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BOG REPORT

York's central student council, CYSF, and the councils of Glendon and Atkinson, have requested increases in their operating grants. Whereas now the councils of Glendon, Atkinson, and CYSF get from each constituent, full-time student \$40.00, \$25.23, and \$40.00, these charges would respectively jump to \$53.00, \$53.00, and \$49.00. These increases would be financed through equivalent increases in "tuition" fees for York students. All York students who do not fall into the Glendon or Atkinson category would be paying the fee requested by CYSF, if the Board of Governors (BOG) ratifies that request. CYSF thus in this case speaks for non-member constituencies, like Osgoode, Bethune, and Calumet.

Although CYSF makes the request for the increase from \$40.00 to \$49.00, CYSF does not exclusively control expenditure of the money. In the current arrangement, non-member constituencies (Osgoode, Calumet, and Bethune College) get \$27.50 of the \$40.00 contributed by each full-time student. CYSF has exclusive power over the remaining \$12.50 contributed by students from member constituencies. The \$12.50 contributed by students from non-member constituencies goes into a trust fund. Funds from the respective trusts can be spent only after agreement between CYSF and the respective non-member constituency. If you find this confusing, you are not alone.

The council's requests carry significant weight. Tended by the Glendon, Atkinson, and CYSF executives, the proposals are first considered by BOG's Student Relations Committee. The Committee operates on the assumption that the tradition, the request of the executive is assumed to be the democratically determined request of all those for whom the executive speaks. The BOG Committee assumes that any dissent against increased council operating grants has been settled by the students as a political question, for which they are exclusively responsible. Consequently, the Committee does not pretend to be interested in the procedure employed by student council executives in their decision to seek an increased budget. The executive's request would have to be unconscionable for the Student Relations Committee to question it. Failing such unconscionability, the Committee sends the requests on to the Finance Committee, as it did at the February 8th BOG meeting. The Finance Committee would normally rubber-stamp the proposal, concerning itself only with the task of implementation.

In their present system of raising revenue, the council's accountability to students is minimal. I feel that change implemented along the lines suggested below would make York's student governments more accountable, and would help them improve their performance.

The First Proposal: Accountability on Student Bills

York students pay to support student government through a charge which is deceptively folded into the "tuition" category on their University bills. Most clearly, it is

foreign to our parliamentary notion of accountability that we should support any organization when we are unaware that we are doing so. The Board of Governors justifies taking a student government grant out of "tuition" revenues by employing an expanded notion of "tuition". An element of truth admittedly inspires the idea that student councils enhance education through the activities they sponsor. However, if BOG insists on imposing an obligatory tax on students to support student councils, it should, according to minimum standards of democracy, let the taxpayers know. This would merely call for another line of itemization on our bills—hardly an onerous administrative burden in a computerized era. Whether the Board continued to pass on the funds as a "grant" (which it formally bestows upon councils on a discretionary basis), or if it gave councils the right to charge students a council fee (which could be made subject to Board approval) would make no practical difference to students.

BOG may object that it does not want to be accountable for the grants it bestows upon student councils. Such an objection would amount to a second weak link in the chain of accountability between students and their councils. Such a weakness strengthens my argument for a change from the grant system to the fee system, where councils charge their constituents directly.

The Second Proposal: Accountability Through Referenda

It is fundamentally important for the University to let us know what we pay to support student governments. But it is even more crucial for students to participate in deciding how much they tax themselves in order to finance their own councils.

We have become accustomed to the idea that citizenship in a country entails the cost of supporting its government. And we have little direct participation in setting our nation's tax levels. But the legitimacy of a national tax imposed by the government depends on the unsuitability of more democratic alternatives. While most people may prefer a more democratic decision-making process, our country is too populous and complex for individuals to play direct roles in national decisions.

However, whereas "indirect" democracy may be the only practical option for a polity like Canada, I believe we can achieve more direct participation in a smaller community like York University.

Student councils have massive budgets. For instance, CYSF's budget for 1981-82 was \$131,040, most of which comes from student pockets. Relative to the budgets of other student councils in Ontario, this may be small. But student councils at universities in the U.S. operate on NO BUDGET other than that which they raise through the voluntary support of their constituents. I do not advocate that York adopt such a policy. A switch to that system would be too radical a shift for our councils to absorb.

But more accountability could help our

student councillors improve their performance. Ratification in a general referendum should precede any council's request for an increase in operating grants. The campaign for approval by the requisitioning council would elevate the profile of the government on campus, and focus students' attention on its performance.

The Third Proposal: Accountability Through Rebates

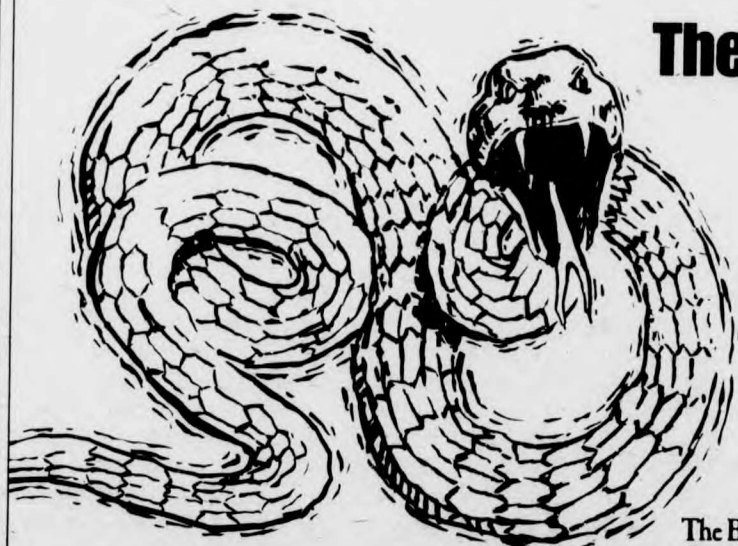
The final proposal would involve a rebate enabling dissatisfied students to receive a partial reimbursement of the money they contributed towards their student government. The availability of rebates would have to be carefully circumscribed in order to protect councils from unjust depletions by "free riders". If, before collecting his money, a student had to submit to his council a formal, written complaint about the performance of that council, and then had to wait for several months to give that council a fair period in which to respond, a high level of constructive criticism could be directed at our student governments. Given their constant (and justified) complaints about student apathy, our councillors could hardly resent increased participation by their constituents. And, to protect the councils from a total budgetary collapse, the amount which could be collected by a complainant should be limited. I suggest that students should be able to collect only 10% of the fees which they individually contribute. If well publicized, a \$5.00 rebate would be sufficient incentive for students to voice dissatisfaction to their councils; budgets would still be insulated from mortal attack.

The rebate proposal presents several problems, most of which I do not address here. One problem is the uncertainty that would be introduced into budgetary planning. Another is the administrative cost that would be involved. A third would be establishing fair criteria for a valid claim. Determining a fair method of adjudicating would be a fourth obstacle. And fifthly, we encounter the difficulty of recovering money from not one, but two student councils: CYSF and the respective constituency. While I admit these problems may render a rebate proposal unworkable, Waterloo and Western Universities have reportedly implemented rebate plans. Improved accountability may justify the pains of implementation at York.

Summary: A Rousseau Approach

The three proposals would all contribute to a higher level of accountability in our student governments, moving us away from indirect democracy and closer to government by direct democracy. The first proposal is to have student council fees show up on our bills rather than be included under "tuition". The second proposal is to make increases in operating grants subject to general ratification of the students. And thirdly, students should, after presenting a valid, substantial complaint, be able to collect a 10% portion of the fees they paid in support of their governments.

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CYSF ELECTION TRIBUNAL

will be meeting

5:00 p.m.

March 31, 1982

S105 Ross

Copies of the procedural format can be picked up Monday, March 29, after 12:00 p.m.