

# Another side to Sunday shopping

Most media observers celebrated Bob Rae's decision this month to allow stores to open on Sunday, but for a large group of workers the event was a serious letdown. Here, an Atkinson college student who manages a large department store explains how Sunday shopping can hurt many employees, especially women. Her name has been withheld so she can keep her job.

While most of us may agree with Sunday shopping on the basis of our freedom to choose, the consideration of the Sunday worker falls by the wayside. That it is named 'Sunday shopping' and not 'Sunday working' is indicative of the media's failure to fairly represent everyone involved in the issue.

A Toronto *Star* opinion poll, held shortly before the Ontario government's decision, inquired as to "Who would like to shop Sunday?" (67 per cent) and not "Who would like to work Sunday?" The Toronto *Star's* perpetuation of Sunday shopping myths and its biased support on this issue leads me to believe that not only does Bob Peter sign my paycheque but also signs the Toronto *Star's* (Oh, the power of advertising!)

My concern is with large corporations who are manipulating local businesspeople, tourist merchants and retail workers in order to gain a bigger and better bottom line. (How is it that

Europeans close up for a nap daily, close Sunday and still can compete in the world market?)

I am a non-union retail worker who is continually told by my employer that I am not to talk to the media. And what is it that I risk saying?

•Sunday shopping does not mean more jobs. As a manager of one of Canada's largest retailers I was instructed to only rearrange existing shifts to cover Sunday and our six-day payroll to cover seven days. If you thought it was hard to find a sales clerk during the six-day week, look again—she is now stretched to seven.

•Sunday shopping does not provide job security. In fact, Sunday availability has become a factor in promotability. Our company is currently restructuring itself to accommodate fewer full-time employees. This also means less corporate revenue into the public Canada Pension Plan and health insurance programs—which affect us all.

•Sunday shopping is not a religious issue centering upon 'rights.' It is a change in our public and family life. Who will pick up the tab for Sunday child care? Senior executives and their spouses will be at the cottage on Sunday while grandmothers and mothers (sales clerks are mainly women) will be at the checkouts. Their children will join the great host of latchkey children who already exist Monday to Friday. (That our company was willing to open on Mother's day disturbed me most).

•Sunday shopping does not prevent cross-border shopping for large retailers. Lower prices and better cus-

tomers service south of the border do. Retailers who are willing to forego over-inflated gross profits and more executive limousines will provide more competitive prices.

•Sunday shopping is Sunday working. The freedom to work or not work

does not exist in large retail stores as it does for the family-run business or tourist shop. Let the small businesses do as they wish, but applying that freedom to large corporations involves the exploitation and manipulation of many individuals who are not involved in this decision-making process.

•In the name of 'rights' the media continues to silence not only the Sunday worker but feminists who are also

concerned about Sunday shopping as a 'rights' issue. The issue of Sunday shopping is an issue of women against large corporations. The exploitation of women workers exists here in Canada as much as it does in any South American offshore production centre. This is a struggle of women who will be forced to work, whose jobs and promotability depend on Sunday availability.

## Two feminist authors who lash back

by Tina Novotny

Women on North American campuses are more concerned with the calorie count on their plate than what their university is doing about affirmative action, Naomi Wolf says.

"Women are more concerned with running around the track instead of asking where the female profs are or why they can't walk home safely at night," says Wolf, author of *The Beauty Myth*. Wolf says this is the result of a society-wide backlash to keep feminism in check.

Wolf is one half of the duo of new feminist writers who appeared at the Winter Garden theatre in Toronto last month. She was joined by Susan Faludi,



whose controversial work *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against Women* has garnered both praise and paranoia in the media it takes to task.

Both writers believe there are very real "backlashings" at work in society, attacking women's peace of mind and job security, even the physical health of their bodies.

Wolf's statistics are profoundly disturbing: 20 to 50 per cent of North American women under 30 have some form of eating disorder. Every year, 150,000 women die of anorexia.

Wolf accuses the male-dominated business world of distorting the female image to profit from women's shame. She says the advertising industry even doctors models' photographs, elongating body parts with something called a "cytex" machine to create an inhuman ideal women can never attain.

Witness the 33 billion dollar diet industry, the 20 billion dollar cosmetics industry or the huge growth in cosmetic surgery.

"They take something female, call it gross, and create an industry" says Wolf.

But if the misogynist world of beauty is Wolf's specialty, it's the media that's been found out by Faludi.

Her book *Backlash* has become a target for dismissive anti-feminist commentary by the media ("A whiner's

bible," one erudite reviewer called it. "At least he called it a bible," countered Faludi). It's also become a renewed call to join the feminist ranks: only 16 per cent of young women call themselves 'feminist' today.

Faludi's research shows how the press became a propaganda machine for societal forces seeking to diminish women's gain, creating the "ugly feminist" stereotype to discredit the movement. Since the controversy over her findings started, 'lifestyle' journalists have asked Faludi "What's the hot trend now?", since we've 'done' the backlash against feminism.

"It doesn't work like hemlines," says Faludi. In fact, both Wolf and Faludi call themselves "third wave" feminists, after the first waves of suffragettes and the second of 70s liberationists. "We're starting at day zero," they say.

"Post-feminism was a term coined in 1919," says Wolf. "We have to re-invent feminism like we talk about re-inventing democracy."

These days women are up against a greater counter-assault than ever before. Faludi points out how affirmative action is faltering because organizations say they have "enough" women.

"There are more women in poverty and more women on the streets," she says. And because of years of cuts by the conservative Reagan and Bush administrations, there are "more battered women with fewer places to turn."

Through insidious media distortion, women have even been blamed for the rise in violence against themselves. Faludi offered some choice examples.

A *San Francisco Chronicle* headline: "Sexy clothes attract rapists." The television newsmagazine show *20/20* entitles an article on campus date rape, "The changing art of seduction in the 90s."

One of the most frightening angles Faludi saw was in the very paper she used to work for. The *Wall Street Journal* headlined a story "Welfare mothers led to L.A. Riots." Faludi says it's part of an underhanded drive by the Bush administration to cut support to single mothers by 25 per cent. As Wolf says of her beauty myth theory: "Obedience is beautiful now."

Both Wolf and Faludi promote and provoke disobedient discourse, acting as perfect foils for each other in their lecturing styles. To take questions from the floor, Wolf commanded, "Let's turn up the houselights so we can see our friends."

Added Faludi: "And our enemies."

Tina Novotny is the station manager of CHRYFM (105.5), York's community radio station.



## Why did President Arthurs whitewash the campus press?

by Phil Downes

The nomination of Dr. Susan Mann as the successor to President Harry Arthurs was surely one of the more stunning public events in this and many other years at York.

For many, used to the predictability often produced by an institution of York's nature, her appointment has been cause for a refreshing and optimistic take on the administrative future of the University. Arthurs can take a certain pride in the fact that he has been president in a period that has resulted in such a progressive appointment.

It is therefore of some concern that the very medium that endorsed the successful candidate has been subsequently held out for some excessive vilification from two specific quarters. In response to the article by Doug Saunders ("Stephen Fienberg's Corporate York," April 1), Arthurs' office took the unusual step of literally

plastering the campus with a "Statement...concerning false allegations of involvement of York University and of Vice President Fienberg in Star Wars research."

Notwithstanding the fact that *Excalibur* was not scheduled to appear again that term, the sense that this office had utilized its considerable resource, rather than the more conventional means of responding to a newspaper article, to present its view, was somewhat unsettling.

That the response read in many ways more like a dubious apology for a less than transparent state of affairs, than a genuine attempt to address the issues raised (not to mention the very "non-presidential" tone of the statement), only reflected a sense of panic on the part of the senior administration. The statement's appeal to "fair-minded people" promising to reveal "the facts...in order [for them] to make an informed judgment" sounded suspiciously

like an appeal to "common sense" designed precisely to contain any critical reaction on the part of the York community less inclined towards the openly stated oppositional nature of last year's *Excalibur*.

But there is another and, in my opinion more disturbing forum in which the *Excalibur* article has been attacked. Those members of the community that offered written comments to the search committee in response to the public forums with the three candidates were sent a letter of thanks from the committee. The letter includes a reference to the *Excalibur* article as "reprehensible and riddled with inaccuracies and malicious innuendo...We hope as a responsible member of the York community, you will let your views known on this type of behavior." I am doing so. I find the inclusion of such an appeal in a letter of this nature not only insulting and inappropriate, but paternalistic and dismissive.

Again a position of authority seems to offer an excuse not to address the article via the media itself, but through the use of a privileged resource.

Perhaps these responses indicate that *Excalibur* is indeed taken more seriously than one might think, but if there is to be a serious commitment to student-administration relations at York, I believe it is vital that the campus media be respected for what they are, and what they claim to be. *Excalibur* is not the *Globe and Mail* and (thankfully) it has not (at least last year) claimed to be. It is a medium that has committed itself to providing news alongside a rigorous examination of systems and operations of power at York. Saunders' article may well have contained a certain overzealous polemic against Stephen Fienberg, but it also contained a great deal of well-researched and accurate information which, it seems, has been ignored in the interest of protecting the public

face of someone who sought the most senior position at this University.

That candidates affiliated with other Universities refused to allow their names to stand says more about their confidence in their own integrity than the potential for abuse of process. No-one will ever know exactly what influence the *Excalibur* article had on the decision of the selection committee; if it was none, then why the fuss about the article in the committee's letter?

I think that the committee is to be congratulated on making a progressive and responsive choice in Susan Mann; I also believe that York deserves more than the arrogant dismissal of campus journalism that they and the president have demonstrated in this case.

Phil Downes is a graduate student in York's faculty of arts.