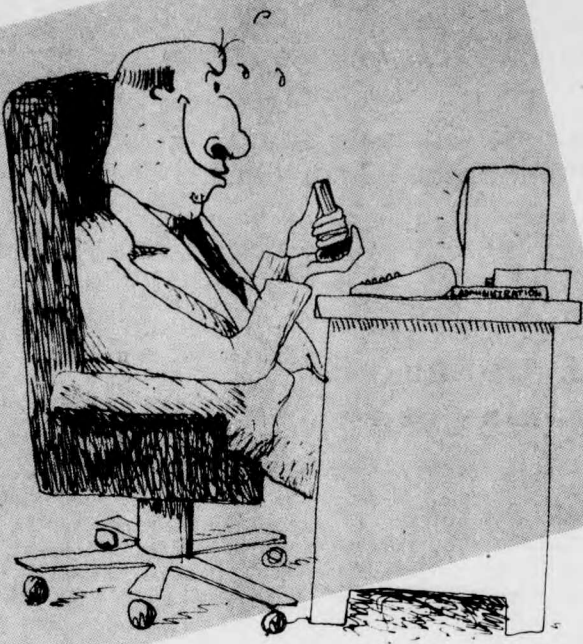


opinion



BY CAROL BRUNT

AUTOMATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL expansion of offices and of a secretary's life has begun. In fact it began quite a while ago as, in all its horrors, it was outlined by Heather Menzies in **Women and the Chip**. However, it has finally arrived in a determinable amount at York University.

The strike by the university's staff association (YUSA) in the fall challenged the entire question of automation: its implementation and the protection for existing workers. It seemed, at the conclusion of the strike, that the union had made real gains and had earned itself some measure of protection with the university administration's proposal for a Staff Training Center. As stipulated in the contract, a six-member committee consisting of three union and three administration representatives, would attempt to define the worker education program. Concurrently the union is attempting to determine its level of participation in bringing new office technology into the university.

"Maybe management only wants to train the staff to use the machines. If this is true, the union has already lost the battle," said Ann Zelechow, YUSA member and representative on the Training Center Committee. Technology can be used to train workers right out of their jobs and it is protection from this that the union is seeking. There is no doubt in Zelechow's mind that the center will exist whether YUSA goes along with the method of implementation or not. The point that arises is, can the training meet not only the university's needs but also those of the workers.

Computer terminals appear not only on the desks of the administration secretaries, but also on nearly all the desks of secretaries in the Faculty of Arts. "There has been no effort to train them but there has been a concerted effort to provide every secretary in Arts with a computer," said Zelechow.

There is no doubt that present efforts to train staff have been negligent. Resource persons, one from each department, were given a two-day

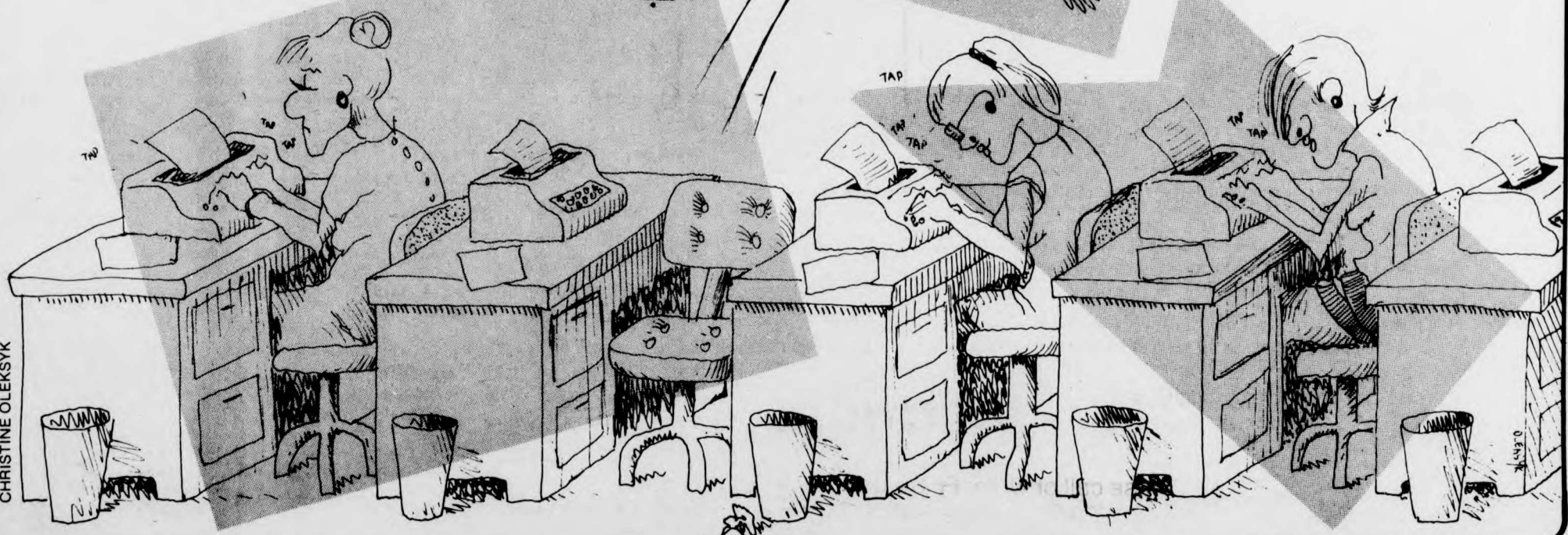
When the micro-chips are down ... what's the future of the workers?

training session mostly in lecture format in which the basic functions of the computer were introduced. The workers then had to relate this knowledge to their present working positions. Some hands-on demonstrations were included. Returning to the departments, these workers were responsible for answering the questions of other departmental staff who had received equipment. According to one staff member, she did not learn a lot from the presentation and she found it difficult to assimilate, even though she'd had previous exposure to micro computers. The other staff members later received a three-hour briefing session. This led to initial frustration due to unfamiliarity

Volume of work has increased because the computers can handle a wider range of work than what could be done manually. A vast increase of both worker productivity and efficiency is expected. Technology can also be used to increase services, and enhance jobs. The union is concerned about the problem of implementation: redundancy of their positions eventually leading to staff layoffs, routinization and devaluation of jobs. Zelechow hopes the university has enough "intelligence" to realize they can only push the staff so far before the situation backfires. "After all, the university can't have an inefficient, disgruntled staff because public relations counts for a lot."

It is about time that the administration realized that it depends on its employees for its continued existence, and that dissatisfied workers can be a very nasty bunch. This was proven repeatedly at the onset of the 1984-85 school year with the strikes and near-strikes by university employees.

It is hoped that the administration's proposed center was not idle talk and that they seriously intend to take into consideration the points to be raised by the staff's representatives and seriously consider the future of their employees. The aim is to reach a consensus on the part of both the union and the administration in the face of a change that will fundamentally alter methods of work.



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