

The civic-minded rhetoric surrounding reform

By RANDALL TERADA

The White Paper is here and the student populace of York University should take note: Student Unity and Spirit are on the agenda today, or so it seems; but once we brush aside all the civic-minded rhetoric of this agenda it soon reveals the structural support of a whoopee cushion. If enough pressure is applied it may emit some very embarrassing noises and the first embarrassing noise has been emitted from the office of Harry Arthurs and his geisha girl, Jim Lane, who giggles with anticipation in his November 24 article, "Government 'Perestroika' and Osgoode." Not surprisingly, Lane makes some interesting and protracted points — and necessarily so since what succeeds flatulence comes about only with much more rigorous effort.

The characteristic imprint of Lane's article is that of an eager law student impatient to adopt the legalese to understand and fix any situation that he finds wanting.

Lane applauds the principal thrust of the President's reform as a "simple, more rational structure of student government." To this end he notes that the centralization of political power in the CYSF is a positive step toward ending the "intercine rivalries among student governments."

But is this really a fundamental change? Are the students' interests now to be better represented under President Arthurs' reforms? CYSF student administrators in the past have tended to be a faceless, nameless crew. Perhaps not ineffective — that would be too hasty a judgement considering that bureaucratic functions have to be overseen in any institution, but they definitely have been in large part disassociated from the general student body.

By this I don't mean that student politicians have been a snooty, stuck up bunch in general, but exactly the opposite — the student populous doesn't really seem to care that they

exist. But can students be blamed?

What is the necessary link between a university student's objective interests and his or her political representation on campus? Neither Arthurs, nor Lane, nor any of the usual laudatory remarks on the reforms have asked this question. In the present juncture, what is the student relationship to the university

"Not surprisingly, Lane makes some interesting and protracted points — and necessarily so since what succeeds flatulence comes about only with much more rigorous effort."

and what has become of the university's role in society? These larger questions must be asked and considered before deeming to speak on behalf of the student population, let alone structuring a "student" government that is responsive to their needs.

In his article Lane does not seek to examine the foundations, but merely rearranges the table setting, and confirms that the appearance of President Arthurs' reforms are acceptable, which is exactly what the White Paper deals with — appearances, an impressionistic feeling of what would better work, of what would better suit the students' needs. To this extent, what is the crux of Lane's argument? And what does he consider crucial in transforming York University from what he calls "the parking lot motif" to a more vibrant setting?

Lane states, "students and their elected representatives must be prepared to create a new attitude to accompany the realigned system." A new attitude! in the general course of debate a "new attitude" is not a forehead-slapping, original proposition.

The general student apathy concerning Arthurs' reforms and student elections in general will not be reversed by describing the necessity of a "new attitude." A new attitude is not as simple as the Coors beer commercial that espouses it. Ideas don't float around in the air, suddenly grasped because Lane considers it necessary. In Romper Room when the teacher wants them to think differently she gets them to put on their "thinking caps." Unfortunately life just isn't so easy.

But nobody has told Lane who holds that, by nature of their curriculum, those best positioned to hand out the thinking caps — like so much free cotton candy at a country fair — are the students at Osgoode Law School! They can teach by example, he implies.

Like the couple watching *Wheel of Fortune* and the husband suddenly pointing to Vanna White and saying, "Geez, why can't you be like that?" Lane posits Ogoode as the model, the perfect state of mind that can be exported for self-improvement.

"But consider for a moment the case of my faculty, Osgoode." He states, "Osgoode's successful experience with student involvement likely cannot be replicated by the other York colleges. We are unique among undergraduate faculties at York..." Yes, the law faculty is unique in a certain sense but not how Lane sees it. This uniqueness stems from the socio-economic tangent that law students ride immediately upon graduation, something which the majority of York students do not share.

Thus the uniqueness of the law faculty at Osgoode does not stem from any internal relationship they have inside York University, though Lane insists that it is precisely the homogeneity of having a shared experience of "surviving immersion in a vigorous academic programme" as if other students at York do not share a similar academic workload.

In the narrow sense Lane is right — nobody can deny that law students are a fairly homogenous group. But why they are unique among faculties at York has nothing to do with their academic workload but instead lies in their relationship outside the York University community.

Law students directly benefit from their strong empirical ties and practical experience in the working community, particularly in student-run legal aid clinics and articling. Their relationship to society and future employment opportunities is less opaque and more direct than many other students who graduate in the Arts and Social Sciences. Lane seems to overlook this factor which leads to many problematic assumptions when he perceives the attitude problem at York.

York is predominantly a social science university. Considering the current economic and political juncture we find ourselves in, the employment opportunities that exist for the number of anthropology,

"President Arthurs' reform package is inconsequential because of its inability to address the larger issues that really affect student life"

sociology, political science, psychology, communications, English, and philosophy students who graduate every year are extraordinarily thin.

Today the prevalent socio-economic factors are bound to provoke a certain anxiety in the student and these factors are also changing the role the university plays in society; this is why you don't see the Anthropology Students Association rolling around in the mud playing touch football in the middle of the afternoon. Lane thinks that by

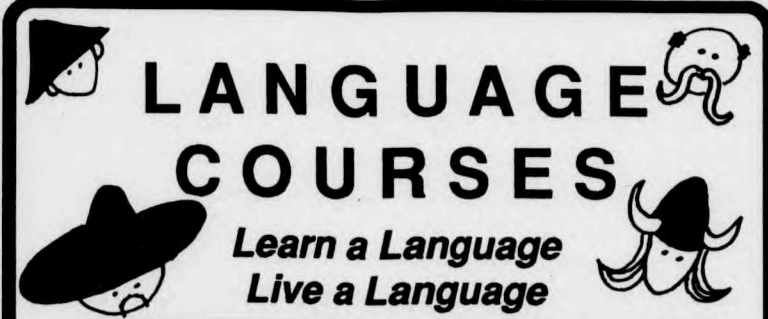
changing the structure of government, attitudes must follow suit. The majority of York students do not share his Richie Cunningham optimism.

York University does not exist in a vacuum. Students are bound to feel the effects of social dynamics which constrain their freedom of "attitude" and choice of occupation. In this regard Lane points out that a beneficial effect of the integration of Osgoode into the York community is the proposal of a Professional Students Association — for students studying "professional occupations," no doubt. His elitist paternalism as a cure for student alienation is clear, as he later states, "The new attitude we need must begin at the top." Attitude as trickle-down effect — no less a poignant example of Lane's supply-side egometrics.

Further on he states, "To achieve this, CYSF should ensure that meetings are conducted in a much more businesslike manner. Purely social interaction should take place elsewhere, perhaps through get-togethers at the end of meetings." This is silly. Lane sees the problem so transparently, figuring the mess York students find themselves in is purely of their own making, but nothing that a little anal-retentive camp counselling couldn't cure. "C'mon, guys, let's pull together — Malcolm, fix your tie!"

The rational kernel lodged within Lane is one of civic-minded simplicity, and if allowed to grow (when he graduates from Osgoode), we get one more lawyer and more legalese. His article is besmirched with a litany of empty, limp concepts like "greater interaction," "common goals," "shared experience," "common objectives," "sense of community," "quality of life," and, of course, "new attitude." Concepts not only found in Lane's article, but also in Royal Commission reports,

cont'd to p. 7



LANGUAGE COURSES

**Learn a Language
Live a Language**

Eurocentres

French, Italian, Spanish, German, English

Sorbonne

**One month Summer Courses and
Full Year Programmes**

Angers University (France)

Full Year Programmes

**For more information and a colour brochure
complete this coupon and mail to TRAVEL CUTS,
187 College Street,
Toronto, Ontario M5T 1P7**


Learn a Language, Live a Language...

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

The Travel Company of the Canadian Federation of Students
187 College Street, Toronto, (416) 979-2406
96 Gerrard St. E., Toronto (416) 977-0441


TRAVEL CUTS
Going Your Way!

Why wait? College starts in January at The City College

Why wait until September to start your college education when you can enrol now for full-time programs starting in January.

At George Brown College many of our winter programs run through the summer so you can graduate up to a year earlier. Or enrol in one of our many certificate programs that can prepare you for a new career in just a few weeks.

Our January diploma programs include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nursing Data Processing Accounting Office Administration Computer Aided Drafting/Design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Arts and Science Marketing Business Computer Programming
---	---

Or start a new career in less than a year with one of the following certificate programs:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refrigeration/Air Conditioning Pre-Health Science Food Preparation Food Service and Bartending Retail Meat Cutting Offset Printing Masonry Furniture Woodworking Women into Trades and Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Microcomputer Operator Chef Training Baking Techniques Bartending Hotel Front Office Ontario Basic Skills Vocational Orientation
---	--

At our four downtown campuses, we offer the programs, facilities and job placement centres to help you get the job you want.

Call now for information on your future at George Brown College. Don't delay, classes start in January.

For more information call (416) 947-9914.
For callers outside the 416 area call toll free 1-800-263-8995.

