

Excalibur

Everything secret degenerates; nothing is safe that does not show it can bear discussion and publicity
—Lord Acton

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OFS and NUS are essential for York students

Wasn't it just last year that York students voted almost two to one to increase their activity fee by one dollar to pay higher National Union of Students (NUS) fees?

And wasn't it just two years ago that York students voted overwhelmingly to raise their activity fees \$1.50 to pay higher Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) fees?

As recently as two years ago York students clearly expressed their desire to not only support but increase their support for both OFS and NUS. Why has the Council of the York Student Federation (CYSF) called a referendum on this issue, with the hope of withdrawing from both of them?

What has changed since those votes? Tuition fees for foreign students have gone up hundreds of dollars. The rest of Ontario students are faced with a \$100 fee increase for next year. The provincial government has just announced a new program to make student aid harder than ever to get. At the same time the federal government is cutting its support to the universities and students across the country face the worst summer job prospects ever.

On all fronts students and the rights of many of us to be students are being challenged by the government.

One of the best ways for us to meet this challenge is with a united front to take on the government both at the provincial and federal level. It makes sense. Students latched on to this same principal when they decided to form students' councils on their campuses to deal with the administration. It seems clear that one democratic body acting in the interests of students at the local, provincial, and national

level, is more effective than the mass of students operating alone in a splintered and Balkanized manner.

So why is CYSF President Barry Edson and the rest of the council members who supported his motion challenging these organizations? Why is he diffusing the energies of the OFS, NUS and their supporters into fighting this referendum campaign at a time when they, along with CYSF, should be dealing with the very serious problems currently facing students?

Edson has never clearly stated his reasons for not supporting OFS and NUS but we can piece together a few of his complaints. Edson feels the OFS is too radical. OFS is only as radical or conservative as its membership, since it is a democratic body. If Edson can't get other members of OFS to vote for his policies that's not the fault of the organization. When one enters a democratic forum one always faces the possibility of losing. It seems Barry has trouble handling this concept.

OFS and NUS are also only as strong as their members. The CYSF has simply not been a strong member of either organization. They have never properly distributed either the OFS or the NUS newspapers. And when was the last time you saw an OFS or NUS pamphlet? They print thousands of them but if you want to read



NEWS ITEM: Government announces changes in students aid program.

one you'll have to dig through the dust in the CYSF offices to find them.

Perhaps the clearest example of CYSF's bumbled membership in OFS occurred during the "post-cards to Parrott" campaign. The OFS voted to

distribute thousands of post-cards on every campus in the province to be distributed to students and mailed to Colleges and Universities Minister Harry Parrott. The cards carried a message to Parrott protesting tuition fee hikes.

Parrott did get thousands of the cards; however, few if any came from York students. CYSF accidentally threw the first crate of postcards from OFS in the garbage. No one is sure what happened to the second batch.

The credibility of Edson's anti-OFS attitude is severely weakened by his council's poor record in the federation. Because of the nature of the organization it is important that the members take their membership seriously.

Much of the good work the OFS and NUS do is not readily apparent to students. The staff of the organizations spend a great deal of time involved in essential lobbying with the government, other political parties and presenting students' case to the public as a whole. It would be impossible for each student council to do this type of work effectively on its own.

The OFS and NUS also have researchers on staff to provide students with the necessary factual "ammunition" to take on the government. Excalibur used an OFS research paper as the core of the centrespread in the February 3 issue.

If Edson is worried about balancing the CYSF's budget, cutting back essential organizations like OFS and NUS is not the place to look to save money.

Basically, membership in OFS and NUS is essential, especially at this time. Even if one has criticisms of the organizations, dropping out does nothing to solve the problems. Whatever criticisms one has of either OFS or NUS can be dealt with in a democratic matter from within the organizations. Now is not the time to use "confrontation" tactics on the OFS and NUS.

We at Excalibur urge all York students to vote on March 9 and 10 to continue our membership in both NUS and OFS so we can get down to dealing with the serious problems we as students face and which membership in these organizations can help us resolve.

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