

Some lofty analysis

The Patronage Olympics

By WARREN CLEMENTS

On March 17, a troupe of aging charlatans and snake-oil salesmen will crawl from beneath the political floorboards and beg for your vote. They want to be elected to a student government — any student government, as long as it has access to a free telephone and a Gestetner machine. This is their special fix. They want to be the power behind the posters littering the halls of York, the hands responsible for setting the time for the next concert, the name in the next Excalibur front-page headline.

The lizards who manage their campaigns are defacing the walls with literature bearing such daring and innovative slogans as "Let's get a decent food outlet on campus", "Fight tuition increases", and "Vote for an effective government". While this use of three-syllable words may slice the number of informed voters in two, and eliminate those York students who are still struggling through Rudiments of Thought 101, the basic issues behind the CYSF election are childishly simple. Consequently, Excalibur summoned its expert on childish issues, York English professor Ivor E. Tauer, to deliver his usual cogent and concise overview of the political arena.

"One of the fascinating elements of York political life," Tauer began, "is that once a person gains elected office, he can be removed only by death or graduation. In the faceless society of York, he can revel in the belief that he is finally a known quantity, a shaper of fate, a giant among students. His friends, awed by his social stature, either dismiss him as an obnoxious termite and ignore him, or run for office themselves, counting on his supposedly considerable influence.

"This may explain why high school friends find themselves on the same student council, and why, when there is any job to be done, leaflet to be circulated, or position to be hired out, another mutual friend ends up getting that plum as well. The joys of patronage.

"Naturally, not everyone can be friends with each other. And so you find the councils dividing into hostile camps, constantly at war with each other because, after all, every new recruit gained by the other side is a recruit lost to the good guys, and a modicum of influence stripped from the top dog of the good guy team.

"Take this year's CYSF elections. We see two visible camps. The first, whom we shall call the Centralists, comprises a group of individuals who hang around the Bearpit and like to think of themselves as foaming leftist radicals, at least until it's time to take the bus home. The second camp, whom we shall call the Collegists, springs mainly from the colleges, and comprises politicians who like the security of bi-weekly meetings at which they can decide the fate of the college chess club, and want to tack the line "past president of the college council" to the end of their resumés when they apply to Standard Life as managerial trainees.

"The level of rational debate between the two camps is high. The Centralists call their opponents "Fascists". The Collegists call their opponents "Commies". They are neither Fascists nor Communists, neither right nor left. They are political opportunists, careerists, friends of friends, hangers-on, and spotlight-seekers.

"The Centralists pretend to the title 'leftist' because their members stand up at otherwise orderly meetings and ask those present to free Dr. Morgentaler. When, after a few minutes, Dr. Morgentaler has not yet been freed, the speakers berate those present for their ineffectual bureaucratic ways, and storm out of the meetings. This is called a 'political protest'.

"The Centralists reject out of hand the futile committees which approach the government, heart in hand, to beg it to lower tuition fees. The Centralists prefer the time-proven method of standing in front of Queen's Park and yelling very loudly. This is known as 'fighting the

tuition increases'.

"The Centralists are against injustice, which they leap upon like a cat upon a herring and tote about the university nailed to long poles, as a warning to those York students who may be firmly in favour of injustice. The Centralists believe that the abortion laws of Canada should be overhauled, and that Dr. Morgentaler should be completely exonerated. To this end, they hold public information rallies in Curtis, which are attended by people in favour of exonerating Dr. Morgentaler. This is known as 'informing the people of the issues'.

"The Collegists, a swirling mass of students with muddy causes and half-baked ideas, despise the Centralists, but not because of their ideas. They hate them because they are noisy. To a Collegist, a university should be a quiet hall of learning, whose solemnity is punctuated only by the occasional raucous belch of a humanities major vegetating in a campus pub. The Collegist reviles the Centralists because they have the gall to call their clique a 'coalition', which in the world of Mickey Mouse student politics is a subtle form of one-up-manship.

"Bereft of an identity of their own, the Collegists react by adopting a negative identity, that of the Anti-Centralists. Some members take great pains to justify boosting the tuition fees. ("The government can't give students a free ride", "The public is fed up with you bums", etc.) This stand is taken not because the Collegists want higher tuition fees, but because the Centralists have co-opted all the other positions, and woebetide the two camps if they should ever agree on an issue.

"This hot air bounces around basically because there is nothing to fill the otherwise omnipresent vacuum. Nothing is ever really achieved in student politics, and nothing is ever passed on from year to year. There hasn't been a notable or even half-assedly competent student government at York in five years. An election is called, a stampede of politicians scramble to toss their hats in the ring, somebody wins, he or she takes over, the students continue to do whatever it is they were doing, and the new president and his or her friends (remember the friends?) cheerfully and absent-mindedly spend whatever the students complacently give them. \$25,000 or so for the colleges, \$90,000 or so for CYSF.

"If nothing is ever done, why do the Centralists and the Collegists create such ado about it? Well, because there are two ways of doing nothing. You can sit around in committees, which is the Old Boy-Bureaucratic way of doing nothing. Or you can rent a microphone and exorcise big business, the government, and the outdated concept of free enterprise wielded as a tool by the running-dog lackeys of capitalism who are stomping with hobnailed boots on the backs of the workers. This is the "Maybe if we yell loudly enough, somebody will think we are doing something" way of doing nothing.

"One interesting platform adopted by the Centralists is the notion that the administration is consciously screwing the students. The administration, of course, is a body which accepts money from the students in return for a vague promise to give them something in return, which is rarely worth the initial payment. The interesting part of this is that the latter definition fits the CYSF perfectly; the CYSF is as worthy of that title as the ninth floor of the Ross Building.

"But you won't hear anyone in the current CYSF accusing himself of screwing the students; he is invariably 'acting in the students' best interests', by protecting them from those who are really screwing the students. The Collegists, for instance. At best, this view is self-deluding and incredibly subjective. At worst, paranoid. Mind you, the Centralists are not wrong in condemning the incompetence of the college politicians; rather, their fault lies in deluding themselves into thinking they have done any



Warren Clements graphic

From his lofty perch on the twelfth floor of the Ross building, Professor Ivor E. Tauer observes this year's CYSF elections.

better.

"The choice in this year's CYSF election is the poorest we have seen in years, at least since John Theobald and Brian Belfont squared off four years ago. Since then, Michael Mouritsen ('73-'74) has had the capacity to clean up the council's paperwork, Anne Scotton ('74-'75) has had the capacity to organize events on campus, and Dale Ritch ('75-'76) has had the capacity to launch an active reorganization of CYSF's basic student-oriented programmes. Unfortunately, Mouritsen's paperwork begat more paperwork, Scotton slumped into an arrogant presidential lethargy, and Ritch succeeded only in dislodging an unpopular food caterer and showing some good weeknight movies — not much, considering that even Scotton's year resulted in the ousting of Versafood and the holding of Cosmicon.

"Whom do we have to choose from this year? Barry Edsel... pardon me, Edson... a paper tiger propped up by the Collegists to consolidate their votes. He shows little grasp of the ins and outs of leadership, and has an unsettling "I'll think about it after I'm elected" philosophy, which his followers might attribute to an open mind, but which from this angle smacks more of political opportunism. Asked a week or two ago what salary he would pay himself as president, he replied, 'I would expect the same salary that Dale Ritch is getting, plus a cost of living increase.' Did he know that Dale Ritch was making around \$5,000? No, he actually didn't have much idea of what the president made. The cynical half of this writer is tempted to say, 'I bet!' The more tolerant half is likely to write it off as 'uninformed'.

"Gael Silzer appears a more personable and dynamic candidate, and would probably make a good president if she weren't toting around a lot of excess political baggage left over from 1968 — a flock of Coalition bozos who could undermine the credibility of Diogenes himself.

"While stressing a more reasoned approach to CYSF politics than has been shown by the Coalition in the past, she would still be one vote among many, and the over-serious tone of her platform is distressing. Is there no room for fun on this campus, or is that strictly the pro-

vince of the 'reactionaries'? Entering the race with the handicap of Coalition support is like diving for pearls with cement air-tanks. Even if those members of the Coalition who need tranquillizers each time the word 'mobilize' is uttered aren't elected, they will view Gael Silzer as their mouthpiece in CYSF. Is she strong enough to stand up to such pressure tactics? It would be nice to think so, but perhaps unrealistic.

"Izidore Musallam has spent most of the past week exposing semi-real, semi-imagined instances of political intrigue and back-biting; the impression he has left, apart from that, is of a fighter for a 'non-political campus'. Could he pull it off in the face of such political intrigue and back-biting? Not single-handedly, which, judging from the plots he has reported, may be how he'll be winging it.

"The point is, nobody in this race has the kind of magic which could transform the campus into an interesting place to be, a place where things happen at night, on weekends, in spots where day students can attend them without feeling like trespassers at a residence party. A place where a student could feel a little more at home. A Herculean task, I'll admit. But it's not impossible, or even particularly difficult; and that's why it's so sad to realize that whatever president we choose, we're in for another lifeless year.

"Optimistic, eh? What's the solution? For years, I've been suggesting a volunteer president instead of a \$5,000 a year one. Maybe a presidential triumvirate. Maybe pay their tuition fees. Then they wouldn't be as cut off from the boredom of the average student's experience at York, and might be in more of a hurry to correct the situation, instead of taking buses off campus to fight battles in which even those students with vested interests haven't the slightest concern, and publishing manifestos which only the converted take the time to read.

"But the volunteer idea has been shot down every time I've mentioned it, so who knows? Frankly, I think there's more prestige attached to being a newspaper writer than a politician. And you can knock all the Centralists and Collegists you want to.

"In any case, cast a vote on March 17. I think Blanche Blöddgett will win in a walk."