

Morale and Power: the condition of York Security

The departure of Director Michael O'Neil brought to light many of the problems that the Department of Security and Parking is experiencing. Bill Farr, Vice-President of Finance and Administration, appointed Executive Officer Pam MacDonald as the Interim Director of Security and charged her with assessing Security's difficulties, in addition to organizing the search for a new Director. *Excalibur's* Adam Kardash spoke to MacDonald last Thursday about her perceptions of the Security Department. Below is an excerpt of that interview.

Excalibur: What are your feelings about Special Constable status — the power to arrest, without warrant, anyone the officer believes within reasonable and probable grounds has committed a criminal offence?

Pam MacDonald: It certainly is the biggest issue in Security. I am currently in the process of reviewing the issue. I have been asked by [Vice-President of Finance and Administration] Bill Farr to evaluate recommendations that are going to be forthcoming.

We really did not realize it was a current issue until [Security Chief] Michael O'Neil resigned, and after I took over reference was made that there had been some plans [for Special Constable status] already afoot. No mention of any detailed investigation regarding the need for Special Constable status had been raised.

Based on the mass of new information that I have now available to me, it seems that there is enough evidence to suggest that a review is very much needed. My preliminary reaction is that there would appear to be a case. Now it is just a matter of weighing the pros and cons of the arguments of the need to go in that direction. This assessment is going on now, in large part by the Security Advisory Council, and I would think that we will have a recommendation made in about two months.

York Security should be able to use handcuffs.

Excal: If the recommendation by the Security Advisory Council is in favour of Special Constable status, and the Administration approves the move, how soon can we expect to have it implemented?

MacDonald: It may be too early to tell, but my guess is that it wouldn't take very long at all. The application process for the status is quite simple. It's just a matter of identifying the individual security officers to be named in that capacity and making sure they have the requisite training. And right now, Security is in the process of putting together a comprehensive training package.

It does not seem unreasonable, though, that Special Constable status be implemented by summer.

Excal: What are your feelings about York Security using handcuffs?

MacDonald: I have heard some very convincing arguments that York Security should be able to use handcuffs. I have also heard some equally convincing arguments that handcuffs should not be available to everyone because of such things as excessive use of power or police-presence. But I have heard a good case for having them available, probably in a supervisor's car, for example, so that if an incident should arise where there is serious concern about the safety of York community members or Security Officers themselves, handcuffs would be available as a tool.

It's possible that handcuffs will be made available to York's officers. But this decision to use handcuffs ties in to the Special Constable status issue, and what type of tools Special Constables need for the job. These are things that are currently being reviewed.

Excal: Some security officers have indicated that nightsticks would assist them in duties. What are your feelings on this issue?

MacDonald: I haven't heard anything that has changed my opinion about nightsticks. I really do think that nightsticks, like guns, are weapons. When you are seen carrying something to be used against someone else then you're inviting trouble. I understand from security officers and police officers that I've talked to that research has shown that beyond a doubt having weapons like that really does encourage and lead to a greater incidence of violent episodes. In my opinion, there is no place for nightsticks on campus.

Excal: There was a major communication problem between Mr. O'Neil and the Administration. What measures have been taken to ensure that the next security chief will communicate efficiently with the ninth floor?

MacDonald: First of all, the former reporting relationship for the Director of Security was through Physical Resources, specifically Assistant Vice-President Peter Struk. But Mr. Farr announced that this system will end — primarily because Mr. Struk is now actively involved with the campus construction programme — and for the next few years the security chief will report directly to him. This should alleviate many of the problems.

Excal: What are your perceptions about the labour-relations problems in the Security Department?

MacDonald: There certainly has been a history of labour-relations problems. I think we are aware that the University as a whole has had difficulties in that area over the years. But Mr. Farr has given me a specific mandate to improve Security and Parking's staff-management relations.

I have had meetings with Rob Hughes, Chief Steward for the United Plant Guard Workers of America (UPGWA) and we've worked out a reasonable approach to trying to deal with problems as they arise. It is my sense from meeting with both security and parking officers that if you just listen to the problems and the issues that these people are concerned about and you try to do something about them in a timely fashion, then you aren't going to have that many reasons to have grievances. This approach may not have been taken before.

It is said from time to time that some of these grievances are frivolous. They may appear frivolous in terms of their specifics. But generally they are telling you that there are morale problems or at least some discontent

Weapons like that lead to greater violence.

Excal: Since beginning your term as interim-director, what have you learned about morale problems in the force?

MacDonald: When I began it was my perception that there was a morale problem on the force, and my perception has been confirmed by what many people have been telling me. From the point of view of security officers it has been related to issues such as Special Constable status, not having the appropriate tools to do the job, and confusion about their responsibilities.

I think that there is a sense of frustration about some events which have occurred on campus and the officers



INTERIM SECURITY DIRECTOR PAM MACDONALD

have not been able to respond adequately given their current mandate.

Metro Police [31 Division] aren't able to respond to many calls on campus in an adequate fashion because of the sheer volume of work on its hands and the priorities they attribute to other calls in the Jane-Finch area. So you have a situation where Metro Police have the responsibility, but cannot be here as often as they might, given that many of our problems are minor in comparison to the surrounding area. So a sense of frustration exists around their not having the actual responsibility and tools to do their jobs effectively.

On the parking side of the operation, I am not altogether sure what the ins and outs of the problems are, but there are definitely morale problems. There are clearly some strains between security officers as a group and parking officers as a group. Security is very concerned about enhancing its status so that they can be more effective and perceived as a genuine policing force maintaining security on campus. They have changed or want to change many of the outward signs, such as their uniforms or rank structure, in order that they feel and are perceived as protecting the community.

Security wants to become distinct. This means being distinct from parking officers, who don't have the same responsibilities. This in itself is causing certain strains. My understanding is that some of those in the parking ranks liked the closer relationship and liked the idea that they were a part of the same body. This issue is going to require some care in the coming months.

I think that there is a much more substantial role for parking officers to play. But now parking officers may feel that they are the low ones on the totem pole. If we can address concerns that they have about their particular duties, that seems to me great potential for raising their morale in turn. Their morale does not have to be tied to what's happening with Security officers.

Excal: What qualities are you looking for in your search for a new director?

MacDonald: I have a completely open mind on this matter. My sense is that the

most important qualifications for a person in that position are really solid people-skills, good managerial skills, ability to work well within the community, and advance the interests of the department. I don't think that you necessarily need policing skills or security skills to do that. But I don't believe that the department can be run without having that type of expertise, knowledge, and experience within the department.

Part of my mandate is to oversee the selection for the new director. But it has also been to oversee the process leading up to the definition of the job description.

... but there are definitely morale problems

Excal: Do you agree with the contention that the Parking and Security Department has lacked a clear mandate?

MacDonald: There are two elements to that question. There had been a very clear mandate that had been given to the last two directors by Vice-President Farr, in terms of outlining the scope of the job and the high aspirations for ingenuity and creativity within the department. Farr spoke about working with the community to develop new policies and procedures for the department, the importance of consultative links with the community, and leadership on a number of issues, such as training. In terms of having a mandate, and the scope to take initiative, I firmly believe that that has been there all along. It's fair to say that mandate — that opportunity — was not seized. There is still a lot of work to be done.

Any new director has to identify the issues and set priorities within the department and pursue actions with respect to those goals. This is critical. And I don't think that there are any obstacles to prevent this. It is just a matter of getting down how one wants to accomplish their goals, and setting about to do it.