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Background:

York faculty seeks union status

By MAXINE KOPEL

York will soon have its name in campus lights as it creates university history. Some faculty members have taken one small step that has turned into quite a leap for their fellow faculty members: the faculty is in the process of becoming a union.

A unionized faculty will be protected under the Ontario Labor Relations Act.

In April, 1975, a general Faculty meeting voted 12 to one in favour of collective bargaining, a procedure that is intended to provide "high quality education for York students, as well as adequate compensation and opportunity for its faculty," according to the September YUFA newsletter.

The faculty is allowed six months to collect its signatures. Therefore, by voting in April, YUFA chairman Jack Granatstein and his associates were given the summer months to organize the project, and the following school months to complete step number one.

To become a union, 55 per cent of the faculty must sign an application for membership and, abiding by the Labour Relations Board, must contribute \$1. (One theory concerning the reason for the \$1 per signature policy is that it shows interest on the part of the singer.) Signatures began to be collected on October 16, and by the end of the day 50 per cent of Atkinson faculty members had signed. If the signing procedure continues as anticipated, it will be completed during November.

Once this step is accomplished, YUFA must go to the Labour Relations Board and bargain over a contract which has to be approved by the faculty. According to vice-president Bill Farr, the university will not attempt to block certification. The university administration is neutral and regards YUFA with goodwill, says Farr. Anyhow, York has no legal authority to

After it becomes a union, the faculty will express, among other things, its right to a good grievance procedure, enabling itself to withdraw from "York's shoddy process for dealing with grievors" (as the September YUFA newsletter refers to the way such concerns as tenure and promotion are dealt with).

One of the purposes of a unionized organization is hopefully to insure greater educational benefits, including more money for research. Granatstein said that "we are being scandalously underfunded now."

Many faculties and departments suffer from insufficient secretarial support, and the library has suffered a decrease in its budget for acquisition as well as a decrease in professional librarians. Travel money to send instructors to conferences is decreasing.

Health and dental care would also be assisted by the formation of a union. Certain expenditures such as these should not be greatly affected by educational cutbacks.

Of course, the question of a raise in salary versus government wage controls is an impending one. The key issue that prompted YUFA to begin unionization, says Granatstein. was president Macdonald's refusal to negotiate salaries last year. Toronto is on the top of the cost of living scale for the continent, while the York faculty is on the bottom of the salary range for the province.

Granatstein states that according to his legal consultants, universities have not been included in the newly proposed 10 per cent ceiling on wage increases. (This may not be permanent, of course, as the guidelines may include universities eventually.)

This piece of information appears to be unknown to many people, including Farr. "If wages are behind YUFA's push for unionization," says Farr, "the catch up will be modest, if at all."

current financial The situation at York has diminished raises in wages, and appears to have limited teaching positions as well. Teachers are let go with no one replacing them; approximately 35 professors are currently on leaves of absence, yet only onethird have been replaced.

Another important factor is whether a teacher about to be let go has the right to present evidence and arguments in favour of a positive judgement. Is it fair for a teacher to be considered for firing without prior notification? Is it right for a teacher to be discredited without ever being observed and evaluated in class? These questions, among others, are being asked by the faculty as it moves closer to unionization.

Vice-president Farr foresees changes once faculty unionization becomes a reality, but whether these changes are for better or for worse depends on the administration and the faculty. However, he considers things to be better now than in the past.

Farr recalls one particular incident in the spring of 1970 when the faculty withheld grades in return for higher wages.

Granatstein does not think unionization will have an impact on the academic side of life, and will instead deliver legal rights to the unionized receivers. He also feels it will make the atmosphere more placid, since everyone will know where he or she stands.

Are all faculty members taking part in this historic step at York? No, not quite. Some psychology, law, and senior science professors are against it. This may be due to the fact that a union would be looked upon as upsetting a traditional pattern. Perhaps the individual professors against the act don't like the individual professors for the act. There may be any number of reasons.



More food regulations

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