

White Paper

Student Government Response

Government "Perestroika" and Osgoode

By JIM LANE
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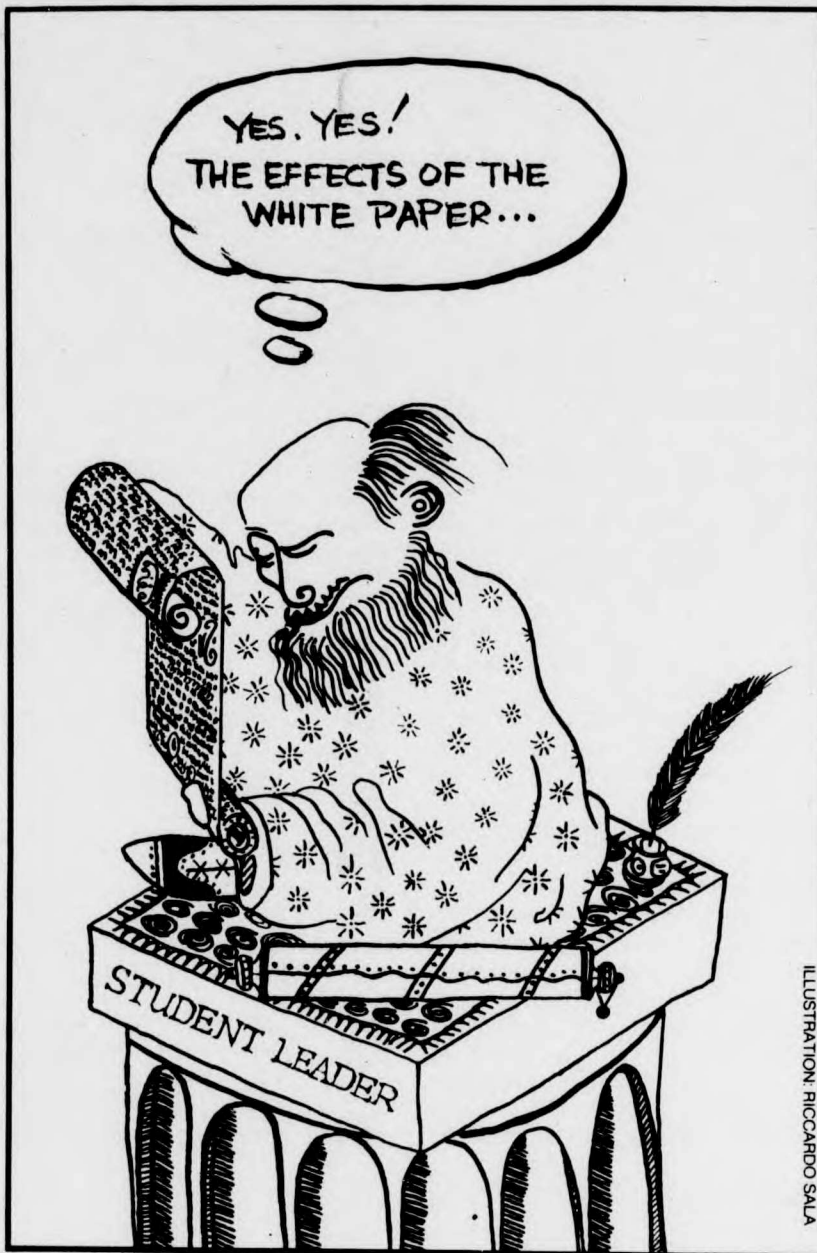
It is my understanding that from the time York University was established, student government has not enjoyed a good reputation. Since my arrival here in 1986, York student government could be compared in terms of popularity, to the Alabama Alliance for Socialism, or the United Save the Lawyers Fund. However, recent developments hold promise for substantial improvement. In particular, President Arthur's White Paper removes many structural barriers to more effective student government at York.

Without becoming bogged down in the detail of the President's reform proposal, I would suggest that the principal thrust of the document is to create a simpler, more rational structure of student government. Towards this end, he has succeeded, where internecine rivalry among student governments has barred student initiated "perestroika" in the past. All faculties and colleges are now to be represented by a central student government, and those faculties that presently have no student government are provided with a clear framework for establishing one.

The manner of funding of such groups is now more consistent, and the way has been paved for students to assume control over the collection of revenues by direct levy. The result is a new opportunity for student organizations to work together more effectively towards the attainment of a closer University community and other common goals.

I emphasize, however, that the removal of structural barriers alone will not assure such progress; students and their elected representatives must be prepared to create a new attitude to accompany the realigned system. College and faculty reps should be aware that they cannot improve the calibre of student activity within their own constituency without improving the quality of student life on the campus as a whole. Student reps must set as their top priority, increased cooperation with other faculties and colleges. York students for their part should vote for reps who they believe will do so.

York students should also divest themselves of the myth that this University is condemned to be a social black-hole, by virtue of the number



of commuter students. True, the landscape architecture of this campus is based on a parking lot motif, but consider for a moment the case of my faculty, Osgoode. We are only a 1000 students, not an insignificant portion of which commute.

However, despite our small numbers, we have over 50 active clubs and committees, including a half dozen regular student publications (half of which circulate nationally or internationally) and two large, full-time legal aid clinics in the city. (Yes we do more than just play touch football.) At the same time, however, Osgoode is seeking greater involvement with other student

bodies on campus. Already this year, we have joined CYSF as an associate member, and proposed the establishment of a Professional Students Association.

Osgoode's successful experience with student involvement likely cannot be replicated by the other York colleges. We are unique among undergraduate faculties at York in that all our classes and functions take place within one building. As well, the shared experience of surviving immersion in a vigorous academic programme results in a stronger sense of community. I believe, though, that the college and faculty governments can help dram-

atically improve the quality of life on campus by cooperating more effectively within CYSF. The colleges serve a vital purpose by providing a smaller community with which York students can identify. They provide a disservice to their constituents, however, when they permit domestic concerns to outweigh the need to promote common objectives such as the new Student Centre.

Some college and faculty student leaders have already recognized the benefits of greater interaction, and in fairness, Osgoode has been slow to come to this same realization. Many others, however, fail to appreciate that greater cooperation is the key to increased credibility of student government at York.

The new attitude we need must begin at the top. To earn the respect necessary for effective government. Student reps must take their jobs more seriously. The lack of commitment of individual representatives is indicated by the poor attendance I have witnessed at CYSF meetings. Perhaps *Excalibur* could do the York community a service by publishing quarterly records of individual attendance at such meetings.

The CYSF Executive must also accept a share of the blame, College and Faculty reps might be more willing to attend if they believed that CYSF meetings were an effective use of their time. To achieve this, CYSF should ensure that meetings are conducted in a much more business-like manner. Purely social interaction should take place elsewhere, perhaps through get-togethers at the end of meetings. No one else is going to take CYSF seriously if we don't take ourselves more seriously.

In short, the President's White Paper is the beginning, not the end of the student government reform process. It is a promising document, but it will not bring meaningful improvements to life at York if current attitudes persist. To make the most of this opportunity, student reps must demonstrate greater cooperation and seriousness about their jobs, and York students must elect and support representatives who will do so. Those who fail to participate in such a way will have only themselves to blame if York University fails to become the more vibrant community it now has the potential to be.

The reform's significance to Grad students

By LEE WIGGINS
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I have been involved in student politics at York for a number of years, with what appears to be ever increasing intensity. I have therefore witnessed the Graduate Students' Association's (GSA) withdrawal from the Council of the York Student Federation (CYSF), its period of internal adjustments and now, finally, its transformation into a central student government here at York with close and congenial ties to CYSF and other student governments.

In some senses, it appears that President Arthur's White Paper and its predecessors do not affect the GSA to the same degree as undergraduate student governments. Certainly, individual specifications contained in the President's student government reform (such as the Dean's and Master's fund) do not have such obvious and immediate ramifications on graduate students as they do on undergrads.

However, as an entirety, particularly as a symbol for changes in the relationships between student gov-

ernments with the administration and between themselves, the White Paper is of critical importance to the GSA and to graduate students, as it is to all students here at York.

It has encouraged (along with the Student Centre project), an end to the often parochial, confrontational and adversarial (what I refer to as "the sand-box mentality") politics which functioned to divide student governments and students themselves, and which frequently resulted in an issue-by-issue approach to the world.

First and foremost, the passing of the White Paper (or some version of) will formally recognize the GSA as one of two central student governments at York. While this has already taken place in practice, the President's statement that there will be two central student governments here at York, and the passing of that ruling by the Board of Governors will formally recognize the independence of the GSA. This repres-

ents a major victory for the GSA, and a validation of the struggles of some years ago to win autonomy from CYSF and to pursue distinct graduate needs, interests and concerns. I can only hope that Terry Conlin (GSA President from 1983 to 1986) and other Executive and GSA members who fought so hard for this are pleased with the results of their groundwork and vision.

The White Paper leaves us with considerable work ahead, but it allows us a role in defining ourselves and our relationships with each other and with the administration. In particular, it charges both the GSA and CYSF with the responsibility of working together, in conjunction with all other student governments, to represent student at York, to advance their concerns and interests and to achieve changes deemed necessary by those members.

I, like the other heads of student governments, still have concerns with the President's Reform Paper.

In particular, I am not yet certain of the form and content of the final document — whether the White Paper itself represents an almost final draft (in which case I would express concerns that it is incomplete and needs to be amalgamated with material from earlier drafts) or if we will see a synthesized paper containing all necessary and relevant material, including the President's responses to the Consensus Student Governments Letter.

However, I am confident that these concerns can be articulated and received in a positive and productive manner. Again, the specifics in this case are, at least for me, outweighed by the development of a cooperative, proactive and creative model of student government here at York and the related support of the administration to that new model.

With that in mind, I would like to thank all those who have worked in such a committed and diligent fashion for this change.

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