

# editorial



## The recession is alive and well and living on the picket line

If the recession is dead — like Finance Minister Don Mazankowski tells us — its corpse is making an unbearable stench.

It must have died a violent death. Ontarians remain chilled by the spectre of jobless throngs, destitute families, mass layoffs and factory closings. And we're faced with the closest thing to a general strike we've seen in a recent memory.

Unionized workers — whether they're York University teaching assistants and part-time professors or TTC drivers, postal workers and government employees — are greeted with scornful silence from governments and employers.

The recession is dead, the recession is dead. That's what the rich and powerful chant repeatedly to each other, knowing they can make it come true for themselves.

But how do you kill a recession? If you're a manager (or a university president), you can't just shoot it full of prosperity. You'll have to make a human sacrifice first.

Businesspeople call it "restructuring" or "rationalization." Working people call it firing, shutting down offices, cutting back shifts, hiring part-timers instead of full-timers and slashing wage costs.

It's strong medicine. It makes things look good on paper, for those who rely on good-looking paper. For the people on the streets, it creates pure desperation.

Starve the staff to save the bottom line. Forget about quality of work and turn the place into a McDonald's. They're doing it at Canada Post, on Parliament Hill, in the subways and buses, and they're doing it here at York.

York is undergoing a "restructuring," replacing its expensive old workers with cheap, disposable new ones. If the budget is hurting, they can drop a few of these transient workers; or they can keep them, but hold back their wages.

Only in this case the workers are the people who teach your courses. Less and less of your teachers are full-time, tenured faculty; 45 percent of the teaching at York is now done by part-timers and TAs.

These people are at the bottom of the pecking order. Nearly half of them earn less than \$15,000 a year. Few of them have telephones or private offices.

But they're highly trained professionals with years of education. They're teaching real knowledge to real students in real classes. And their classes aren't small: Arts tutorials have up to 35 students in them; Science labs have up to 46. York has been devastated by the recession. The university, reeling under a costly load of expansions, was expecting a big boost of government funds and private investment just as the bottom fell out of the market.

And York, like so many corporations and governments, has decided to drive away the recession by cutting its own wrists. While the university has given reasonable pay and benefits to the dwindling full-time faculty, they're offering the part-timers and TAs a painful 5.8 percent — and that's 5.8 percent of a pretty meagre pay.

Even worse, the university wants to lock its low-cost teachers onto a dead-end treadmill by cutting their only escape route. If the administration gets its way, part-timers won't be able to become full-timers.

We can't kill a recession by starving ourselves. The recession will only be over when we're all working hard and earning decent pay. If the university wants a balanced budget, it'll have to look at the whole picture — employees have their own budgets to balance.

So if your profs and TAs start taking action, don't get angry. They're the ones who are really fighting the recession.

## excalibur

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