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EXCALIBUR Weekly

October 9, 1981

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Excilbur is published every Thursday by volunteers from the York community. Our editorial offices are located in 111 Central Square around the corner from Soundproof Records. Our editorial phone number is 667-3201. For advertising call 667-3800.

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YORK UNIVERSITY STAFF ASSOCIATION

The Editor Excilbur

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to the Editorial that appeared in the September 24, 1981 edition of Excilbur. The Editorial appeared as follows:

YUSA clams up on settlement Don't call us, we'll call you

It always amazes those of us who put out this paper how gregarious and wordy different groups on campus can be when they feel that it serves their purpose or when they sense that we can or will be supportive of them.

By the same token they can be just as tight-lipped and unfriendly when what we do does not please them. They forget that it is our job to report the news and that it can often be a tough and thankless job.

Yet, in the interests of good reporting and the spirit of making the truth known, many groups and individuals on campus are able to find it within themselves to overlook our shortcomings and take the time to co-operate with us in informing the York community and getting the news out.

Last week we felt it was our obligation to get the facts in print concerning the recent YUSA settlement. In good faith an Excilbur reporter approached YUSA president Karen Harrell who refused to discuss the issue with Excilbur because she did not approve of our previous coverage of the story.

Adding insult to injury Ms. Harrell had the audacity to send us a story which she felt best reflected the struggle of deliberating unioners. In short, what she admired as the best account of what happened was simply a piece of union propaganda that would have made Stalin blush.

In the past, YUSA and other campus unions have complained about a lack of coverage, yet when we offer them coverage they reject it on the grounds that we are not, in their opinion, doing a satisfactory job. We wonder if the Globe and Mail or the Toronto Star would have gotten a similar response. Yet YUSA feels that we are not worthy of that kind of professional respect and, in a child-like manner, they try to censor us through silence or pander us with partisan pap.

If YUSA does not want to talk with and communicate through us, they will find that we will be reluctant to deal with them. If reprinting union propaganda and playing footsie with the union is what they expected of us, Ms. Harrell can forget it.

Ultimately it was not Excilbur that was hurt by the lack of co-operation — it was the York student who did not have access to all the facts. What was slapped in the face was good journalism and freedom of the press.

If everyone responded as immaturely and irresponsibly as YUSA has we would have damn little paper to put out. If, on the other hand, we had acquiesced and printed the story YUSA wanted us to we

would have no newspaper to put out — just a propaganda vehicle. Unfortunately for YUSA we are not yet ready to turn from a newspaper to an advertising agency.

Maybe in subsequent years that will change — but we hope not. Until then, YUSA, don't call us, we'll call you!

During the week of September 14, a reporter from Excilbur approached me to ask for details of the recent YUSA settlement. When she informed me that this was her first story assignment for Excilbur, that she had been supplied with no information or background on YUSA from Excilbur; and, in fact, she didn't know what YUSA was; I told her that it was our preference to put it in writing and send it to Excilbur. Further, I explained, a report on YUSA negotiations had appeared in the September 10, 1981 edition of Excilbur stating, "An informed source said that the YUSA settlement, which members will vote on today at 1:00 p.m. in Curtis I, will amount to 15% in wages and benefits." In speaking with this reporter prior to his article that appeared on September 10, 1981, I explained that there was a press black-out, agreed to by YUSA and the University, until the union could present the tentative agreement to its members on September 10. However, even though this reporter assured me that he understood the importance of reporting accurately about contract negotiations, his report appeared on the morning of the vote giving inaccurate information, which only served to cause confusion amongst YUSA members.

Given this information, and

understanding my concern about reporting accurately on the recent settlement, the reporter I saw during the week following the settlement appeared visibly relieved that she would not have to report on an item about which she knew nothing.

Following ratification of the agreement, Brigitta Schmid, External Vice-President of YUSA (not myself, as the Editorial states), sent the following to Excilbur:

In regard to the York University Association's Contract Negotiations, please find enclosed the best article written on the subject to date. On Thursday, September 10, the Executive met with YUSA members to recommend acceptance of the University's last offer, which was 12.25% increase across the board, with benefits increases of .75% amounting to a total package of 13%.

YUSA members voted 470 to 196 in favour of ratification.

"To strike or not to strike... The executive committee and membership of the York University Staff Association faced the toughest decisions in the history of this young union at a September 1 contract ratification meeting.

After an all-night mediation session, the university offered a 12 per cent across-the-board increase, plus improvements in benefit plan coverage amounting to an additional .75 per cent. This offer was lower than that given to both the faculty and the professional and managerial employees. It also took away the hard-won formula of a

percentage or lump sum increase, which gave lower-paid workers a bigger increase. Consequently, the bargaining committee recommended strike action.

YUSA members, however, were divided on what action to take. When ballots were counted, 384 of the 692 members attending the meeting authorized the executive to call a strike. This constituted 55 per cent of those attending, but only 40 per cent of YUSA's total membership of about 1,000.

The executive board and negotiating committee withdrew to consider the vote result. After 15 minutes of soul-searching deliberations, they returned to the membership and recommended that, given the narrow margin of support for a strike, YUSA not exercise its option to strike at this time. The membership voted by a narrow margin to accept the recommendation.

A mediation meeting is scheduled for September 8, when further negotiations will take place."

C.C.U. Bulletin, September 3, 1981

Hardly, we think, a "piece of union propaganda that would have made Stalin blush".

I do not feel that YUSA has now, or in the past, "censored (Excilbur) through silence of pandered (Excilbur) with partisan pap"; but I feel we should be able to expect accurate reporting, especially in the area of contract negotiations.

Karen Harrell
President
YUSA