

Excalibur

Everything secret degenerates; nothing is safe that does not show it can bear discussion and publicity
— Lord Acton

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YUSA executive weakens bargaining power

Last week the York University Staff Association approved the formation of a "voluntary" association to bargain on future contracts.

For the first time, secretaries, librarians, clerk-typists, administrative assistants and technicians were standing up and demanding to be heard as a group—a group with a lot more muscle than might be apparent on the surface. After all, an assistant with one pull on a computer plug could do a lot more damage than a walkout by dozens of

cleaners—at least in the short-run.

But one thing made very clear by the association is that this is precisely the kind of "union" tactic it would go out of its way to avoid.

How else can you account for the "compromise" of a voluntary association over a government-sanctioned union with all the built-in protections that implies?

The YUSA executive opted for a legally weak bargaining group for two basic reasons. First, it genuinely believed that some sort of bargaining power at this stage was better than waiting for provincial accreditation, a process which could take up to two years. By that time, both the mood and size of the staff association could change drastically.

This is something the Association of Commercial and Technical Employees (ACTE) has discovered in its current drive to organize office workers. They have a notoriously high rate of turnover, making formal certification of a bargaining unit difficult.

The second reason for a voluntary group, however, is the key to the whole matter. A fairly large number of YUSA members remain virulently, and naively, anti-union on the grounds that unions automatically mean strikes, violence and high dues.

It was to placate this group—no more than a vocal minority now—and to keep relations with the administration low-key, that the compromise was struck.

If relations with the university don't remain friendly, of course, the voluntary association won't be worth much. YUSA is gambling on the good will of administrators who have to agree to bargain

with it in the first place. When money's on the line, however, good will has a habit of evaporating quickly.

The YUSA executive should have examined the unionization process more carefully. Instead of painting the blackest possible picture of union membership, it

should have indicated somewhere along the line that attachment to the Canadian Union of Public Employees or ACTE has benefits too.

YUSA's leaders can still make amends. It's the least—the very least—they can do.

Naming our new glass menagerie

Now that the new fine arts building has been officially opened, the powers that be will no doubt solicit suggestions for names for the structure.

Rather than wait until some junior bureaucrat names it after David Slater or Bill Davis, each student must wrack his conscience for a name which aptly describes the architectural pride of the campus, the brick fishbowl by Burton Auditorium.

How about honouring the first dean of fine arts? Jules, a gem of a building, come Heller high water.

Or the Greenhouse, in honour of the second? Joe Green did say on Saturday that it contained "the moral soil from which the arts grow."

Perhaps we could wait until winter, call it Bog Hill II and use the 45-degree bay window as a ski slope. If the heating element works, we can rent it out as a sauna.

And if we charge enough, the proceeds could cover the cost of Phase III of the Fine Arts expansion programme.

At the inauguration, architect Raymond Moriyama called the building a foil for the students' creative imagination. Maybe it's just an Earth Mother for the campus, with the window acting as a protective shield.

A womb with a view.

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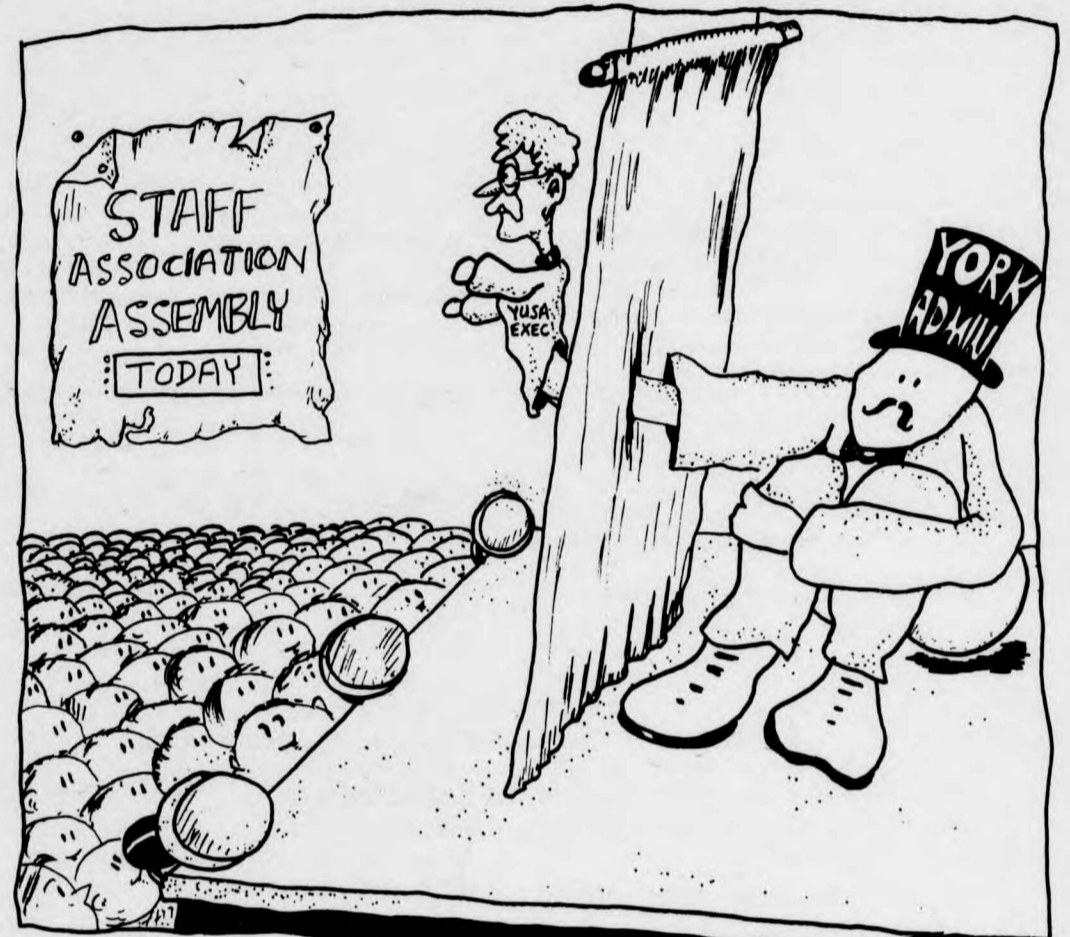
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"Fellow members, I am confident that we can convince the administration to accept our proposals.."

— Michael Lawrence

Is freedom of speech a privilege?

John Becker is an assistant vice-president in charge of student affairs. Housed in the top loft of the Ross building, Becker plays the liaison role between students and the university administration. After meeting personally with Becker this week, I wonder how he would choose to define his job.

The interview was preceeded by some unusual events earlier in the week. Becker, in his administrative role, had become involved in the SDS incident in Central Square (see story page 2).

I called Becker that day and related my on-the-scene account of what had happened. Becker, citing other information that had been passed to him by a "trusted professor," called me a "horseshit reporter" — and suggested I review my facts.

That pleasant introduction to the students' man in the administration came to an end. Minutes later he called back my editor, worried that the naive young reporter he had spoken to was about to distort facts to the administration's embarrassment.

Becker was suspicious that, in an attempt to create hot news, a story of administration repression was about to be manufactured. I must confess that that kind of cunning is not mine. I called Becker again Friday afternoon and asked if I could see him personally, to placate both our suspicions.

My desire to talk to Becker stemmed from a conversation I had had with the same "trusted professor" whose account was used to contradict my version. This professor arrived at Central Square in the middle of a dancing scene that was taking place on some literature belonging to two men sitting behind a table. He picked up the material,

and, after asking the owners whether he could look at it personally, proceeded to his office to read it.

I spoke to this professor at first only to find where our accounts conflicted. After an exchange of some information, however, we came to a mutual conclusion.

Incidents of this kind could be interpreted as a warrant for administration censorship. Though Becker strongly refuted this charge he still left me with the uneasy impression that our fears were not completely unfounded.

The issue centres around Becker's claim that he has the right to make pseudo-legal decisions which are binding on the members of the York community.

The specific decision concerned the issue of permits, allowing groups to distribute material in the Central Square concourse. Becker, after receiving complaints about material distributed by the SDS, delayed their permit until he could judge whether their material was legally objectionable or not. After hearing the "trusted professor," Becker judged that the permit could then be issued.

A policy statement titled "Citizens Rights and Responsibilities on Campus" was signed by Becker and approved by the president in 1972. The outline states that all municipal, provincial and federal regulations apply on campus as well as to all university activities. In its fourth clause, the draft states: "Victims of criminal acts committed on campus have the right... to invoke the criminal law by calling the police."

The draft clearly states that there is legal machinery to deal with illegal acts on cam-

pus. That machinery is the police and later the courts. How then could Becker, an author of this draft, defend his action in deciding what is or isn't legally objectionable?

I asked him what right he had to use a layman as a witness to a legal question and, further what empowered him to act as judge on a matter that lay outside his jurisdiction? If some legal opinion was needed, wasn't a university solicitor available?

Becker answered with an allegory. He described his role as one of landlord. And, after all, a landlord has some right to control what goes on in his building. As for asking the opinion of the university solicitor, Becker explained the lawyer lived 17 miles from campus. This justification escapes me.

The issue is a crucial one, though Becker would probably accuse me of making a fuss over everyday administrative decisions. Even though the SDS did in fact get its permit, the problem remains the same. As long as any administrator exercises the power to make difficult decisions outside his jurisdiction, the threat of repression exists. The legality of withholding the right to disseminate material should be left to judges.

Becker refuted the charge of overstepping his limits. "The issuance of permits is in a sense a privilege, and if the university feels a party has violated this privilege the permit could justifiably be withdrawn." I asked him when freedom of speech had been converted from right to privilege. He had difficulty answering.

"If I had to contact the solicitor every time I made a decision, I would become impotent... It all boils down to whether you trust me or not," he said.