

## The illusion of democracy at York University

Why the administration ever decides to consult students before making a decision is a mystery. In the end they usually formulate policy without even considering student opinion, and often that policy is completely opposite to what the students wanted in the first place. The only conclusion is that all this consultation is simply incorporated into the decision-making process in order to make students *think* they actually have a say in the running of this university. It's a brilliant political ploy by an often smug administration to keep the illusion of democracy alive at York.

A perfect example is the University Food and Beverage Services Committee's (UFBS) recent decision to grant Beaver caterers a five-year contract after students clearly indicated that they were against such a move. Beaver had been hired on a one-year trial period, and were supposed to show significant improvements in both the quality of food and service in order to secure the five-year contract. So, to show that student views did matter in the decision-making process, the UFBS conducted a lengthy survey to see if patrons were seeing any improvements.

According to the survey's results, "Students indicated that Beaver Foods was no better or no worse than Rill Foods," and that standard turned out to be extremely dismal. For example, 93% of respondents rated the quality of food between three and five (with five being the lowest possible rating). The administration's survey results demonstrated without a doubt that students were against a contract renewal for Beaver Foods. Obviously, the students' views have been ignored. Worst of all, residence students will be forced to eat only at Beaver Food outlets on campus with the introduction of the 'credit card system' next year. The current scrip system allows these students to eat at *any* cafeteria on campus. Given that these students will become the primary customers for Beaver, it's strange how their views played such an insignificant role in the final decision.

But being ignored in the final stages of the administration's decision-making process is not new for York students; in fact it takes place all the time. Another current example is the university's attempt to reform student government. At first the Student Relations Committee Paper, which was based on the Gilmor Commission, proposed that students have a choice of joining either faculty-based or college-based student governments. Following several protests from college masters and governments, President Arthurs dropped the SRC paper, declaring that the Hare Commission's findings on the college system would also have to be taken into account.

Since then, the President has held a "secret meeting" with student representatives, vaguely outlining his plans for student government reform, but telling them not to go public with the proposals for another month. The plans call for the establishment of faculty-based colleges. For instance, all Fine Arts students may be affiliated with Winters College. What's happening now is that college masters are fighting amongst themselves for certain faculties. Yet at the most critical stage of decision-making, students will be effectively barred from offering input. While there was consultation at the beginning of the process, in the end Arthurs will go behind closed doors to ultimately decide the fate of student government. And how will we ever find out what student opinion on faculty-based college is when Arthurs seems prepared to unilaterally implement his policy without giving students a chance to voice their concerns?

Finally, there was the introduction of a financial liaison officer to help student governments in organizing budgets, despite the fact that student representatives have clearly said that they were against such a move. What is most disturbing is that funds for student activities are being diverted by the administration against the will of student governments, forcing them to pay for something which they are totally against.

And so, in this year of political reform at York, the real obstacle to getting more student participation in decision-making comes to light. More often than not, it is a heavy-handed administration which preaches full student involvement in the decision-making process, but rarely practices it.



FOR FINE CAFETERIA DINING, LEAVE IT TO BEAVER.

## LETTERS

We will publish, space permitting, letters under 250 words. They must be typed, triple-spaced, accompanied by writer's name and phone number. We may edit for length. Libellous material will be rejected. Deliver to 111 Central Square during business hours.

### Retirement piece is praised

Editor,  
I was delighted to see Jeff Shinder's article, "Is Mandatory Retirement Fair" in your January 28 issue. Mandatory retirement is part of two larger debates: How to split the infamous pie, and What is old?

These are important issues, not usually covered by the student press. I commend Shinder for his interest.

All of us at the Retirement Planning Centre enjoyed the cartoon too.

Sincerely,  
Melissa Spore  
Co-ordinator

### Women's Centre "frustration"

Editor,  
A clarification regarding your rather shrill editorial of 4 February 1988: I have never been "known" to call people at the Women's Centre homophobic. I did, however, refer in my report on the Centre to the general problem at universities of homophobia aimed at Women's Centres. This was based on information in a memo from the Ontario Coalition of Women's Centres. As an aside, may I suggest you examine the definition of homophobic to ensure you used it in proper context.

Also, I have never been "known" to run about campus and call individuals at the Centre arrogant and paranoid. I did state in my report that given the Centre's refusal to cooperate, their "attitude is totally unacceptable and it betrays an underlying arrogance and paranoia that seems prevalent in the Women's Centre."

You stated that such language on my part was "[nice] coming from

somebody who wants to get some information from the Women's Centre." (I must admit that your sarcasm is lost here) Allow me to point out that these admittedly strong comments in my report were written over *three months* after my first request for information. They do not reflect any initial bias on my part. Rather, they demonstrate my frustration with the uncooperative nature of the Women's Centre.

You pointed out that this is no way to carry out negotiations. I agree. But as far as I'm concerned by October (my original request having been made in July) the period of negotiations had long since drawn to a close. Had you or any of your reporters been at the CYSF meeting where I discussed these points at length, your editorial *might* have been written from a more informed perspective.

May I also add that a good lesson in negotiations would demonstrate to you that there are times when, quite naturally, talks breakdown. These were not "playground tactics," but the culmination of months of frustrated requests.

Sincerely,  
Robert M. Castle

### Security vandal was York student

Editor,  
I am writing on behalf of the members of the Security Department to express our concerns about the inaccuracies and inadequacy of the article which appeared in the February 4, 1988 edition of *Excalibur* entitled "Police aid needed to stop vandals."

First of all, you indicate that some of the vandals responsible for damaging campus property are actual employees of the Security and Parking Department. This statement implies that more than one person

employed by the Department is involved in damaging campus property. In fact, the person to whom you refer in the article, was a part-time employee of Student Security who was not on duty at the time and could have been more appropriately described by his status as a full-time student at York University.

The article also referred to the student as having been apprehended by officers from 31 Division. In reality, the individual was apprehended by members of the Security Department. Initially, a student from one of the residences called in the information that four people were damaging the emergency telephone and this concerned individual then gave Security Control a running commentary on the direction of the suspects' travel which enabled several Security Officers to pursue the vandals on foot. Despite the fact that these vandals were not apprehended at the scene, an immediate and determined investigation by the Security Officers resulted in the arrest of one individual within 45 minutes of the occurrence. Subsequent to that individual being taken into custody, Metro Police were notified, officers from 31 Division attended the scene and followed up the arrest with a charge of malicious damage.

In addition, the names of three other suspects were supplied to the police officers.

I point out these circumstances in order that this community will know that our Security Officers are not only putting forth the effort to make this campus safe and secure, they are also achieving positive results.

Members of the Security Department are conscious of the fact that our service to the community can be improved and we welcome constructive criticism which will help us to achieve our goals.

We believe that at the same time we can be criticized we can also be recognized for our achievements.

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(... and Liz Flagal as William Shakespeare)

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EDITORIAL: 736-5239  
TYPESETTING: 736-5240  
ADVERTISING: 736-5238

MAILING ADDRESS:  
Room 111, Central Square  
York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Downsview M3J 1P3