

# editorial



## Something you can't vote no to

**W**hen you pick up today's papers and read the results from yesterday's municipal elections, check out the figures for voter turnout. They will not be terribly high — municipal elections never get a good showing.

And while this may be disgraceful, depressing, devoid of democratic drive and really not representative of the population, they didn't call it off. Even if less than ten per cent of voters showed up to do their bit, it would still be a valid election.

We don't want to insult your intelligence by reminding you why this is necessary. This should be patently obvious. But there are obviously some people on campus who need reminding, so bear with us.

Student government at York -- as opposed to, say, the Board of Governors -- is run using a democratic system. In fact, it's very democratic: not only are the leaders directly elected, but whenever they ask students for more money they have to hold a referendum.

Because of the nature of York University, not many people vote in these referenda. York's population is based more on commuting than on community, so students simply don't feel inclined to show up to vote in droves. It's always been this way -- referenda held during the last five years have typically seen between 10 and 20 per cent turnouts.

That's too bad. This place could do with a tighter-knit community and all that. But it doesn't mean the people who don't vote are being disenfranchised, deprived of democracy or generally duped by the system: if they really want something, they'll show up to vote for it. If they really don't want it, they'll show up to vote. If they're ambivalent or indifferent -- or poorly informed -- they won't bother.

Which brings us to the letter in this issue from the Board of Referendum Commissioners, an obscure subcommittee of the University Board of Governors which oversees these referenda. The BORC -- comprised entirely of appointees -- has recently decided to become a student government unto itself.

As a result of BORC's muscle-flexing, you won't have to

do much of that nasty voting any more. They've made it nearly impossible to hold a referendum. A catch-22 combination of unprecedented quorum requirements (it would be exceptionally difficult and expensive to get 20 per cent of York students to vote) and draconian spending limits (even if you wanted to waste your time *trying* to get 20 per cent of York students to vote, BORC won't let you) have rendered referenda redundant.

But we'd like to thank the folks at BORC for reminding us of something we neglected to mention: the situation is even worse than it looks.

Their letter smugly reminds us that they have not, in fact, set the quorum level at a permanent 20 per cent. They just chose that amount for last month's health insurance referendum (which, as a result, was cancelled). The quorum is actually set at a minimum of 10 per cent, but BORC can choose whatever level they want *at their own discretion*. (Their italics).

And why would they choose an unusually high or low quorum level? Well, because of "matters relating to a specific proposal" (for example, if BORC doesn't like it), or the "amount of the levy to be assessed" (for example, if the Board of Governors doesn't like it), or "the size of the affected constituency" (whatever that has to do with the 'appropriate' turnout level).

In other words, this little subcommittee -- an *appointed* subcommittee -- has given itself an *a priori* executive veto over a democratic process. This is strictly out of order. A body like BORC is supposed to make sure a referendum is fair and well-managed -- they are not supposed to render it impossible because they don't like the idea of a 'yes' vote.

They've even tried to cheer up *Excalibur* by telling us we'll only need a 10 per cent quorum should we ever need to raise our operating grant (you give us \$4.50 a year for this thing, based on a referendum vote.)

Sorry, BORC, you can't buy our support with appealing percentages. We've seen what you're up to and we don't like it. And that's all of us.

## excalibur

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## EXCALENDAR

**Wednesday November 13**

**Production Meeting at 12:00 pm**

and every Wednesday

**Thursday November 14**

**Editorial Board Meeting at 2:00 pm**

**Black Writer's Caucus Meeting at 3:00 pm**

**Sunday November 17**

**Black History Month Feature Issue Meeting at 2:00 pm - 426 Student Centre**

**General Meetings**  
**Every Wednesday**  
**4:30 pm**

**All Welcome**