

New Model proposal demands close scrutiny by students

By GARY SYMONS

With all the fuss over the OFS referendum this year, no one seems to have paid much attention to CYSF President Reya Ali's slowly developing plan to completely restructure our student government. That's both strange and dangerous since, as some CYSF insiders will tell you (some at great length), the restructuring plan is arguably the most important event in the history of York student politics.

Right now, however, I have my doubts whether a majority of the CYSF General Council has even the most rudimentary understanding of

the plan and its ramifications for the future of student government at York.

Perhaps the major reason for the lack of understanding on this issue is its complexity; Ali's plan, if adopted, will result not only in a completely rewritten constitution and a change in the way CYSF is run, from elections to day to day operations, but also in a substantial shift in the powers and responsibilities of the different groups within the student government structure.

The initiative for the restructuring plan came from the painfully obvious observation that CYSF has for

years been an effective, underfunded and poorly representational body. In fact, CYSF is probably the weakest student government in Ontario. To give credit where it's due, this weakness does not stem from a lack of effort or ability on the part of our CYSF reps, but rather from inherent faults in the system itself. The most basic of these is that CYSF now represents only about 50 percent of the full-time student body, making it less than credible as a central student government, and it also has one of the lowest per capita operating grants of any institution in the province.

Another, more arguable point, is that the current system is inefficient, leading naturally to conflicts between the Executive and the General Council, sometimes unnecessarily delaying legislation.

The most substantial reform, and the one most needing a close review, will involve a restructuring of the CYSF hierarchy. In its present incarnation, CYSF is headed by an executive council consisting of the president and eight directors. Each of these directors oversees his own portfolio or area of responsibility and is involved in setting out policy. Below the Executive is the General Council, consisting of three representatives from each constituent student council, two reps from the Board of Governors, and the Chairperson of the Student Senate Council, through which the Executive must pass any policy they wish to adopt. In a sense, CYSF resembles closely Canada's federalist parliamentary system, with the General Council acting as a Parliament, and the Executive as a Cabinet.

If Ali's constitution is passed by the General Council, however, this pseudo-parliamentary system would be radically altered. First of all, the current Executive would be replaced by a council, which would be called a Board of Directors (BOD),

made up of the college and faculty council presidents. The current directors would still head their portfolios, assisted by standing committees, appointed from within the general council, but would not take part in policy-making, and might be appointed or elected at the discretion of the General Council. Essentially, the BOD would be the sole legislative body, taking over those powers from the General Council and the Executive, while the Executive would be relegated to the role of civil servants. Under the new model, the Executive would be responsible for carrying out the assigned responsibilities of their respective portfolios as outlined in the constitution.

The General Council would also play a new role. Rather than being directly involved in the legislative and policy making process, the council would act as a sort of Senate. Since most of the power in CYSF would now lay in the hands of the college presidents, opening up the possibility of abuses by a small minority, the General Council would be given the authority to review and even to veto legislation proposed by the BOD, and would thus act as a check to their power.

There are many more important changes contained in the new model constitution but the realignment of the governmental structure itself is by far the most fundamental. The big winners will of course be the college councils, which will hold far more power in CYSF, but at the same time the general student body will gain by the streamlining of CYSF's policy making process and by the increased funds available should the colleges rejoin.

There are, however, some problems with the new model as now constituted. The most serious of these is that, since the college councils, in practice if not in principle, primarily serve the interests of residence stu-

dents on campus, the commuter students that make up the majority will have no power base directly serving their interests. In fact, even the Executive, which is the only group within CYSF to be directly elected by the entire student body, can be appointed by the General Council which is made up of college council representatives.

To reduce at least in part the bias towards residence students, CYSF should make the Executive an elected body, and should also consider seriously the idea of somehow representing the commuter student directly on the Board of Directors, perhaps by creating positions that would be solely responsible for representing the commuter student on the BOD.

Despite some inevitable weaknesses, however, the new model will go a long way to solving the most serious drawbacks in our present system of student government.



Leanne MacMillan (back to camera) and 'No' campaigner rejoice upon hearing results of referendum.



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