

YFS staff battles management in first talks

Student office workers win contract

by Christine F. de Leon

While it seems like everyone else is on or preparing to strike, members of York University's smallest union are celebrating their first collective agreement. But by most accounts the negotiations weren't easy.

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local 1281 — which represents the five office employees of the York Federation of Students — began organizing in December and finally arrived at a collective agreement in August.

The YFS management consists of the president and four vice-presidents. Union members include the receptionist, the communications coordinator, the health plan administrator, the business manager and the handbook editor.

The difficulties came as a surprise to the YFS employees. The 1990-91 YFS executive rallied around politically progressive issues and often expressed pro-labour views.

According to Health Plan Administrator David Taylor, who participated in the negotiations, the executive seemed to neglect fair treatment of their own employees.

"As far as last year's executive goes, they were pro-union when we formed, but at the negotiating stage there was a big difference between their vision of a union and our vision," Taylor said.

According to Taylor, former YFS President Jean Ghomeshi was a major stumbling block in the process.

"I am disappointed with Jean Ghomeshi. I don't think he's aware that there is a distinction between his ideologies and application of such."

But Ghomeshi claimed the decisions were made without much disagreement. He also added that relations between staff and executive are better this year due to a larger budget.

"I am pleased the staff unionized and I would say we were working under different financial circumstances."

Most of the disagreements between the executive and the employees centred around basic benefits and salaries.

The receptionist's salary was a contentious item. The union requested \$12 per hour; the executive offered \$7.50. A compromise was reached at \$9 per hour.

Also, according to Taylor, the executive only wanted full-time staff to unionize. The employees successfully argued that the receptionist, who worked part-time, deserved to be included in the agreement.

Taylor said YFS workplace conditions

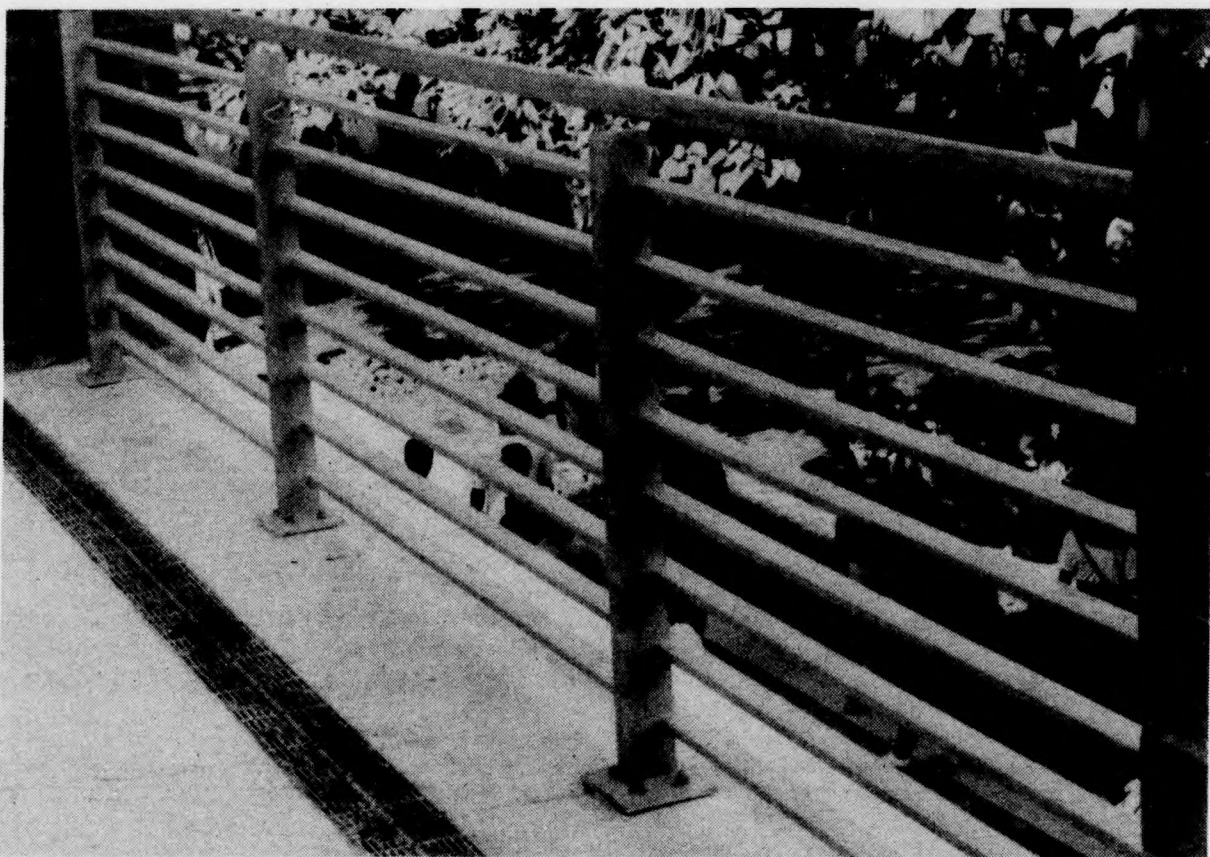
have improved since last year.

"There were no benefits at first and the staff was underpaid," says Taylor. "We had to compromise on a few things, but it is going well with the new local and there is a good relationship with this year's executive."

Brian Robinson, chief steward of CUPE 1281, says the YFS local ended up with a reasonable agreement.

"We eventually arrived at a collective agreement with some friction, but of all the [agreements] I know of, the employees of the YFS are provided with good working conditions, better than the [student government at] University of Toronto."

"I wouldn't want to go through it again and I'm happy the new executive is in," said Taylor. "Things are going well with the new local and there is a good relationship with this year's executive"



Alok Sharma

Clients of the Student Centre childcare facilities were told by staff that they could not make use of the rooftop playground.

One irate client, who declined to give his name, described Student Centre Manager Rob Castle as a "poo-poo head."

Student Centre hazardous to children

by Mark Woo and Doug Saundor

Children at York will be told to stay indoors this fall.

The newly opened Student Centre childcare facilities will be undergoing approximately \$28,000 worth of renovations on an outdoor recreation area upon failing a child safety inspection.

The recreation area is located on a second floor balcony of the Student Centre. The rails on the balcony are oriented horizontally, allowing children to climb up and plunge into the courtyard below. The balcony also features an approximately 12-metre long concrete staircase which has no protective gate.

"There's lots of things for the kids to bash their heads on," said Betty, a childcare worker.

According to Rob Castle, manager of the Student Centre, the hazards were the result of oversights made by the Centre's architects.

Lee Wiggins, chair of the childcare facility, said the balcony and staircase were originally designed as a fire escape.

The facility was added to the Student Centre plans after it was requested by the Canadian Union of Education Workers (CUEW), which represents teaching assistants and part-time faculty. It offers low cost daycare and parent-child drop-in services to students and CUEW members.

Wiggins said the outdoor area will

not open until the railing is covered with a plexiglass wall and a gate is installed on the stairs.

"It has to be made so it's not climbable for children," she explained.

Although 80 per cent of the renovation cost will be covered by a grant from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the difference will come out of the Student Centre's budget, funded by students, Castle said.

The Student Centre expects to shell

out about \$5400 for the renovations, Castle added.

When asked whether the Student Centre Corporation will seek compensation from the designers for their errors, Castle said it wouldn't be worth the effort. He also said he wanted to maintain good relations with the architects.

Philip Beasley, chief architect for the Student Centre project, said he could not comment on the matter.

U of T gets expanded African Studies program

Toronto (CUP)

A new program at the University of Toronto will address "wrong, skewed and negative" perceptions about African culture, says the head of African studies.

The university is offering an introductory course on African studies, featuring the works of African scholars and writers rarely taught in Western universities, including Walter Rodney and Cheikh Anta Diop.

"Africa has been largely written about by people other than Africans," said Bernard Moitt, coordinator of the new course and head of the African studies program.

Moitt said he hopes the new course will work to combat racism at the undergraduate level.

"The information these students have (about African culture) is usually wrong, skewed and negative, and that lends itself to racism," he said.

The new course will be taught by a team of instructors, four of whom are Black. This will help make Black first-year students more comfortable at the university, he added.

"One major problem for Blacks in the school system is that there are no Black role models."

But Moitt said the addition of the course is not a commitment from the university to diversify the curriculum.

"You can't take one course as an indicator of major change. You would have to see more specific action in different areas of the university first."

The fact that the university faculty does not reflect the diversity of the campus community or Toronto shows little has changed, he added.

Provost Joan Foley said the money for the course — which cost \$7500 — came from a one-time university special projects fund.

"As yet, I don't know if there will be such a fund in the next budget, but obviously the response was so good, we'll have to consider it."

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Black Caucus will have its first meeting Thursday, September 19th. Or come in and speak to Jeannine.

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