

# Heated free speech debate draws considerable crowd

by Moira MacDonald

**T**he issue of free vs. responsible speech on university campuses dominated a well-attended debate on "political correctness" held by the York Federation of Students last February 12 in the Curtis lecture halls.

Judy Rebeck, president of the Na-

tional Action Committee on the Status of Women and Alan Borovoy, General Counsel of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association held their very civil debate before an audience of about 150 students.

Rebeck said she does not believe a "politically correct" movement has ever existed and that "it is a phantom created by the right in the United States." Rebeck later mentioned that the term "politically correct" has been

used as an ironic put-down by leftists since the 1960s.

Rebeck warned her audience that "it is important that we don't adopt their [the right's] language" and that rather than being about free speech, political correctness is "a debate about equality."

"If we didn't have freedom of speech there wouldn't be a women's movement in Canada," Rebeck observed, but added that freedom of speech "is not an absolute" and that it could be used to further disempower already oppressed groups such as women and visible minorities. She cited the case of Philippe Rushton at the University of Western Ontario, whose research on biological causes for racial inequalities has created "a poisonous atmosphere for minorities on that campus."

Alan Borovoy said he agreed with Rebeck's "description of the criticism of the politically correct movement as an example in hypocrisy," but added that he was concerned about "the growing attempt by universities to determine what constitutes correct speech."

"She [Rebeck] and I will both agree with each other that racism, sexism and homophobia must be fought, but muzzling speech at universities is a hell of a way of engaging in that fight," said Borovoy.

Borovoy supported his argument by citing cases, including one at York, in which he felt unfair sexual and racial harassment policies were used against an individual's right to free speech. He also spoke out against hate literature laws which he said have been used to harass "not only Nazis but anti-American protesters, Quebec nationalists... and even a film sympathetic to Nelson Mandela because [customs officials said that] it promoted hatred against White South Africans."

Many of the audience's questions and comments focused on a recent



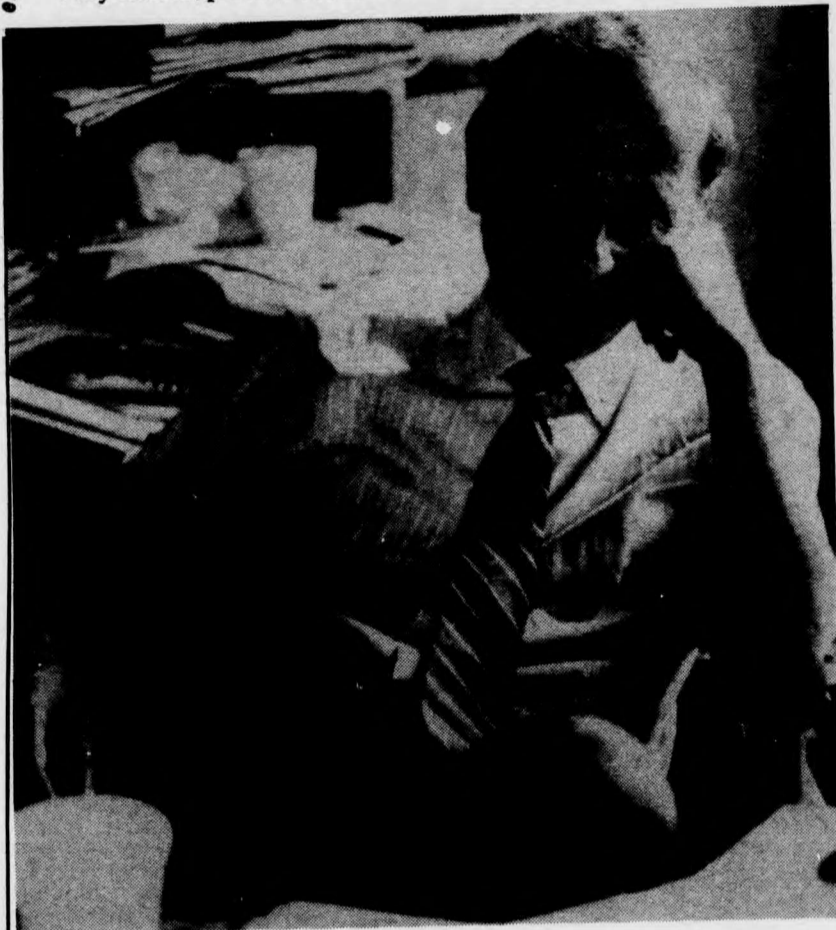
Judy Rebeck (above), President of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Her opponent, A. Alan Borovoy, General Council of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association.

case at the *Obiter Dicta*, the Osgoode Hall Law School student newspaper, in which the paper's editors were fired after printing a letter which alleged that the school's admission standards had been lowered for Black students.

One Osgoode student spoke against the firing and said that one of

the editors had since been called "racist" and that "that's a form of silencing."

But another Osgoode student opposed the printing of the letter, saying that the opinions expressed in the letter made Black law students feel "disempowered in class...they don't want to be in school anymore."



## WOMEN'S SUPPLEMENT

Excalibur will be accepting submissions for the upcoming

women's supplement until Friday February 28.

If you have short stories or poetry

call Maggie or Cindy at 736-5239.

If you have a creative streak flaunt it in the paper.

**excalibur** 420 Student Centre  
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## Black History Month

To those interested: over 22,000 copies of the Black History Month issue have been distributed all over Toronto, Scarborough, Mississauga and North York. The feedback has been very positive.

**Too black guys** said people from all over have come in saying they read about the store in the newspaper. A man walked into **Nappy's** and didn't want a haircut...he only wanted a paper. CIUT FM did a 45 minute radio program devoted to the issue.

Teachers and community centre coordinators from Scarborough, North York and Regent Park are actively using the paper in programs with their students.

So, thanks again to everyone who contributed work, helped with production and distributed the paper.

peace,  
Jeannine

Black Caucus meeting this Thursday at 3pm to discuss the future of the Caucus.

All Welcome

Need a ride?  
Can u give a ride?  
Check out the new ride board outside the offices of the yfs 336 student centre

york federation of students