

February referendum to decide York's future in OFS

By LORNE MANLY

As the referendum for the Council of York Student Federation (CYSF) to pull out of the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) begins, York students can expect to be caught in the middle of the war of words that will emanate from both sides. The referendum will be held Thursday, February 6.

Reya Ali, President of CYSF, wants York to withdraw from the provincial student organization, claiming that CYSF can "no longer afford it (membership in OFS)," and that OFS "is ineffective as a lobbying unit." "With the equivalent money," Ali said, "we could double our capacity in lobbying and services for York."

According to Ali, the CYSF budget doesn't reflect its position as the second largest university in the province. Pointing to the student council budgets of other universities such as Western (2.6 million dollars), Carleton (1.1 million), Wilfrid Laurier (1.2 million), and Ryerson (1.25 million), Ali maintains that CYSF can ill afford to pay for OFS directly out of its funds as it leaves CYSF to run their council on a "shoestring budget."

This year's CYSF budget is approximately \$235,000 of which \$30,000 goes to OFS. CYSF receives \$18.50 per member and pays OFS out of these funds whereas every other member university pays its fees from an extra three dollar levy tacked on to each student's tuition. Ali's plans for the money that would be saved by withdrawing from OFS include hiring a full-time researcher and a part-time administrative assistant to lobby the Ontario government on behalf of York students.

Gerard Blink, the student coordinator for the OFS support committee in the upcoming referendum, disputes the validity of this explanation. "CYSF is operating on a small budget," Blink said, "but OFS membership is more important than hiring a full-time researcher and an administrative assistant. They'd be trying to do the same job OFS does...and the Government responds much better to a 200,000 person strong organization (OFS' membership) than 15,000 (CYSF members)."

OFS, according to its chairperson Bernard Drainville, sees the basic question of this referendum as "what is the best way to achieve these goals?" "Our response," Drainville explained, "is that by working with the rest of the students in the pro-



CYSF president Reya Ali (above) says CYSF not getting money's worth from OFS, while OFS chairperson Bernard Drainville stresses need for student provincial lobby group.



GARY BLAKELEY

vince, we can make sure the Government addresses our needs. For \$3.00 each student gets a voice at the provincial level.

"What's the point of isolating yourselves from the rest of the students in the province," Drainville continued. "More than ever it's important that we have someone speaking for the students."

According to Blink, "three dollars is not much for the benefits achieved." Examples of these benef-

its, which OFS feel was due in large part to their efforts, include an eight percent increase in OSAP, a limit of a maximum four percent increase in tuition fees, and the exemption of residence food from provincial sales tax. Blink says this last benefit saves each residence student over \$100 a year.

Ali does not feel that CYSF would lose its voice at the provincial level by dropping out of OFS. "We could be effective lobbying the provincial government," Ali said. "We would have more resources and research behind it (the lobbying). It's a matter of who gets the ear of whom (and not sheer numbers)."

"This is the first year York has had as much exposure at Queen's Park," Ali said. He attributes this development to the hiring of a researcher to help prepare a brief detailing York's needs for the Minister of Colleges and Universities, Gregory Sorbara. "Because of that extra manpower," Ali believes that CYSF executive "knows more about York vis-a-vis their stand among Ontario universities than at any other time."

Ali is also convinced that CYSF is not getting its money worth from OFS as York's specific concerns regarding certain issues, such as the funding formula for Ontario universities and York's space shortage have not been acted upon. Ali has said that the OFS makes no mention in their response to the Bovey Commission Report of changes to the funding formula but only made recommendations that more money should be injected into the system.

CYSF's Director of External Affairs Sandra Antoniani claims that the OFS has no interest in changing the funding formula. Antoniani says that if she represented all the universities in Ontario it would be "political suicide to change the formula. The bottom three may be thrilled...but the universities at the

top of the scale won't be thrilled as they stand to lose money," Antoniani added. "What I could do is lobby for more money." And according to both her and Ali that is exactly what OFS is doing.

Drainville reacted angrily to these charges, denying that OFS did not want to change the formula. "I think it (the funding formula) sucks," Drainville exclaimed. "It sucks for everyone—it sucks for Guelph, it sucks for Lakehead, it sucks for York." Blink said that OFS is working on amending the formula and "doesn't know where Reya got his information from."

Both point to the OFS three hundred page submission to the Bovey Commission which called for a funding formula that was "predictable and stable" and a "block funding" model to "provide a first step...to update the historical base of the formula to current enrolment levels."

Leanne MacMillan, an OFS fieldworker responsible for York, believes that CYSF took their information out of context. Ali bases his information on the OFS response of March 1985 to the Bovey Commission which states: "There should be no revision of the funding formula, along the lines proposed in Recommendation 25 of the Bovey Commission, until the Cabinet publicly responds to the Fisher Report and the final report (of 1981) and the final report of the Bovey Commission, and these responses are debated in the appropriate manner in the Legislature."

MacMillan asserts that this quote doesn't show OFS to be against changing the funding formula, but against the specific changes proposed in the Bovey report. "OFS has always wanted to change the funding formula," MacMillan said.

The referendum campaign begins today.

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