first thing I do when I walk



Jack Layton discussed the NDP's thoughts on last month's Conservative budget on Monday before taking questions from his Fredericton audience for close to an hour.

Andrew Meade / The Brunswickan

into a building is look up to see the light bulbs it's got. I look up here and I see incandescent bulbs, which are, um, ridiculous," he said of the Wu Centre's Kent Auditorium.

Energy efficiency projects aren't the only thing Layton envies in Germany.

"They have this thing in Germany - I don't know if you've heard of it - it's called a coalition government."

He ended his talk with a reminder of North America's two most recent major elections.

"In the U.S., 53 per cent of people voted for change, and they got it. In Canada, 62 per cent voted for change, and we got the same old."

Layton spent close to an hour after his presentation fielding numerous questions from the crowd, regarding

everything from poverty to electoral reform to post-secondary education.

Of the electoral reform question, Layton commented that there must have been numerous political science students in the room.

"That, or there's something very good in the air that isn't legal yet."

Check out next week's Brunswickan for a one-on-one interview with Jack Layton.

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