

## Students must work together for change, says OFS chair

Editor:

As the Chairperson of the Ontario Federation of students, I feel I must respond to recent Letter to the Editor and Opinion Columns in the *Excalibur*.

The Ontario Federation of Students is just that, a federation of almost 200,000 students from 30 student associations around the province. In the recent past we have been responsible for a number of concrete victories for students.

Limits on student contributions to OSAP, increases in the weekly loan limit, extensions on the repayment period for student loans and the eligibility of part-time students for Canada student loans are some of the things we've accomplished on student aid. The reinstatement of the Ontario Youth Employment Program last December translated into 53,000 jobs this past summer. Residence meals are exempt from provincial sales taxes on food, saving residence students about \$100 a year due to pressure by the Ontario Federation of Students.

Over the past few months, representatives from the Ontario Federa-

tion of Students have met with the Honourable Gregory Sorbara, the new Liberal Minister of Colleges and Universities, and the PC and NDP critics David McFadden and Marion Bryden respectively. In our meeting with the provincial treasurer, the Honourable Robert Nixon, about federal transfer payments, student aid, unemployment and tuition fees, he referred to us as the "recognized and respected voice" of Ontario students.

The Ontario Federation of Students also meets and works with other interest groups in the post-secondary sector such as university administrations, professors and staff associations.

Our campaign this year is focussing on strong student participation in making changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program. We're calling for a complete review of the OSAP system and are circulating postcards to the Premier to be signed by members of the Federation. To date, we've had overwhelming response from around the province.

Students are also working on stopping the massive increases in tuition and incidental fees we've faced as a result of persistent government underfunding. We're calling for increased student participation in the decision making bodies locally. We're working on affordable quality housing for students. Basically our campaign this year is working on a Student Agenda for Change.

In terms of how we achieve our goals, the primary representative for the Ontario Federation of Students is the Director of External Affairs at CYSF, Sandra Antoniani. She is running OSAP Appeal Clinics on campus this month as a result of the OFS Student Aid Manual and campaign documents. Copies of our research materials, campaign materials and leaflets and our INTRO magazine are available from her at the CYSF office.

In terms of the OFS fieldworkers their responsibility is to act as a liaison between campuses. Each of them is responsible for 10 campuses and provides organization resources, tips on running effective campaigns and information from around the province and Queen's Park. They are not meant to be a replacement for an active student council. The Ontario Federation of Students is students working together to achieve common goals.

Now more than ever with a Liberal minority government that was elected with a commitment to post secondary educational reforms students need to work together. Now is not the time to be squabbling amongst ourselves, but rather to be working together on a strong, well organized and planned campaign to make concrete changes for students.

We look forward to a productive year with York students.  
—Bernard Drainville  
Chairperson, OFS

## CYSF cannot afford loss of OFS political clout in period of change

By Gary Symons

Since last Monday I've begun to take the current debate over our membership in the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS), e.g., should we stay or should we go, very personally.

The reason for my sudden intense interest is simple, and selfish, but judging from the disgruntled line of students at the Financial Aid Office that day, it shouldn't be unique.

At the present time OFS is the only large and effective lobbying group representing student interests to the provincial government, and those interests include a substantial restructuring of the student assistance program in Ontario. That alone makes me a supporter of OFS, but it's not the only reason.

Over the years, and last year in particular, OFS has also been running campaigns to keep tuition costs down, to retain the principle of universal accessibility, and to create summer employment. During the last few years of the Tory dynasty in Queen's Park these campaigns met with only limited success, but now with the Liberals in power, the federation has finally achieved the breakthrough it has sought for so long. The provincial Liberals have come to adopt almost without exception, and by no coincidence, the OFS policies on post-secondary education while they were in opposition, and now, like it or lump it, they're stuck with a pretty attractive bundle of promises. Since none of these policies have yet been implemented it's still too early for dancing in the streets, but the situation as it stands now makes the response of our own student government, CYSF, seem somewhat curious.

The current CYSF executive, with the possible exception of Director of Finance Tim Rider, believes York is not getting its money's worth from OFS, and after years of feuding between the two groups they are now preparing to withdraw their \$30,000 membership (that translates into three dollars for every student represented by CYSF) and go it alone. Director of External Affairs Sandra Antoniani, the prime mover on this latest pullout bid, calls the membership fee a "bad investment," and believes CYSF can do the same job better and less expensively by hiring its own researcher/lobbyist.

But, after two years of CYSF watching, I can't agree. This isn't a slight against our current student government—on the contrary, York

hasn't had a more effective, hard-working group at 105 Central Sq. for at least four years—it is merely a realistic appraisal of the present capabilities of our student government.

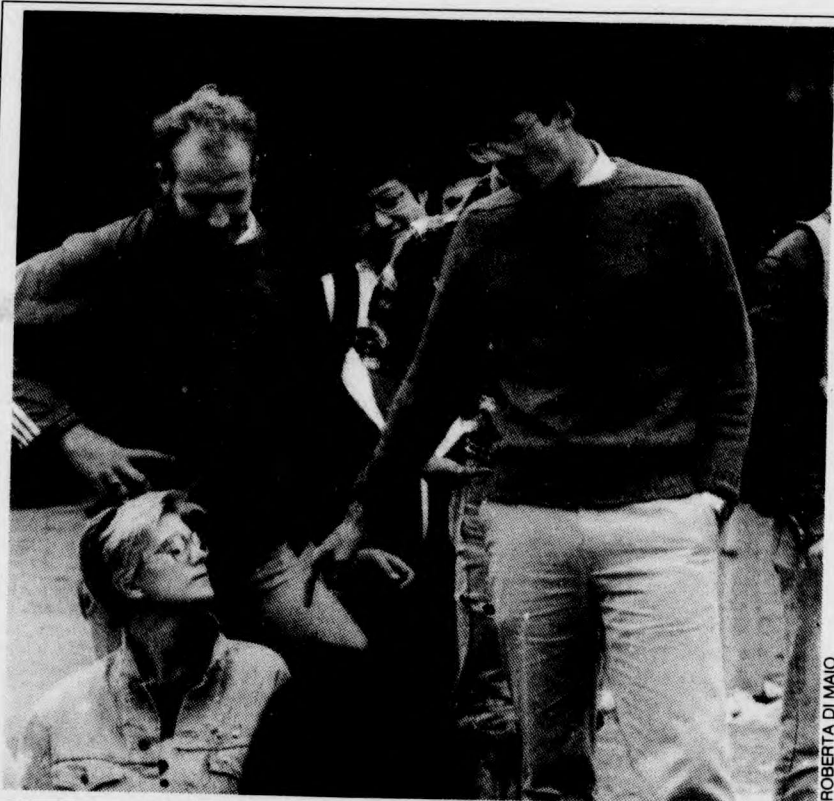
First of all, the political system at York is so fragmented that CYSF has been crippled in its efforts to represent student interests on our own campus. In fact, CYSF represents only 54 percent of York students, and, if the Graduate Students Association succeeds in its bid to withdraw its membership, that percentage will soon dwindle substantially. President Reya Ali, to his credit, has launched a program to reestablish CYSF as a viable central student government, but right now that animal does not exist. Any attempt to take on the lobbying and research tasks now performed for us by OFS before Ali's restructuring program is completed will thus be doomed to failure. CYSF is trying to wrestle with a beastie that is, at least for now, far too big for its present abilities.

Also, CYSF by itself cannot hope to rival the political clout held by the 200,000 member strong OFS, and central lobbying organization that doesn't necessarily mean York should always remain a member of OFS, but, with major government budgetary decisions due to soon come down from on high, to pull out now might mean that York will again be lost in the shuffle.

A better approach to the problem would be to establish the external affairs system Antoniani desires and use it to increase our own participation and political leverage in OFS. Then, next year when (hopefully) Ali's restructured plans have become a functioning reality, the question of OFS membership can be reconsidered.

By doing so, CYSF and York students gain three benefits: President Ali will have the time necessary to make sure the implementation of his centralization plan goes through; York students will still reap the harvest of OFS lobbying during this crucial period in the government/university system relationship; and Antoniani will be able to put in place an external affairs system ready to deal with the provincial government by next year in the event that CYSF again decides to withdraw its membership.

In the meantime, Ms. Antoniani could always use her lobbying group to help me get some food money out of OSAP...



ROBERTA DI MAMO

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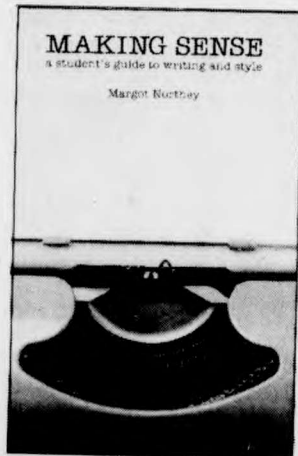
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