

Slater requests more time as York bombs out at Wright Commission hearings

By MARILYN SMITH

York's name is mud with the Wright Commission. And it all got slung about last Wednesday at York's public hearing with the commission. The big chance to lash out at the report petered out into "Please sir, we want more time."

That was bad enough. Never mind that every post-secondary institution across the province has made a reply to the report the number one priority item on their schedules. Never mind that the stakes are future government policy.

As chance would stage it, York president David Slater's request for more time and another hearing was followed by a presentation that wowed the commission. The Students' Administrative Council at the University of Toronto stepped up after Slater to present a 32-page comprehensive brief compiled by a 35-student commission.

The commission was impressed. In fact, it invited SAC to participate in the hearing with the Council of Ontario Universities and the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association.

The psychological implications of York's poor showing against the showy triumph of SAC was evident during a coffee break when one commissioner remarked that "they (York) think they're so important."

The great debate over the Wright Report is raging all about most institutions across Ontario. Administrators, faculty and students are united together in this one instance. Their fears are different and indeed their recommendations are different. But the factions are united in this one thing — the Wright Report must not go through in its present form in June.

Perhaps it is best to say that York has remained calm and unruffled in the flurry of briefs. It might be best to say it that way. But it wouldn't be honest. The fact is that while every other post-secondary institution has given the report priority attention, York has gone about the whole matter in the most stumbling and inept way imaginable.

Neither students, staff, faculty or administrators have devoted much effort to a document having this many implications.

The commission chairman, Doug Davis told Slater the same thing he told a shouting Young Socialist delegation the month before, "We can't answer your requests until you submit your brief and give the commission the opportunity to study what you have to say."

For the record, York had prepared an official brief. It was written by Slater's assistant, Terry Olson, under the supposed guidance of administrative studies dean James Gillies. He had little to do with the brief and little York-wide input went into the content. Olson said he requested a submission from every student council. Not one gave a brief.

The outcome was predictable. Senate refused the brief last Tuesday, the day before the hearing, vowing they'd rather send an empty-handed delegation, than one carrying a brief with a tone of "the most effable snottiness." That's how Glendon economics professor David McQueen put it.

And it is a snotty report. It's filled with clichés of ivory-towered elitism.

"Professors are by definition abnormal people. Normal people do not wish to spend most of their lives reading books and getting involved in long esoteric discussions and abstract ideas about theories and about basic research. University professors do — and they prefer to be around students who share

some of these same characteristics and enthusiasms. Most of the undergraduate students do not. The result is that most professors would prefer to have most of their students at some other institution than their own."

"The reality is that the university is there for higher education and many students are there for just more education."

The York brief runs counter to the Wright Report's emphasis on accessibility and integrated living and learning patterns.

The Commission criticizes the system for "the inculcation of unnecessary and destructive competitiveness among individuals; the senseless ranking, both social and academic; the maldistribution of resources and preferences; the structured and bureaucratized system which we deplore but to which we submit; the injustices of socio-economic origin that are reflected in our school system".

It's easy to see the commission and York would never have seen eye to eye on what university is all about.

The Atkinson brief prepared by an Ad Hoc committee stands on more agreeable ground. Accessibility, diversity and formal and informal education experiences mesh well with the ideals of the Atkinson experiment.

The Wright Report heartily endorses part-time education. This pleases the ad hoc committee. They only caution that part-time students not be put in competition with full-time students for class space and time. The fuller range of options through a University of Ontario also gets endorsement from Atkinson.

The only other significant briefs from York were from women professors on the status of women at York. They focused their concern on equalizing the roles of men and women.

The Wright Report deals with some of the inequalities of women such as underrepresentation in faculty ranks, the difficulties of getting back to school once a family is started and the need for money and daycare facilities.

The York status of women brief scores one point. They point out the sexist attitude throughout the report in spite of these recommendations. The "biological role of women" demands adequate provision for maternity leaves, tax relief for child care and daycare.

The status brief points out that this emphasis on the biological role of women makes it appear that men have no biological role; no real responsibility for family life beyond the economic realm.

The Council of the York Student Federation did not make a critique of the Wright report. Their reason — the current smozzle over the election of next year's council. The time of year and the academic crush are back-up reasons. Yet look at SAC. They had the same situation with a council acclaimed, contested through campus-wide referendum and a new election set. Sandwiched in this same time slot was the SAC headed Roberts Research Library confrontation.

How is it they managed to come up with a brief? The main reason is organization. They have a full-time education officer on staff to co-ordinate such efforts. SAC reasons education is the main function of their mandate, so the money is well spent. CYSF prefers to hire a \$9,200 a year business manager.

Student senators asked to join the faculty on their brief. This was a mistake. These students assume that everyone has the same beef with the Wright report. Both SAC and the



University of Toronto faculty argued against the suggested co-ordinating board.

SAC proposes a board more representative of the public, students and faculty. The faculty decries any intervention in the autonomy of the university. SAC endorses part-time education. The faculty flatly reject increasing part-time education. They felt it threatens full-time scholarship and would not keep the quality of the university.

The dichotomy of views and interests is evident throughout the two briefs. Students must make their own submissions if they want to express their views. In their token senate representation, they have no real voice. Any dissent they may have with the thrust of a York-wide brief will carry no weight.

York is finally turning its attention to the report. It's getting later and later. The Commission said last Wednesday they will decide March 27 which parts of the report to release as final and which portions to redraft. The outcry has been loud enough to push back the June deadline at the legislature. This is not

confirmed but seems likely in the broad hints made by the commission and university education minister George Kerr.

It's fine for York to attack the Commission for demanding responses at the worst point in the academic year. But ignoring the report won't make it go away.

It didn't go away when submissions were originally called for two years ago. Few universities responded. The only York submission came from a small group of students. The universities argue now, "we didn't realize how important it was going to be." Yet here at York, in spite of its recognized importance, the report has had no serious community involvement. There hasn't even been a campus-wide distribution of the report.

Faculty and students could have made their response a practical academic exercise. The scope of such a critique merits academic credit.

Pretensions of experimentation and liberalism aside, when it comes to the application, York sinks back into an ivory-tower stupor.