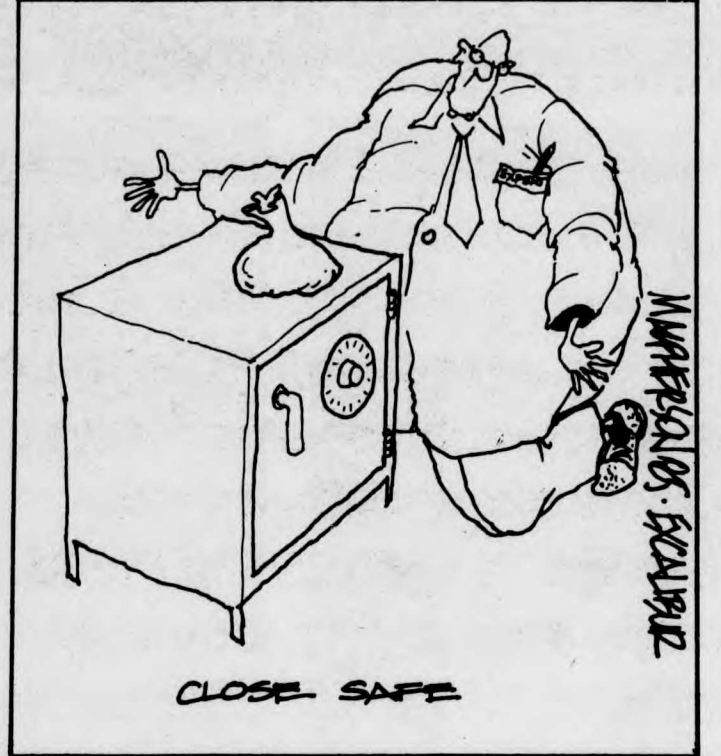
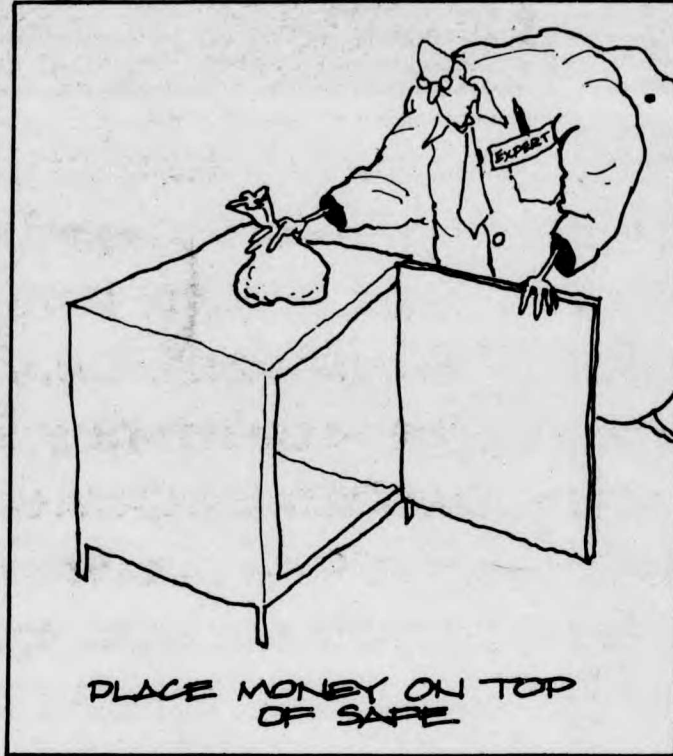
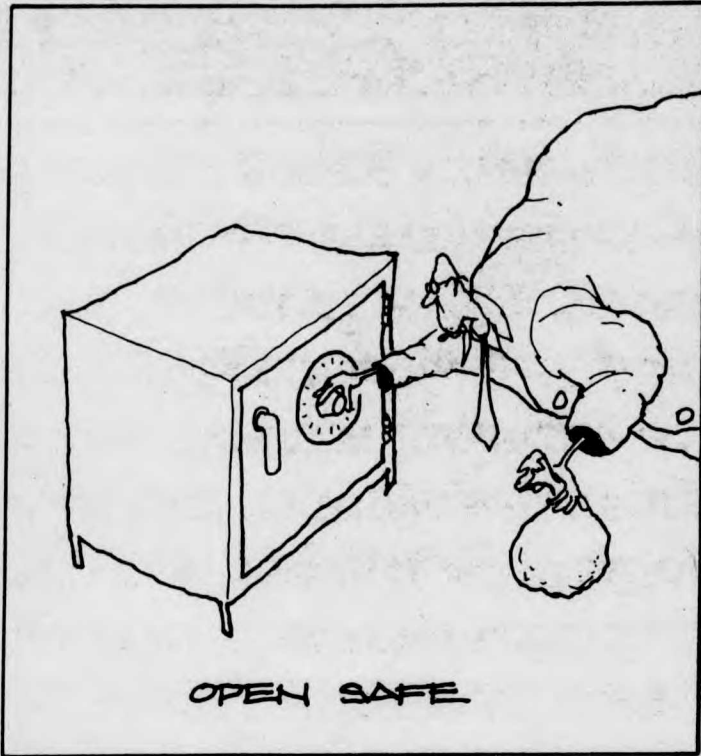


Page 6 CYSF SECRET SECURITY HANDBOOK: How to store money safely in these difficult times



O P I N I O N

Exorcism at CYSF: Contento banished

By GARY SYMONS

In a modern university like York, crammed full as it is with sharp, authoritarian corners and straight, no-nonsense lines, it's difficult to believe that a ghost has been roaming our utilitarian halls since the beginning of the school year.

But (as Ripley would say) believe it or not, a spirit of the most ethereal sort has been spotted several times in and around the offices of CYSF, although she appeared so briefly and disappeared so quickly that even the unfortunate denizens of our student government were unsure of her very existence.

Some call her the Ghost of CYSF. We at *Excalibur*, who knew her in life, prefer to think of her as The Director of External Affairs That Might Have Been. Others call her Lily Contento, and though all of the above are correct, all are equally irrelevant, at least as far as CYSF is concerned, since she was banished just this week by the federation's resident exorcist, CYSF Speaker Marshall Golden.

To understand the mystery of the Ghost, however, one must peer back in time as far as last year's election. Only then can we see why the Might Have Been became the Never Was.

Lily Contento, a former reporter for *Excalibur*, and a good one, left the paper to run on a slate with presidential hopeful Alex Riha. Both had high hopes, and worked hard on a well organized campaign that came within inches of success. Unfortunately for Contento, however, running mate Riha was edged out by incumbent Chris Summerhayes, although she went on to win against her opponent David Blair.

Even then, on the night of her own victory, Riha's defeat was the beginning of the end for all of Contento's hopes. As they told me last year, they had both wanted to radically reform CYSF, to transform it into a body advocating what is so popularly known as "direct action," to combat the government on issues like university underfunding with massive demonstrations rather than quiet lobbying. They wanted to focus the collective eyes of York students towards the outside world, not just in Canada, but all over the world, to use CYSF as a vehicle for progressive social change within the student body at York.

That very night, while Riha morosely contemplated his narrow defeat over a plastic cup of beer in the Grad Lounge, Contento said for the first time that she would resign as Director of External Relations. Her campaign team talked her out of it, of course, but the seed was already planted for Contento's utter failure during her year at CYSF, a failure that culminated this week in her expulsion from council.

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Great Brain critique has problems of its own

By DAVID BYRNES

The Great Brain Robbery: Canada's Universities on the Road to Ruin has caused a minor media sensation since its publication a few months ago. The authors wanted it to cause a sensation.

According to J.L. Granatstein, a York history professor, and his co-authors Robert Bothwell and David J. Bercson (history professors at U of T and the University of Calgary), it's high time the public was made aware that Canadian universities are "on the road to Hell" and "must do everything possible to regain their souls."

Not afraid to mix their metaphors, they explain: "The system needs a jolt, an electric shock that might actually restore the heartbeat of the universities to a normal pace and rhythm." The "jolt" they prescribe to restore academic quality amounts to instituting an oligarchy of the professoriate and a return to a modern day equivalent of Ivy League elitism. They were bound to stir up a controversy and they have.

Now the controversy has turned away from the question of academic quality in the universities to that of questionable academic practices in *The Great Brain Robbery*. A University of Ottawa professor has recently produced a widely published critique in which he tries to demonstrate that the book is academically irresponsible—that "the quantitative information used is either erroneous, misleading, or inaccurate." In his critique (*A Critique and Documentary Evidence on The Great Brain Robbery: Canada's Universities on the Road to Ruin*) Max von Zur-Muehlen shows, for example, that the authors of *The Great Brain Robbery*, who argue for the need to increase student fees, claim that Canadian students now pay as little as eight percent of the cost of their education. But the average figure, von Zur-Muehlen points out, is 15 percent. (In fact, at York, students pay an even greater portion—26 percent).

Von Zur-Muehlen's charge is a serious one. The use of "misleading" information by academics, especially those writing of their concern with academic quality, would be an ugly offense. In response to von Zur-Muehlen, Granatstein defends the "numbers" used in *The Great Brain Robbery* by saying the critique was "nitpicking," and that von Zur-Muehlen "simply missed the point" of the book. True, most of the statistical "errors" that von Zur-Muehlen finds have no bearing on the argument of *The Great Brain Robbery* and could easily have been the result of using different statistical sources.

In fact, it is hard to tell how seriously to take von Zur-Muehlen's critique. What speaks much more loudly than his argument is his remarkable inability to write comprehensible English. How sound can his argument be if he can't even deal with the logic of syntax? His very first paragraph (sentence) is enough to put the reader into a trance:

Canadian universities have been subjected to a great deal of questioning and pressure by society and government as reflected in the numerous and recent articles ranging from Reader's Digest, Maclean's, Toronto Life, Saturday Night and throughout the hearings and submissions to the MacDonald Royal Commission, Ontario's Bovey Commission on the Future Development of the Universities and the Royal Commission on Post Secondary Education in Nova Scotia.

After a while, reading von-Zur-Muehlen can even be fun: "Ironically, the academic management of the univer-

York History Professor J.L. Granatstein.

sities is perceived as the major barrier in advancing the welfare of the university community, although the majority of them were university teachers prior to their administrative appointments."

In the process of critiquing *The Great Brain Robbery*, von Zur-Muehlen nicely illustrates its argument that Canadian academic quality is going down the drain (if not to "Hell").

But despite the astonishingly poor quality of von Zur-Muehlen's writing, he does ask two interesting questions about *The Great Brain Robbery*. The first, mentioned already, is the possibility that the book contains sloppy or even "misleading" use of statistics, and the second, a very personal one, concerns the attitude of the authors.

Although it seems like a silly and irresponsible conjecture at first, von Zur-Muehlen does cast an interesting light on the book. After noting that the authors in question represent the generation of professoriate who have reached middle age, he reasons:

"The medium age of Canada's full-time faculty is almost 45 years, many of whom are forced to realise that expectations and aspirations of the 1960s will never be totally fulfilled given the constraints of the new environment, changing societal values, and individual limitations. In reaction, some of them have chosen different lifestyles such as hobby farming... others have become the "Angry Men" of the 1980s. In this sense, a mid-life crisis syndrome appears to have manifested itself and is reflected in the book."

Putting aside the question of what speculation like this is doing in a technical academic paper (mid-life crisis?) there is a tone of bitterness and frustration in the book, and an awfully dogmatic perspective. Come to think of it, isn't it a bit strong to suggest that the universities might be going to "Hell" or that they have lost their "souls"? By going to such disturbing metaphoric extremes don't the authors ultimately tell us something about themselves? Certainly they leave themselves wide open to wild conjectures like von Zur-Muehlen's.

Perhaps if the authors of *The Great Brain Robbery* had spent a few months doing more careful research, using some of the "cool dispassionate analysis" that they leave to "others" as they launch into their polemic, they would have seen that the problem facing Canada's universities are too complex for nostalgic, simplistic remedies. But then, a more thoughtful work would not likely have been so sensational and sell so many copies.

