

editorial

Wednesday November 4th, 1992 • Volume 27, Issue 13



DICE BY J. LANGSTEIN

Sometimes a compromise won't do

Picture the lofty top floor of York's Ross Building, where a group of professors, students and administrators are deciding whether to cancel classes for an hour on Dec. 7.

The reason is a vigil marking the deaths of 14 women killed at a Montreal university three years ago.

No one denies that violence against women is a crucial issue, but professor after professor, and student after student rise with their own version of "It's a very worthy cause, but..."

"But the 7th is the last Monday class — what if an exam is scheduled?"

It gets changed to the 4th instead, and the 'buts' start again.

"But we planned our academic schedule already."

"But we're here to learn, aren't we? Isn't cancelling classes defeating the purpose?"

"But York is one of the safest universities for women to speak their mind — sure there are problems, but..."

Many suggest compromises.

"Maybe we should settle for no academic punishment if students skip class. In the meantime we should develop a more permanent policy so we can work our schedules around it."

"Isn't that what we decided last year? Yes? Did it get done? Nobody knows. Oh. Well, we should do it this year."

This is basically what happened at last month's Senate meeting, where only two professors spoke out unconditionally in favor of cancelling classes for an hour on the 4th. One of them was prompted to ask, "What further holocaust could further persuade us?"

Apparently all it took was a reminder that there are actually real people involved — and a little bit of guilt:

A female student stood, so angry, she was shaking. She took a deep breath to regain her composure, and told the room full of strangers that she's a survivor of a sexual assault on this campus, that she went to the vigil last year, that she skipped not only class, but an exam and was

granted a re-write because she refused to leave her instructor's office until she got one. As a survivor, she said, the vigil gave her strength.

The room became quiet, the vote was taken, and nobody voted against the proposal.

It's easy enough for academics in the "ivory tower" to say no to such a request when they see it as part of a "an endemic societal problem." It's necessary to see that the kind of hatred that spurred Marc Lepine to shoot 14 female engineering students is not an isolated result of one warped mind, but we can't lose sight of actual women who deal with that kind of hatred every day of their lives.

The annual candlelight vigil is for these women and the people who care about them. The vigil itself won't put an end to the violence, but it's a chance for women to gain strength and solace from each other and their allies, so they can fight violence more effectively.

It's also an opportunity to let people know that the hatred didn't begin or end when Lepine killed those 14 women. It continues with

- the death of Chantal Brochu, a student who was raped and murdered near the Université de Montréal in September this year;

- the sexual assault of a woman who was grabbed and kissed against her will by two men on the University of Toronto's downtown campus, also in September;

- the man who was recently arrested and charged with sexually assaulting two York students;

- the increase, at U of T, in reports of "anonymous" harassment which, a U of T official says, are often directed at public feminists;

- and with the 189 reports of sexual harassment, battery and sexual assault that York's Sexual Harassment Education and Complaint Centre handled this past year.

There are a lot more dangerous threats to getting a quality education than losing one hour of class time.

PM

• If our feature on feminist pornography in this issue piqued your curiosity (or raised your ire, got your dander up or what have you), then there's a conference coming up you ought to check out.

It's called Refusing Censorship: Feminists and Activists Fight Back. Organizers say it's a public forum on the issues of censorship. Panelists will include a variety of artists, activists and experts — including York sociologist Thelma McCormack. It will also feature film screenings in the evening.

It's taking place this weekend, Nov. 7-8 at the CBC Auditorium, Front & John Streets. For information, call the Feminist Caucus of the Ontario Coalition Against Film and Video Censorship at 863-9897.

• The phrase "York Security officials were not available for comment" is all too common in the pages of this newspaper. And we've recently learned why.

An official from York's security operations told us this week about a policy over at his office: the only three officials with authority to speak to *excalibur* are avoiding impromptu interviews. It seems our campus guardians want to respond only to written questions.

According to the official, this wall of silence came down last year, after some security noses were put out of joint by *excal*'s coverage, in which the officials claimed security was misquoted.

We don't know exactly what articles pissed off the troops, but we can guess. We began last year by revealing that Security planned to eliminate the popular escort van system — not to improve efficiency (as they claimed) but as a cost-cutting move (they've since semi-recapitulated on this). Then we wrote about how Security hires spies to watch their parking lot employees — a practice a national guard union president described as the worst of its kind in Canada. Finally, we reported on the March protests against racism in the security force.

They're using the approach Metro police chief William McCormack uses with the *Globe and Mail* and the *Star*, and it has the same effect: it makes them look mean, distant and bureaucratic. If York Security wants a better reputation, they ought to start being more friendly.

Black Caucus

Who's writing about your issues?

MAKE SURE YOU ARE AFRICAN-BLACK HISTORY MONTH ISSUE BLACK WRITERS CAUCUS

excalibur Black Writers Caucus next meeting Thursday November 12 at 5:30pm in the excal office

Desperately seeking
Typists!
come on in
and talk to
Pat or John about
volunteering for the most
necessary and appreciated
job at Excal (room 420
Student Centre)

CORRECTION:

We forgot to acknowledge Joelle Medina, for the photograph of artist Christina Iglesias's work at the AGYU in October 28th's issue.

excalibur

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excalendar

Thursday, Nov 5
Production meeting at 1:30 pm
Staff meeting at 5 pm
All events in the *excalibur* office

Piece of mind:

"I hold on to the idea of pleasure as a site of resistance. Not just pleasure as an end in itself, but that pleasure might be the beginning of something else: of real subversion."
— bell hooks