

Letters To The Editor

All letters should be addressed to the Editor, c/o Excalibur, room 111 central Square. They must be double-spaced, typed and limited to 250 words. Excalibur reserves the right to edit for length and grammar. Name and address must be included for legal purposes but the name will be withheld upon request. Deadline: Mon. 5 p.m.

York's faculty union is a "Pandora's Box"

I would like to comment on some of the issues raised by J.L. Granatstein in his letter in Excalibur last week (January 6th), and make a few other comments concerning the present faculty union question.

There is plenty of evidence outside the university that unionisation tends to the lowest common denominator and does not encourage excellence; what is the evidence that, in the long run, the universities would be any different? While faculty unions are comparatively new to the Canadian scene, they have been common in the States for some time. It is surely significant that few, if any, of the top-rated U.S. universities are unionised. Instead it is in the lower-rated institutions where faculty unions are to be found.

Previous YUFA decisions on merit pay, and a movement by some union supporters towards pay by seniority, leave little hope that the quality of academic life at York can even be maintained, never mind improved, by faculty unionisation.

Granatstein poses the rhetorical question: might we not wish to go on strike to protect the academic freedom of Professor X? He clearly believes the answer is yes. What a pity he does not display such zeal to protect my freedom not to have to join the union.

Indeed, is a strike the best solution to the problem he raises? My answer is emphatically no for

two general reasons.

First, in any confrontation between the faculty and administration, it is the students who will be hurt. I would wish to minimise this suffering, not maximise it by withdrawing my services in a strike which, if prolonged, could lead to permanent damage to a student's career. If there were a sufficient body of faculty opinion to warrant a strike, then there would also be a sufficient body of opinion to take some alternate action less detrimental in the long run to the student population.

The York Act gives considerable power to senate — power which is rarely used. A sufficiently agitated group of faculty could choose, for example, to withhold student grades until the issue was settled. Such action, while it may be painful in the short run, would do no long-term harm to the students.

Second, while strikes have played an important role in settling industrial disputes, their time is surely over — or should be. They are an extremely wasteful and damaging method of solving a problem. It is imperative for all democratic nations to find alternative, less destructive procedures for settling industrial quarrels. The universities could lead in the development of such alternatives. For this reason, a strike in a university would lessen our credibility and be an anathema.

I agree that salaries at York are generally too low. I do not understand how unionisation can improve this situation. Surely we cannot expect the government to give us more money simply because we have a union. Thus, any extra money for the faculty will have to come from the existing budget. This may be achieved in one of two fashions: either by firing a substantial number of faculty or by increasing the university budget deficit. Both of these alternatives are highly undesirable and the latter, in view of current high interest rates, could prove disastrous. Indeed, taking into account the Trudeau restraints policy (which will certainly be applied to us), the salary issue, at least for the next few years, is a red herring.

Granatstein asks, "Whoever suggested that research would stop in the event of a strike?" Suppose we think forward to the time when there is a strike on campus. One of the most powerful weapons possessed by the administration would be a lock-out. In that event, libraries, offices and research laboratories would be closed to faculty. There is no guarantee that the administration would not use this weapon. Thus, while under the present non-union status it is remote in the extreme that the administration would take such action, when the union comes, the possibility becomes very real.

There is also the question of tenure, which constitutes a faculty member's individual agreement with the university for his continuing services. It is not clear just what will happen to tenure under a collective agreement signed by the union. However, it currently appears that tenure protection is likely to be reduced once unionisation is a fact.

Some faculty may be in for a rude awakening when the university looks for ways of meeting an increased faculty salary payroll.

Thus, unionisation is a Pandora's box — faculty must think very hard indeed before opening it. It is still possible, even at this late hour, to keep the lid firmly closed.

A.B.P. Lever,
Chemistry

Ross's York

Murray Ross's essay in Excalibur attacking Canadian nationalism brings back memories of the year I spent at York University (1970-71). Ross, of course, was a main force in the

development of that institution of higher learning and excellence. The stark concrete buildings were the best of American architecture at that time. The board of governors, which set overall policy, was composed of representatives of the American corporations who are doing so much for Canada. The key administrators were well-known Liberals.

Following the example of the Canadian Football League, Ross and his fellow administrators imported star personnel from the United States, paying them salaries far in excess of what was paid to their obviously mediocre Canadian counterparts. This was justified on the ground that the stars would increase York revenues by bringing in huge grants from American foundations. While courses with Canadian content were few and far between, Canadian students were exposed to the most up-to-date American subjects and methodologies.

While student unrest was widespread throughout Canada, at York, things were calm and peaceful, the only murmur of dissent coming from a small handful of Canadian nationalists who were in control of the student newspaper. Following the American youth culture, York students wore their hair long and dressed in the best Levi jeans and leather vests. In the dormitories, the halls and the common rooms of the colleges we were continuously exposed to the latest rock music from the States over the numerous loudspeakers.

The liberal policy of the administrators effectively diffused any potential student unrest. Sexual co-habitation in the dormitories was normal. Alcoholic beverages were plentiful. But this was the era of experimentation in mind-drugs, and marijuana and hash were plentiful. Plants could be seen growing in dormitory windows. There were special rooms where students on harder drugs (like LSD and coke) could go for help or just companionship while on a "bad trip." It was widely reported on campus that the administration had an agreement with the local police: all drug raids would be at Rochedale College, and not at York.

For the professors, this was an ideal situation. Class attendance was normally low. Professors could drone on through the same lectures given year after year, from the same notes, without the bothersome interruptions from the doubting members of the university left. They could spend their

time writing the articles and books which no one read, but which earned them promotions and increases in salaries.

However, there was one incident which I will never forget. York had the only university demonstration in Canada in support of Trudeau's implementation of the War Measures Act in October, 1970. All those long-haired, upper-middle-class students shouting anti-Québécois slogans were enough to even bring an expression of concern from Ramsay Cook!

Midway through the term, I began to get homesick for Saskatchewan. I went to the university library to look up a Regina or Saskatoon newspaper in an attempt to find out what was going on back in the provincial hinterland. There were no newspapers or magazines from Saskatchewan. But the library had all the best newspapers from the United States.

It is nice to see that Ross has move on from the presidency of York to the board of directors of Time Canada. It is easy to see that he is still in pursuit of excellence, wherever it may be found.

John W. Warnock,
Naramata, B.C.

Play-by-play

Why is it that when a good job is done by a member of the university community, no one but no one acknowledges his effort?

I speak of Ian Wasserman and Sineal Joshi, two of the finest sports broadcasters Radio York has ever had. Ian's finesse with the play-by-play action excels that of anyone else I have ever listened to — whether it be a professional or an amateur.

Intelligent, accurate and to the point, Ian expresses his opinions on the performance of the Yeomen and, unfortunately, few ever really appreciate just what a fine job he is doing. Sineal's commentary parallels and complements that of his partner.

I listen on Willow-Downs Cable everytime I know there's a game. If I'm on campus at night, I listen to the broadcast in Central Square or in one of the college common rooms.

I only hope Ian and Sineal have the good fortune to make it professionally some day. There are never enough fine sports broadcasters these days and any city would be proud to have either of these two gentlemen as the voices of its NHL or WHA team. Keep up the good work, gentlemen.

J. Corning

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