



Photo: Mario Scattoloni

## Schools could lose their autonomy

# Law will force elimination of university deficits

Barb Taylor

York University officials say proposed legislation to curb university deficits will not affect their plans, but student leaders are concerned the law will have a wide range of effects on university programmes and services.

The legislation was introduced in the provincial parliament on December 22, and once passed, it will require universities with deficits larger than two percent of their operating costs to provide the Ontario Council of University Affairs with a schedule for the elimination of the debt. If the university's plan is inadequate, the OCUA can recommend that a financial supervisor take over the roles of the Board of Governors and the university president. The supervisor could then make cuts on behalf of the provincial government.

Five universities have deficits above the two percent limit: York, Brock, Ryerson, Laurentian and Trent. Sheldon Levy, an official in the

office of the York President, estimates that York's deficit will be \$2.848 million at the end of the year. The *Toronto Star* has cited figures of \$4.05 million and \$3.6 million. "The deficit was not an accident," said Levy. "It was a purposeful move in investing in the future, in enrollment, in teaching and in research."

### Totally ridiculous

Helena Mitchell, Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario feels that the university community and the public "will be tricked into seeing it only as deficit legislation and not cutbacks. It puts the blame for underfunding at the local level so the Ministry is seen as good managers, which is totally ridiculous." Mitchell feels the province has not adequately planned its funding of universities, and says, "All the universities can do is play catch up ball every time there is an announcement." She points out that almost all

Ontario universities have deficits of some level.

Opinions on the effects of the legislation vary with projections on the increase in provincial grants for next year. The Council of Ontario Universities has requested a 12 percent increase to cover the cost of inflation and the years of cutbacks. Bette Stephenson, Minister of Colleges and Universities, has told CFSO that the increase will be between 5 and 8 percent.

Students are worried that a low increase combined with the deficit legislation will cause major cutbacks within the university system. Morris Bevilacqua, President of CYSF, projects lower rates of equipment replacement, and a reduction in services in the form of library and staff layoffs. In his view, Fine Arts students will be hit the hardest.

Mitchell feels the trend towards higher incidental fees may become greater, particularly if tuition fees are held at

5 percent increases. She points to recent increases such as the computer fee at Ryerson, and building fees at other universities. Mitchell also questions the cost of administering the deficit legislation particularly if "overpaid" provincial financial advisors have to step in.

### Wage controls

The York administration feels it can eliminate the deficit without affecting its current level of services. Levy, and William Farr, Vice-President of Employee and Student Relations, points out that prior to the legislation, York had a policy to eliminate the deficit before the end of 83-84.

Farr points to increased revenue from higher enrollment and a lower increase in staff costs because of the five percent wage controls. He feels that a 12 percent increase is necessary to cover all increases including fuel, library costs, and other de-

mands such as smaller class sizes. While Levy projects a decrease in the deficit of \$700,000 to \$900,000 in 83/84, Farr believes the figure will be substantially higher.

While Farr believes that an increase of 7 percent could be adequate to maintain services, Levy says, "7 percent is not enough to maintain the university, after years of underfunding, you can't rectify it with a 7 percent grant."

With a current budget of \$109 million, the difference between a 5 and 12 percent increase is \$7.63 million. Bevilacqua is worried this shortfall, combined with the deficit legislation, would remove a buffer for the university, resulting in drastic cutbacks.

The legislations also raises the issue: university autonomy. Bevilacqua says, "I think that the government has stepped over the boundary

where intervention in the university is concerned." While Farr is not opposed to the legislation, he says, "we're just as capable of running our affairs as they would be-in serving the needs of our clientele we're probably more qualified." Mitchell sees this as part of a move on the part of the government to increase the role of OCUA and reduce university autonomy without public discussion.

While the university will be presenting their plans to OCUA this spring, CYSF will be co-operating with students at other universities to oppose cutbacks. CFS-O is planning to discuss the legislation at their conference this month and incorporate it in their plan of action this spring. Final decisions on next year's budget and deficit elimination will be made after the funding announcement which is expected sometime in late February.

# EXCALIBUR

# 1983