**Episode 46 – Doug vs. student democracy**

[Intro Music: “You are listening to Sandy and Nora's Podcast”.]

Nora: (Laughing.) Hey Sandy!

Sandy: Heeeey Nora. (Laughs.) So we just finished recording part one.

Nora: I haven't even stopped recording. (Laughs.)

Sandy: We did not even stop recording. Here is part two. So the, the other terrible, terrible thing about the policy of tuition fee reductions or I just, I can't even call it that, the policy on post-secondary education that was announced by the Ford government recently is the fact that they have promised this weird kind of throw away thing that not a lot of media unfortunately has focused on which is, ah, so they're going to give students a lot of choice, 'cause students are adults and they should choose what services they are funding on campus. So they're going to give individual students the right to choose whether or not to support all of the additional services that come with their fees. So that, you know there's a bunch of different fees that students support like you know there might be a fee for athletics, there might be a fee for the health centre, there might be a fee for the students' union, the women's centre, maybe you have a LGBTQ2AI+ organization on campus, maybe you have a walk safe, maybe there's a food bank, all of those services, the conservative government is gonna somehow give students the ability to choose whether or not they fund those services because students are adults and should have the right to choose such things. (Deep sigh.)

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: This is a disaster for all of Canadian society (laughs).

Nora: Yeah, yeah. It really can't be overstated.

Sandy: It can't. Ah, and it will affect Canadian society for decades actually...

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: ...if allowed to stand for too long.

Nora: Yeah, yeah. It's a fundamental, it's a fundamental rearrangement of power and of resistance really. So, I know that this is pretty complicated and I think that this is why a lot of journalists haven't written about it. Which is really frustrating because of, ‘cause who's got the most to lose in this is the student press. I always said this when I was on campus that, like, at the end of the day we have common cause, you know you're always butting heads with the student press, but at the end of the day we've got common cause with the student press because of, you know, students were asked to vote to keep paying their money to the student press, ya think that's going to pass? (Laughs.)

Sandy: Mhm. Mhm.

Nora: So the reality is, is that, so there's two kinds of fees on campus. There's fees that are controlled by the university and there's fees that are not controlled by the university aka they're controlled by students, by a kind of student, a kind of student, in a Board of Directors in one organization or a collective of students or whatever. And Ford, when it was first announced, Merrilee Fullerton said all ancillary fees basically, all of these fees are up in the air. And so that's student services, that's athletics, that's whatever, a lot of different stuff. When pressed by a journalist about whether or not that means you know all fees are on the table (laughs) she's like "(laughing) no, no, no, I just mean, I just mean the student fees." Well she didn't say that, she said "no, athletics would still be forced, mandatory, health services” - whatever the fuck that means - “would still be mandatory, and walk safe would still be mandatory.”

Sandy: It's just essential services would remain mandatory, is the exact term that she used. Essential services. She said, I think health is really important. So students would still be (laughing) be funding health. The idea that students are adults and can decide these things go out the window at this point right? "I think that health is really important, athletics is really important, so these would be essential services" and of course the ideas that students would be able to like accurately decide makes no sense in a situation where students are paying the highest tuition fees in the country, but I digress. Continue Nora.

Nora: Yeah, well, and so this is, this is the thing. So we're talking about many different fees that tend to not be that much, like some fees are literally only a dollar, ah, and they can go as far as just over a hundred dollars for athletic fees, so you'll have hundreds of dollars when it comes to health and dental plan, which is a fee that students are able to opt out of, of course not all of these fees are mandatory. The students decide at the point that the fee is passed, first of all the amount, any time that fee is going to go up, it has to go back to students, that there are campus wide referenda in the university system, in the college system the college administrators already control most of the student union boards so they just go to the student union boards and they basically sit on their necks until they say they will pass this new fee and then the students are like "ok fine." Which is a whole other issue, and I'm sure that Ford's not touching that. But for the fees that, um, students control, you know you named some of the services that they provide but it's, but it's all encompassing, it's any single student club, like you know, any campus has hundreds of student clubs, so it's all of those student clubs. It's course unions, so the groups that do course fun events but also that organize departmental councils and so the students representatives that change course programs or make suggestions for new courses, or whatever right? The actual student democratic voice within, within the departments are threatened.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: Then there's like the student bar, there's the, the World University Refugee Program, where students fund a refugee student to come to their school which exists on a lot of campuses, there's Engineers Without Borders (laughs), there's the Commerce Society, like...

Sandy: Yup.

Nora: These, these, these organizations actually don't have one political orientation, well certainly not... the campus press is in there, the campus radio is in there. They, they all share one thing in common, which is its students control the fees and it's the only fees on campus that are democratically decided on.

Sandy: Mhmm. because and this is, this is really important for people to understand, it is already law that students have to choose to pay these fees. The difference is, or what they are trying to do away with is right now the choice that students have is a choice as a collective, everybody has to vote on whether or not to fund, uh, the food bank. And if the majority say yes, it's useful to fund a food bank because people are fucking poor, then everyone contributes like a dollar towards this foodbank so that students who can provide food for those of their group who are less fortunate than them, as an example of how this works. Another example might be that there is, I don't know, like a computer science club or some club of conservative whatever, just to make it (laughing)... Not to say that computer scientists are conservative, I was one (laughs) just to make it, like it doesn't, like politically it doesn't matter. Like people would vote to say yes, I support this organization and then that organization would get funded to whatever it was, ah that, that the fee was decided at whatever they were voting on in the referendum. What's different now is that the conservatives are saying, like, you know, fuck a, a vote that happens all together. Individual students are going to be able to opt out of all of those fees. And so what does that do? It is, ah, you know, it is, it's essentially if you've heard of right to work legislation, against unions, having workers decide whether to pay in to the union or not, not as a group, but as individual workers, what that does, is it provides real instability to the organization on whether or not they're going to exist. Because you don't know if you're going to expect a dollar from 50, 000 students if you're at York University in the next year, or if you're going to expect a dollar from maybe 20, 000 students because only 20, 000 or the 50, 000 students that you were typically getting are, are paying into the women's centre, and you have to fire two of your staff people.

Nora: And some tiny Tory wanks off to the idea.

Sandy: Yuuuup. (Nora laughs.) Fuck them. (Sandy laughs.) So that's, that's what's happening. And, I, like again as we say, like this really can't be overstated that it's going to change the entire landscape of political organizing.

Nora: Yup.

Sandy: because that is how important student organizations are in Canada when it comes to organizing.

Nora: So there's a whole bunch of mechanical questions to how this would actually work. Like are you agreeing to pay or not to pay before you've even stepped on campus? Um, do you have to opt in, which would vastly reduce the number of people than if you had to opt out, just because that's, there's experience with that on campus, you can see how that, that works when people opt out of a certain fee.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: And so are you reasonably expecting a random 17-year-old who doesn't even know what like WUSC is to pay for the WUSC fee? (Laughs.)

Sandy: Right.

Nora: You know if you've never been on campus. Like it's just, it's really brutal, and the right to work comparison is excellent to an extent. It's excellent because it's exactly why right to work exists in the United States right? The right to work system originated in 1948 as a way to allow white workers to refuse to be in the same organization as Black workers.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: They were trying to maintain segregation across the South and was first passed in two southern states, Florida and I think Kentucky? I just wrote about it, I forget. But a lot of the southern states adopted right to work and, and as things have gotten worse and worse and worse in the United States right to work is now, um, actually in a majority of U.S. states.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: And so what that's done is that, that unions have had their budgets gutted, completely gutted and that there's a new bureaucracy that has been built around whether or not you even represent the person that's coming to you with the problem.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: Which, is also the function of student unions. And we'll talk about the organizing that students’ unions do, but there's a lot of individual advocacy, like there's nowhere else on campus that you can go to have, have help to challenge your grades or to say yeah my house burned down in the middle of the semester, that's why I had to bounce. Like, these, these things happen all the time. They're so common, every year there are hundreds of appeals that students make about their grades and it's the student union that dispatches, that helps, that supports and that will represent them.

Sandy: Exactly.

Nora: In these cases.

Sandy: Exactly.

Nora: And so, so with unions in the United States there's been bureaucracies built up around trying to identify who's a member of your union, trying to convince workers who are not members of your union to join, to pay. The difference with the student union is that unions sometimes do have difficulties reaching their members and sometimes people stay for too long and sometimes they stop doing the outreach and sometimes they get too comfortable. That doesn't happen in students' unions because there's so much turn over that every year you've got like people who are like "I'm ready to just do it!" Again, regardless of the political orientation of the student, they want to get out there, if they've got you know a, a, a good progressive, uh, analysis they probably want to organize students to do different progressive campaigns, if they're shitty, ah, shitty, shitty, shitty, fucking right wing students they still probably want to reach as many people as possible to party. Right? They just probably won't target people who look like they might be like alternative. (Laughs.).

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: But at the end of the day, like these are, these are exceedingly democratic organizations and they are actually the most democratic organization within the higher education sector, and so the connection between that and the fact that Doug Ford is going after them is I think what the most important part of this whole, this whole saga is. Which is, it is, it is literally a totalitarian attack on autonomous organizing in this province, in that province.

Sandy: Mhmm, mhmm. And so why do we say that it is like so important that it'll change the milieu of like Canadian organizing and so on? I, I do a lot of organizing that's cross border now. I, because of my involvement with, ah, BLM and in like a global context organizing I have seen a lot of how organizers are trained, or how organizing happens in the United States. And what is really striking to me, in the, the U.S. that's really, really different than the Canadian context is that there are a number of different pathways to becoming a social activist in the U.S. The U.S. has a really weak student... like a really weak formal student organizing infrastructure, it is nothing like Canada. Um, student associations aren't very strong, um, and they, there is a national student organization, the United States Student Association that I think has like members in maybe 13 states the last I checked. It's just like, it's not very strong. They have a very weak student organizing infrastructure, which is different from like the entire world. The entire world has a really, like (laughing) the rest of the world has really strong student organizing infrastructure, but the U.S. does not. But what the U.S. does have is like a thousand different pathways to being involved, like becoming a trained organizer, a trained activist, you can get involved in so many different formal organizations, formal schools even, that are focused on training you to become an activist. And many of the activists that you will see, um, you know on your television, in newspapers, uh, who are leading American institutions, have been trained through these pathways. In Canada there are very, very, very few. And one of them in student organizing. The infrastructure that Canada has for student organizing and the way that student organizers are trained is almost unparalleled actually throughout the world. And, ah, I say this not as like as just some shit that I made up, uh, but as someone who has done a lot of organizing world wide, in that I recall when I went to an international student organizing forum in South Africa. Uh, one of the questions that everyone from around the world was asking us was how do we replicate the Canadian organizing model. We want to know exactly how you do it because you guys have, you've you've organized like a closed union shop. We want to replicate this in France, we want to replicate this in France, we want to replicate this in Spain, we want to replicate this in El Salvador, literally every, like we were the rockstars, because people wanted to replicate this system 'cause it is such a unique training system for activists, it's very robust and strong in the way that it trains activists. Such that in my adult life as a, a lefty who's been involved in so many different organizations both as formal employment and not formal employment, people will ask me like "where did you get your skills?" And I'll say, you know I was, you know I was a student union person, or I was employed at the Canadian Federation of Students or whatever. People will be like "Ohhhhhhh, you're a CFS trained person" because that actually means something. It actually means something that you were trained in student organizing and throughout this country, whether these people agree with, ah, the tactics or whatever of the Canadian Federation of Students or not, are people who have been affected by, trained through, student organizing, student movement organizing, because of a formal student union structure that have gone on to create unions that have changed public policy, to create uh community organizations that have changed public policy, to create different types of radical sorts of organizations that have changed public policy. Or who have gone on to create some sort of private organization that is, um, informed by the what event planning that you get, the speaker training that you get, the fundraising training that you get, name it, it's there through student organizing. In the States it's everywhere in Canada it's in like two or three places and student organizing is one of them. Conservatives know this so well, so well that in the early 2000s, early to late 2000s they made it a focus, a prime focus of conservative organizing to tear down student organizing and specifically progressive student organizing through dismantling the Canadian Federation of Students, the Ontario Public Interest Research Groups, which are another form of kind of student organizing on campus that is, ah, formal and has a formal infrastructure. Ah, and this is how, ah, you know they created a document for how they were going to, to do that. And one of the things that they wanted to do is to implement voluntary student unionism, which is exactly what the government has announced in this last week.

Nora: Yeah, there's, there's a whole historical aspect to this as well. Like, it's not by coincidence that the United States never had the same kind of broad based student organizing model that Canada has, the United States student group, I'm not sure, it wasn't called the USSA back then, but it was fully infiltrated by the CIA right? This is the era of the Cold War where, where student activism and radicalism was a true threat to the dominance or status quo of the left, as Russia and as the United States were fighting each other. And so, like, the, the government forces in the States were involved in any radical organizing, ah, and you know crushed the student movement. Whereas the Canadian Federation of Students you know has ebbed and flowed in it's political orientation in a lot of different was, right Paul Desmarais, from Power Corp was the President at one point (laughs), a previous orientation of the organization in the 60s. But it's, the, but there was never the same state interference with autonomous student organizing, and so throughout the 1970s that's where you, you see social movements born on campus that, you know the women's movement, and the civil rights movement, and anti-war movements all coming from the campus location and that's where you start to have organizations take more radical approaches and, and the key to how radical they could be is in how autonomous they were from administration, or how autonomous they were to, for the students to control their own money, uh, to not be, to not face reprisals, and the clear result of that if you look at Québec is a post-secondary education system that is still very funded, that is still more accessible than the rest of Canada, where college is free, where talking about supplemental fees is still something you know you can get press on and students can, can make headlines about. And where they literally toppled the government over a, ah, proposed tuition fee hike in 2012. In Québec the student federations, students' unions on campus at the, at the CGEP and at the university level are all protected through legislation through an Act that considers them, they're actually included under labour legislation, so they've got similar protections that a union would have, um, there's only one other province in, in, Canada that has a similar piece of legislation and that's British Columbia where there's the Societies Act that protects societies, student societies they are called, in, in British Columbia schools. And so there's no protection like that in Ontario, although I'm sure even if there was Ford would probably try to destroy it, but, the, the, giving...

Sandy: We tried! We tried. (Laughs.)

Nora: We did, we came so fucking close. And the Liberals didn't put it through...

Sandy: Yes.

Nora: Even though it was co-served by a Liberal Member of Parliament.

Sandy: During the time that Nora and I were working at the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, we drafted a Bill, Bill 184, I believe it was, to, to try to get student unions protected through legislation, um, because this, this stuff was leaked, it was leaked that the conservatives were attempting to get rid of, were, were, had this plan to get rid of student unions, voluntary student unionism or whatever, became a priority and we had it jointly, jointly sponsored by Yasir Naqvi and, uh, Rosario Marchese and it was blocked by the Liberal party. Sorry, continue.

Nora: Yeah, they wouldn't, they wouldn't put it through in time for it to not die on the order paper which of course it died. And and so, you know, the result of allowing students to control their own resources, give everybody those skills that you talked about, like the organizing skills, or also just the managing skills, or, or, or, staffing and hiring and HR and legal and everything that comes with managing these massive corporations, cause most student unions at large campuses are actually massive corporations. Which raises a whole other questions which is whether or not it's even fucking legal for Doug Ford to pretend that he can do it. But we can maybe end off with that. But, but the repercussions are massive and and the problem is is that this, this should be seen as an assault on free association and free press.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: Except that the administration stands to benefit handsomely from eliminating those pesky students who keep getting in the way of doing what the administration wants to do.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: And so that poses a bit of a difficult problem because I think part of the way to fight back against this is going to be a multi, ah, partisan kind of coalition. The Liberals are gonna be all over this...

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: Um, you know anybody to the NDP and left will be obviously all over this. There will be probably people who are conservative supporters who will be all over a campaign as well. But, but administrators love this because if you look at the college system in Ontario, they already almost managed to crush autonomous student organizing. There are no, there are almost no autonomous student associations at the college level because the college administrations control those associations, either through appointed staff or directly by votes on their Board of Directors. You know, I, I saw that directly at one of the best student unions in Ontario, which is the George Brown Student Association, or the Student Association of George Brown College, where at one meeting an administrator came in trying to convince them to raise the graduation fee by I think it was $15. (Sandy laughs.) And I was the Chair and so I had to like pause and tell someone to suggest that they go in camera so that the administrator couldn't stay in the room to watch the vote, and it was a funny year for the admin to decide to try and push this vote forward because, um, the year before their graduation was a disaster. Like, literally tickets didn't work, people couldn't get in, there was a huge lineup, the centre, they, they, they went to the Hummingbird Centre last minute in Toronto and it was, anyway, it was like not the year to try and convince students that (laughs) graduation should be more money because they were all burned by it. And it was fascinating watching the rage, the pure rage from the Vice-President, when they, when they rejected him...

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: And then I started to get calls from Senior Administrators at George Brown demanding that I not influence their vote and it was "we went into camera, I didn't influence shit". I was, I was chairing, like go fuck yourself, you are not a member of this Board either. And, and as I say George Brown Student Association was one of the more politically active and aware student associations. But if you cut out that critical thought and you cut out the autonomy that students have to run their own affairs, then it's like "yeah sure we'll vote for whatever you want, sure yes, it's all good. Yeah, jack our fees, yeah cut our quality, fuck over our professors. We don't care!" And that's literally what's going on right now in Ontario, is this, this, this, this, this slide into the hole of fucking trash of the system, because it is constantly under-funded, students are under massive stress and they actually need, need autonomous student organizing more than ever.

Sandy: I just want people to appreciate that we are not overstating the value of student organizing, um, in in Canada. If you trace back so many different social change moments in this country whether it's you know, um, bodily autonomy for women, and, uh, the right to choose. Like if you trace back the organizing of that you will find yourself at a women's centre on campus. If you trace back, uh, organizing to have sexual assault supports centres, community organizations, if you trace that organizing back, you will find similar types of organizations on campus. If you trace back, um, organizations supporting Queer folks, if you trace it back you will, in Canada, come to the homophile association that was started at the University of Toronto. All of these organizations were funded through their students' unions. (Laughs.) The very social landscape of Canada and how people organize generally can be traced back to these organizations that are funded through students' unions. And we talk about student' unions really cavalierly like "oh, student politics, ha, ha, ha." Without really appreciating how important student organizing to literally training the entire way that, ah, so much of our society operates. And I, I always though when I was an organizer on campus and would get a lot of critiques either from conservatives or even from, ah, progressive students who were like "ah, this is, you know, this organization isn't, ah, progressive enough we should shut it all down and screw this whole thing." I was like why don't people understand what's actually happening here? The value of student organizations, the true value, is the training that happens through student organizations. It's what happens in the next 10, 15, 20, years after you’re involved in this student organization that is the true value of student organizations in Canada and it is the uniqueness of student organizations in Canada. Not entirely, of course you can trace back certain organizing like, um, like organizing against anti-Blackness in the United States was often through student organizations as well, but the type of rigorous training that you get (laughs) in student organizations in Canada is kind of unique. And again, conservatives figured that out years ago and have been focusing on student organizations for quite some time and you can see that in the way that they first went after free speech on campus, funding student union, or funding ah, ah, campuses having campus funding attached to whether or not students were saying certain things on campus or not. Like that is a part of this plan to dismantle these organizations that have such a massive effect on the way that Canadian society is organized. I mean, even, even something as simple as and and ridiculous now in the way it's organized as land acknowledgements right? Like, the thinking around decolonization, land acknowledgements, which have become like this kind of really just performative thing but all of those things that are now you know ubiquitous in Canadian society started on campuses through students' unions.

Nora: A lot of these, uh, Tories started their reign of fucking terror on campus as well, so fucks sakes, (deep sigh) they're all like just like mad that they were not that popular in first year university and that they're now trying to wreak their havoc (Sandy laughs) on like the campus bar.

Sandy: And it is actually brilliant that the conservatives in order to make this policy go through announce it with a flurry of other things which are consequential of course, like the tuition fee reduction, um, the changes to OSAP, but not as consequential as this is going to be, it's consequential in a different way and, and they’re, it's like so diabolical because they're giving student organizations what they've been asking for the last like 30 years (both laugh) tuition fee reduction in exactly the way that you wanted it, and we're going destroy you at the same time.

Nora: There are so many ways that this is going to impact Canadian politics and an already badly beaten left (laughs) um that this will just continue to allow the conservatives to get worse and get worse and get worse.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: And so I think like it's probably important for us to talk about what the fightback has to look like. And I have some ideas.

Sandy: Yes! But before we get there I do want to mention one thing that somebody asked me about, it's like "if all of this is true, then why didn't the Liberals just get rid of the organizing". (Laughs.)

Nora: Ooooooo. Ha ha.

Sandy: Why didn't the Liberals do it? because the Liberals are schemey people who (both laugh) who will always try to figure out another way that is not the easiest way to do things. And what the Liberals did to counteract the type of organizing, that student organizations have come up with is they came up with their own types of infrastructure. So you have the Ontario Undergraduate Student Association, you have um ah the Canadian Association of Alliance of Student Associations (Nora laughs) which are all attached to the Liberal Party, which also form a kind of infrastructural training, it's a different type of training, it's more geared towards students who want to get into government and you can trace people who are in government or in bureaucracy back to being involved in these organizations or organizations who are attached to these schools and they also rely on being able to have a, a well-funded resourced student organization on campus, so the Liberals require this type of infrastructure as well to fund their training (laughs)...

Nora: Mhmm.

S:... of students. And so for the first time in a really long time if you go and take a look at what the three major student organizations in the province in Ontario have said about this policy, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, the Canadian Student...ah the College Student Alliance, and the Canadian Federation of Student-Ontario, they are aligned! (Laughs.)

Nora: And the Canadian University Press. (Both laugh.)

Sandy: And the Canadian University Press!! They are all aligned for like the first time in a really long, probably ever. (Laughs.)

Nora: Oh yeah.

Sandy: On saying that this policy is wrong and this policy is bad meanwhile Joe Blow from like the Carlton Free Speech Association is like "yeah, ah, this is exactly what we wanted".

Nora: Yeah. I, you, you make me uh, you remind me that I have to mention that the training piece is not just for the left or just for organizers or even just for how to run your, a student group or meetings, or, or the student bar or whatever. These are these are going to be job losses, massive job losses, because a lot of student organizations hire dozens, hundreds of people sometimes, across the province it's going to be thousands of job losses for sure.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: And also the training piece is really campus press that some of Canada's best journalists come out of the campus press, and there's, there's always this weird situation on campus in the, in the campus press...

Sandy: Naomi Klein!!! Naomi Klein came from the campus press!!

Nora: I mean, her and yeah, but even like mainstream really good mainstream journalists got to all practice at the...

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: ...at their respective campus newspapers.

Sandy: Absolutely.

Nora: ...and there was always this weird situation where you would look at the mainstream press, like, which was on fire and going to shit because of you know media concentration and ownership and selling newspapers and newspapers closing, but the campus press was always protected from that because they always had guaranteed funding, and so they had guaranteed funding, they didn't have to worry about fighting to survive, right? Because you just budgeted within your guaranteed funding, plus you have a bit of ad revenue maybe. And you did the work of reporting.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: In some parts of Ontario the campus press is the only local news source or is one of only two local news sources, and the journalism in some of these papers rivals mainstream news. And so this is, when I say that this is also an attack on the free press, that also can't be understated because student journalists are even worse than student organizers in telling people to give them money (both laugh), it will be, it will be catastrophe for the student press, that people will just have to work for free, there will be no more paid staff and that the whole thing's going to be running on fumes. And it's the campus press that, you know, when they're doing their job they're holding administrators to account, their holding students' unions to account, they're covering local news, so it's bad news for them too.

Sandy: And maybe you're listening to this and you're thinking, well c'mon. Can it really be that bad? They're a bunch of student organizations, can't they just run on volunteerism? And let me tell you something (laughing) about being a student in this province. If you are a student in this province, in a province where you are paying the highest tuition fees, and you're someone like me who came from a low income family, you are going to be working. I worked three jobs in my first year and my second year of university because I couldn't afford to do anything different. I had to, to be at work. And if you're a working student and all of your student organizing stuff, the ability to get involved, which augments your student experience, which gives you access to um to to, to meeting different people, to different skills, to different knowledge and so on, um, that, if you're saying that just volunteer based, well someone like me, who has to work while I'm in school, because I'm poor, is precluded from that experience because tuition fees are so high that I have no other chance, choice but to work. So in a situation where everyone is just forced to be volunteers for the student press and for students' unions, well the types of things that they're going to be interested might be quite different if you only have students who can afford to work on a volunteer basis. Ah, additionally, ah, what it means is that you just simply just don't understand the way these things work. Like if you are administering a health and dental plan, you need to have like an insurance specialist on campus, if you're administering, um, I don't know some student organizations have...

Nora: Legal advice.

Sandy: ... legal support centres, yeah. For students who are maybe at, at risk of maybe being expelled or have some sort of academic infraction for with they're going to a tribunal and they have a good argument and they have, the student union provides legal support. Well you're going to have to pay those lawyers.

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: (Laughing.) Like there's a lot of, um, ah, of work that goes into, uh, running student organizations and that work deserves to be paid and should be paid and if it's not paid then what becomes important changes, significantly. And maybe you're also thinking "well if it's all this important, if this is is all so important wouldn't students just choose to fund it?" Well again, I say in a province where you're paying the highest tuition fees in Canada and you're struggling to make ends meet and you're going to try to save money any way that you can. If you hear, "hey, you can save another $300 on like on all of this, these different things that you probably don't need." And I guarantee you there will be campaigns to get students to opt out of these things that will probably be misinformed, that will have misinformation as part of these campaigns, because there are people on campus who don't want to fund a women's centre, who don't want to fund a food bank. Ah, of course, I for sure as a student who his struggling to make ends meet and extra $300 is really important to me, so yeah, screw the course union, I need this money because tuition fees are so expensive. And that is the situation that we're walking into.

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: So yes, of course this is going to be a situation where it will 100% no matter what people do affect the bottom line and the ability to organize for hundreds of people, hundreds of student organizations across the province, and thousands of individuals will be affected.

Nora: Well, let's go back to who apparently has claimed victory on this. Like these are full, far-right Gavin McInnes loving pieces of fucking white-supremist trash right? Like, they're not even hiding who they are.

Sandy: Absolutely. Absolutely! Yeah, the Rebel's like "yes!" Like the Rebel! (laughing.)

Nora: Yeah, Ezra Levant, Ezra Levant has been loving this shit.

Sandy: Yeah. Is commenting on this.

Nora: I have to shout out, um, Michael Bueckert for coming up with some of these connections and putting them into a blog post, you should look it up. Um.

Sandy: Yes, yes.

Nora: Because it is so critical that we know these connections and that we know who this is serving. These are, again, these are democratically determined fees, they have all been voted on, every single one of them has already been voted, and these pieces of fucking shit, mother-fucking assholes are all like oh my god in a fucking circle jerk tonight with Doug Ford being like "yeah, we're going to fuck over the women's centre!" Yeah, it's like well you're also going to fuck over the Commerce Society, so like what the fuck?

Sandy: (Sandy laughs.) OK, so how do we organize against it?

Nora: I mean, OK so first of all this is fucking war, like #1.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: I hope that there are discussions being held among teaching faculty, among professors, who understand that this means that they're fucking next. That they start considering wild cat strikes. Has to be on the table as an option.

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: And the reason why I start with them instead of starting with students is because the student movement looks different on every campus, some campuses it's very strong, some campuses it's not so strong, and it's going to take students a bit of time to get their shit together to figure out how to fight this. There's already been a rally held at Queen's Park, I understand that the turnout was pretty good, several hundred students, maybe even a thousand, Queen's Park is so big that's it's really hard to tell how many people are there if it's not like 20, 000. But students absolutely need the support of people who have job security and who have experience and who can make these historic links, so professors, support staff, like you folks are going to have to play a key role in this fight back. So that's my one option.

Sandy: I also think that, ah, unions should start thinking about how they can underwrite the, um, and support like formally the structures that students ah have organized over the years. Like if you need to fund the food bank, fund the food bank, as a union on campus. Or outside the campus. 'Cause honestly unions like this is, this is step one towards right to work organizations for labour, like this is the test ok? (Laughs.) So you're next, so it would be really good to help these student organizations to continue the work, the vital work that are doing on campuses. Like figure out how you can support, you know, the, the, the Health and Dental Plan staff if that's what it comes to, figure out how you can support student organizations, course unions, whatever, it, it is, unions you're well resourced, if there is a way that you can assist student organizations in continuing to exist and support their workers, please, um, let's make that happen.

Nora: Yeah, but you also have to flex your muscle too because if they, if they you know it's one thing to save the students' union's operations, which is important, but it's a whole other thing to show Ford that he'd be a fucking like he'd be foolish as hell to try and poke that bear in the eye. So, if you're not, like, like, you really do have to flex that muscle now. (Deep sigh.) Guys, you gotta...

Sandy: Mhmm.

Nora: ... you gotta do this. But students! The lion's share of this work is going to be on students.

Sandy: Mhmm. And look, I, I, you know, this, this might feel icky (laughs) but I, I think it's like incredibly important that the, ah, traditionally non aligned student organizations in the province are all aligned on this issues (laughs). OK?

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: Ah, I, I, I don't know if people are waiting for, for something, or maybe they haven't had the idea but you should all come together, even though you hate each other, and with the student press, guys you're natural allies to student organizers just all come together...

Nora: (Laughs.) That's so hard.

Sandy: (Laughs.) Fuck I hate the student press, but you know, you know whatever. (Laughs.) We have a certain history. (Nora laughs.) Ah, but, but I am saying coming together (laughs) and come up with a plan, like issue a reverse this decision by this time or we will call a student strike that is supported by...

Nora: Yup.

Sandy: ... student, student unions across the province. Whether you're OUSA affiliate...

Nora: Yup.

Sandy: .... CSA affiliated, or Canadian Federation of Students affiliated, or like...

Nora: Or unaffiliated if there's any of those.

Sandy: Unaffiliated, I don't know if there are any who are unaffiliated or if you're CUP affiliated. All of you should be coming together to destroy this. And it's possible!

Nora: Totally!

Sandy: The Québec students’ union has shown you that it's possible, this is one issue on which you can all ally. Fucking get it together, get it together!

Nora: Yup. Yeah, and it's, it's not actually, so just some basic steps. And this is where the Canadian Federation of Students folks are going to be very important because no one, none of these other groups are organizers right? And, and you know like you, you issue that demand, you pick a day that is actually going to be a day where you can demonstrate some sort of action. You, you give people the tools that they need to to organize on their own campuses, you create a central website where you're going to make your announcements that you're going to fight this and you're going to fight this in these steps. Your actions have to be, uh, ramping up, like it can't be general strike tomorrow, you need to have, you need to have actions that ramp up the pressure, um, every one of the cabinet ministers is a fucking piece of shit coward and every one of their constituency offices needs to be occupied. No fucking question, so you need to figure out who's best to occupy those. How do you do an occupation, they're not hard, they're not dangerous, you don't have to break anything, it's awesome. Um. But it will freak out the cabinet ministers (Sandy laughs) and as you, as you ratchet up the pressure on them people, more and more people get involved. People are hungry to do something, they're hungry to see a victory, they're hungry to tell, to, to knock Doug Ford around. Immediately after this announcement he announced that he was going to delist endangered species, so he could fucking go and shoot fucking honey badgers in the face and I don't even know and probably eat their brains or something.

Sandy: Weird.

Nora: Oh, I mean develop their habitats of course with the Mattamy homes, which Ryerson Mattamy Athletics Centre, fuck all of you. Um, the there are ways to ramp up this pressure that you need to have a province wide coordinating group that includes all of the province wide associations that are impacted by this. Students’ unions need to literally fucking list every single service, student group, course union that is going to be adversly affected by this. You have to explain what the fuck all of this means to your local press, you call an emergency meeting with the editors of your local newspaper and if they come from the campus press they will actually kind of get it right? You do that groundwork.

Sandy: And don't be timid on this.

Nora: Oh god no!

Sandy: Don't be timid on this. Go hard, OK? Like, I have an inkling, I have an innnnnkliiing that some people who are in student organizing knew about this fact coming forward before it came forward.

Nora: I knew about it!

Sandy: I think that, because I did. (Both laugh.) OK. I did, Nora did, which means that some people within student organizing should have known and that means that you should have leaked it before the conservatives leaked it because you would have destroyed their announcement.

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: But you waited. You waited until they announced and then you responded. Why would you do that?! Don't be timid! Fucking destroy them at the first opportunity. Which means go ally with all of the people you hate, I know, I know, I knoooooow (Nora laughs) it feels really dirty and it sucks. But this is the point that you're at. It is, it is sooooo detrimental, like this is going to be so detrimental to so many things. Like, what is the real reason for this happening? It's because when they do decide to privatize universities, when this, this tuition fee framework is over in two years, you will have no ability to fight back in any real way. That is the long term plan, OK? They don't want people who are going to be fighting back for good education policy or any other policy within the society of Canada OK? And so they are playing a long game and they are cutting you off at the knees right now, so if you want to be able to have the ability to fight for good education policy, for the generation that is coming behind you, or just for today (both laugh), you have to fight this with everything you've got and don't be timid and don't hang onto information if you have it.

Nora: That's right, that's right. I mean fuck, the model's out there. Just look what they did in Québec. Right? Those were three student organizations that well, two of them were buddies and one wasn't and they, I mean there's a lot of conditions that are different in Ontario for sure, I get that, but also guess what wasn't under attack in Québec? Like the fundamental right for students to self organize. You could do it.

Sandy: And there are so many people who will help you, there are so many people who will help you. If you contact some of those folks from Québec, they'll help you. Some of those folks from Québec are in Ontario rn, they'll help you. (Laughs.)

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: There are people who are around who have amazing organizing skills and have been doing organizing either on campus or off for years, who are in Ontario, and they'll help you. If you need help finding them, we will, we will help you find them.

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: We are some of them, we will help you.

Nora: Yeah.

Sandy: (Laughing.) We want you to win.

Nora: Yeah. Totally.

Sandy: So just do it, just do it, just do it.

Nora: Yeah, and if you're an average person, average student who's got, who's never really got any connection to your student association, you're at a college where your student association is a bunch of scabby fucks, um, just get in touch anyways. Who knows, you might be in a part of the province where there is like good organizing happening somewhere else right, we might be able to connect you with people, but the reality is is that this has to be centrally coordinated, but it also has to be done in lock step like with, with everybody on the ground. Students' unions need to have meetings with every executive member of every one of these groups, get everybody in a room, fucking pull the fire alarm, not for real, that does happen sometimes in student politics (laughs) don't, no one needs to pull the fire alarm for real. (Sandy laughs.) Um, and figure how you're going to build that, that, that campaign on campus. You know you might have a president who's willing to stick their neck out on this, like a lot of university presidents do have respect for autonomous student organizing. Figure out who those are, divide and conquer the fuck out of the university presidents. Occupy the Council the Universities office if you need to, ah, you know, tell Linda Franklin to fuckin stop selling out students in the college sector. She's with the Colleges Ontario. But these are all groups that, you know, if they have a conscience they will be able to either help you either publically or quietly. And if they don't have a conscience then you should be occupying their offices (laughs) and making their lives totally uncomfortable and hellish. God. I mean what the fuck?

Sandy: God! (Yelling.) What the fuck?!

Nora: It's so bad.

Sandy: Ugh. It's so bad. Ahhhhhh, is that, is that where we end?

Nora: I mean, I think that's, this, this is the worst thing. This is the absolute worst thing, this is literally the worst thing. (Both laugh.) That could happen in the college and university sector, yeah.

Sandy: Happy New Year everyone! (Laughs.) Happy New Year, welcome to the worst thing.

Nora: And happy organizing!

Sandy: And happy organizing! Win this one for us, we need it.

[Outro music.]