

NO SIDE

by Tim Evans and
Andrea Shettleworth

Unless you haven't noticed, York is in the process of a referendum.

The YES-Coalition has been actively and blatantly promoting the concept of joining OFS and CFS to anyone who will listen.

Disappointingly, what has been missing is an active NO side. This is not surprising, however, given the amount of money that any NO side would need to be effective (considering OFS and CFS are donating thousands of dollars in cash and services to the YES-Coalition).

Therefore, to provide a counterpoint, we will critically analyze OFS and CFS to allow students to make an informed decision.

We realize that many of you may not be familiar with the recent history regarding York's relationship with OFS, so perhaps a bit of background is in order. When OFS was originally founded in 1972, York was one of the founding members. During the period that followed, there were three referendums in which students voted in favour of staying with OFS.

When CYSF decided to pull out of OFS in 1988, there were a number of points affecting its decision:

1. That OFS was not worth the \$30,000 annual fee that was being paid to it.
2. That their name recognition and consequent legitimacy was low among students.
3. That their legitimacy was questioned by the government and media alike.

WHY YES?

We will criticize the reasons for voting YES by examining the Coalition's own brochure entitled "Strength in Numbers."

The brochure begins by explaining the "evils" that students face: "tuition costs soaring above

inflation, cuts in student services, an inadequate OSAP system, lousy equipment, over-crowding." It ends by asking if anyone is doing anything about this and concludes that something is being done by OFS and CFS.

Leaving aside the question about these groups' efficacy when there have been so many problems, the Coalition goes on to propose that they were effective in lobbying the provincial government and the federal government. Let's analyze the claim that they affected government policy.

Claim: "In part due to cuts in federal transfer payments for post-secondary education, the Ontario government, in the spring budget, contemplated increasing

There is no mention in any proposal to increase tuition

tuition 15 per cent. After lobbying efforts, spearheaded by OFS, and mass demonstrations by students, the increase was held to eight per cent."

Truth: First, if you check the spring budget, there is no mention in it of any proposal to increase tuition. In fact, after contacting the Ministry of Treasury and Economics, they indicated that they do not set increases in tuition, but that it is the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities indicated that it is and was their policy to increase tuition the same extent that they

REFERENDUM



OFS
FÉO

Ontario Federation of Students

Fédération des étudiant(e)s de l'Ontario

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increase funding vis-a-vis operating grants.

We realize that, according to this, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics would have an effect on tuition rates, but both ministries denied ever contemplating increasing tuition by 15 per cent. Instead, they suggested that perhaps the writers of the brochure were confusing government policy with the proposals in the Queen's Blueprint: two entirely different policies.

Second Claim: "When Michael Wilson first introduced the GST, it was to apply to already burdensome tuition rates and residence fees. After intense lobbying, the CFS convinced Wilson to axe the tax on tuition and residence fees."

Truth: This is an outright lie. The following are quotes from the 1987 White Paper on Sales Tax Reform: "Most educational services provided by non-profit educational institutions would be exempt from tax under the general exemption for charities, non-profit organizations and government bodies.

However, for greater certainty, there would be a general exemption for the supply of educational services by such organizations. This would include specific reference to the supply of education at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels as well as extension courses and nursery schools."

The White Paper goes further — "All rentals of 30 days or more in a residential dwelling will be tax-exempt. Thus, most apartment and house rentals will not be subject to tax. The provision of ancillary services such as cleaning, heating, and electricity (but not meals), as part of the rental charge, will also be exempt where the rental is exempt. Under the approach to taxing charities, non-profit organizations and governments outlined in Section 10, all rentals of real property by this sector would be exempt."

This was how the GST was introduced. These concepts were maintained from concept to the ultimate bill. There was no lobbying needed since what they wanted was already there. If CFS did do "intensive lobbying" for their concerns, they wasted a great deal of money.

How about the federations' "strong caucuses and student committees that provide a voice for groups often left out in the decision-making process?"

OFS' committees currently consist of Women's Issues (7

people), Francophone Issues (not active), Native Students Issues (not active), Disabled Students Issues (not active), Northern Students Issues (9 people), Standing Campaign Committee (6 people), Race and Ethnic Relations (approximately 40 people at last symposium), Environmental Issues (approximately 24 people at last symposium), Gay and Lesbian Issues (6 people), International Students' Issues (not active), and Part-time Students' Issues (not active).

This is how active OFS's committees are (keeping in mind that there are no maximums to the number of people that can be involved).

"The OFS has two researchers who provide background material for both Federation and membership lobbying efforts, and provide material on current issues as requested by members. All research is available to students."

If their research is as good as the information that they have presented in their brochure, then you had better not use them for your essays.

For example, their claim that the federal government provides 73 per cent of the funding for colleges and universities is incorrect. If they had properly done their research, they would have

Neither organization is worth the money that we must give them

discovered that the transfer that covers the colleges and universities also covers health care.

Since the province simply puts the transfer into general revenues, it is impossible to determine how much goes to health and how much goes to colleges and universities, although the province estimates that it is about 42 per cent.

The YES-Coalition also claims that CFS provides many services to its members. Services such as: / Student Work Abroad Program; but they fail to tell you that you do not have to be a member to use this service / Travel CUTS; again, you do not have to be a member to use this service.

/ International Student Identity Card: last year, York issued only 800 cards. When you consider that our full-time student population is about 25,000, that is less than five per cent of students.

/ StudentSaver Card: We already have KHARD.

/ Canadian Programming Service: again, you do not need to be a member to use this service.

Finally, the Coalition has tried to convince us to join by indicating the other universities that have become members. So what... University of Toronto undergraduates are not members (the G.S.U. after UoT in the YES brochure means Graduate Students Union). University of Alberta undergraduates are not members. And University of British Columbia undergraduates are not members. If three of the largest universities in the country are not members, why should we have to become members?

WHY NO?

The most obvious reason is that neither organization is worth the amount of money that we must give them yearly (\$140,000). They do not achieve results. For example, if OFS/CFS are so effective, where were they during the recent election?

If lobbying is what we require, then we would be better to spend the money on a professional company that specializes in lobbying (and has better connections). Further, we are also members of MUCC (Metro University and College Caucus), which costs us nothing.

Besides, there are better things we can do with our money:

1. Give \$20,000 to each college.
2. Give approximately \$1,400 to each club.
3. Give out 140 thousand dollar scholarships each year to various groups (ethnic, financially underprivileged, disabled, academically gifted).
4. Use the money to fix our buildings and residences.
5. Keep it in our pockets.

While the concept of national and provincial student organizations is sound, they are not worth the \$140,000 annual fee that it would cost us. Quite frankly, they are a waste of our money.

Above all, the most important thing is to vote at the referendum. A low voter turnout is pitiful. We can do better, let's decide this issue on a broad-base.

Vote NO

If you don't, it's like throwing your \$7 away.

by Kate Collins
and Jean Ghomeshi
(Members of the YES-Coalition)

Strength in numbers

OK... We've been at York for over four years now, and we feel at least marginally qualified to identify what we see as the major problems that we face as students in this place.

Let's face it, we all know about tiresome line-ups in Scott library, having to sit on the stairs in an overcrowded Curtis lecture hall and over-priced texts that we're compelled to purchase.

These concerns are, of course, matched by unbearable yearly increases in the costs of tuition to attend our crowded — second or third choice — classes (we won't mention parking fees, residence costs, and our profit-oriented administration here).

So to state the obvious question: why such hassles? Well, if there is one point upon which we agree with our esteemed President Arthurs, it is that these problems are predominantly a product of chronic provincial and federal government underfunding to post-secondary education (PSE).

York students are not alone. Government underfunding has created similar conditions on campuses across the province and country. Massive cuts in federal transfer payments and a corresponding reduction in PSE operating grants as a percentage of the provincial budget have left York and other universities in a relative mess.

So what are the options for a York student?

1. Say to hell with it and drop out of school.
2. Say to hell with it and stay in school.
3. Attempt — with pathetic results — to get in touch (let alone "do lunch") with Mike Wilson and his provincial

In the future a coalition of this strength may be very beneficial

finance counterpart to discuss the state of education.

4. Unite with other students from around the province and the country, organize, and

demand a better deal!

Hint: If you selected options #1, #2 or #3, you have largely shut yourself out of the struggle for accessible post-secondary education.

If you chose option #4, you have opted to join students at Western, Queens, Carleton, Ryerson, Dalhousie, Simon Fraser and dozens of other campuses across Ontario and Canada through OFS and CFS.

Indeed folks, if you haven't guessed already, we are members of the York "YES-Coalition" intent on making option #4 a reality. While York undergrads will pay up to seven dollars per year (with a full course load) to be members of the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) — the approximate cost of one extremely average Marriott meal — the impact of adding our voices to these larger student movements will save us bundles of money in the end.

What does the OFS and CFS do? Examples? When Michael Wilson (the guy featured in option #3) initially announced the proposed Goods and Services Tax (GST), the new tax was to apply to tuition and residence fees. After intense lobbying by the CFS, the tax on residence and tuition fees was axed. Alright! — a savings of up to \$400 per student yearly.

Likewise, due in part to cuts in federal transfer payments, in the period leading up to the submission of (ex)Treasurer Bob Nixon's provincial budget last spring, tuition was expected to rise by a nasty 15 per cent. After lobbying by OFS and mass demonstration by students province-wide, the tuition increase was held to 8 per cent — not a complete victory but still a net savings of approximately \$150. These are only two brief examples of the positive effects of OFS and CFS lobbying.

Lobbying benefits are complemented by the OFS and CFS annual campaigns set by the membership — this year focusing upon tuition, government assistance and racism on campus. And, both organizations have very active "special interest" committees and caucuses (open to all member students) including: women's issues; environmental issues; race and ethnic relations; international students' issues; disabled students concerns; and aboriginal and lesbian and gay issues.

Finally, OFS and CFS provide tangible or "material" benefits in the form of services such as Travel Cuts, International Student Identity Cards (ISIC), StudentSaver cards, Student Work Abroad Program (SWAP), research, resources, and more.

A broad-based Coalition

OK. We've jotted down some straightforward information about OFS and CFS. Let's get back to the real point of all this which is a student movement, with particular regard to York students.

Something very exciting is presently happening around this "YES-Coalition" which we briefly mentioned. A large and diverse group of York undergrads have come together in support of a vote for membership in OFS and CFS.

This coalition includes student governments — several endor-

sements have emerged from college councils in addition to the Faculty of Education Students Association, the Creative Arts Board, the Osgoode Legal and Literary Society and the YFS.

And, more importantly, students in various political, cultural and social student clubs and organizations including the Women's Centre, the Economics and Business Society, the Psychology Students Association, the International Socialists, the Student Christian Movement and the Muslim Student Federation are also formally supporting the YES! side.

This is the most diverse and committed group of students that we can remember uniting in our years at York (so committed that individuals working in the Coalition are themselves paying for the creation and manufacturing costs of "Strength in Numbers" T-shirts). Perhaps, it is because of the massive broad-based nature of this group that some have recently claimed that only "one

Joining will save us bundles of money in the end

side" of the OFS/CFS issue has been widely addressed in the lead up to the referendum voting.

In contrast, we see it as a positive measure that so many different York students and student organizations have banded together with a common goal. In truth, we should celebrate!

Any notion that wide-spread grassroots advocacy of the YES side is "overriding a democratic process" is absurd. Many York students are uniting for what we believe is a progressive step for our future.

Clearly, we all had the option to form a similar Coalition on the so-called "NO" side of the issue, but we chose not to. In addition the implications of an active Coalition of this size are impressive.

Future for activism at York

The "bottom-line" for a majority of us working on this campaign is not ultimately the YES vote on Tuesday and Wednesday, but the efficacy of a strong student movement (coalition) at York to effect change after the referendum is over.

This effective activism will not just manifest itself within the provincial and national federations (should a majority of York undergrad voters support membership in OFS/CFS), but also in addressing issues that we face specifically at York. Doubtless, when there is a need for York students to have their voices heard in any area of concern in the future, a coalition of this strength may be very beneficial.

Not claiming utopia

Let us be very clear. We are not arguing — nor have we been at any point in recent weeks — that the OFS and CFS are flawless institutions that we ought to worship. York students have every right to express interest and concern about how the OFS and CFS

YES SIDE

these federations towards directions that serve particular York student needs. Policy resolutions, the budget, and campaign focuses are all set explicitly by a majority of the general membership — of which York students would have particular advantage as the largest university in OFS and CFS — during semi-annual general meetings.

Lastly, we fundamentally believe that York undergraduates should be full members of the OFS and CFS. Remember to vote this Tuesday and Wednesday.

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