

New age for human rights heralded

Mike Monastyrskij

"We are leading into a new chapter of human rights," according to Jose Zalaquett, Chairman of the International Executive Committee of Amnesty International.

Speaking in Osgoode Hall Law School last Wednesday, November 26, he said that in the new era, "human rights will become a household word and a mandate for activism."

During the talk sponsored by Amnesty International and the Osgoode Hall International Law Society Zalaquett went on to

explain Amnesty International's role in the defence of these rights. "We concern ourselves with political prisoners, particularly those that have not used or advocated violence. We are opposed to torture in all cases. We advocate a free trial in every case and we are for the abolition of the death penalty."

He added that "in some corners" there is a "nascent feeling" that social and economic rights are a part of human rights and that without them civil or political freedoms are illusory. However, in his opinion Amnesty

International can only occupy itself with political rights if it is to keep its broad membership base.

"It is a practical question. When you widen a group's membership you must necessarily limit its objectives."

Nevertheless, Amnesty did expand its mandate somewhat when it decided last year to advocate the abolition of military aid to governments whose armed forces are thought to violate human rights. This new policy can pose problems.

For example, Zalaquett wrote a letter to American Secretary of State Edmund Muskie, in which he asked the U.S. to cut off aid to El Salvador. Muskie's office wrote back acknowledging El Salvador's violation of human rights but arguing that it was the army's field

units who were responsible for the offences. As a result, Washington believed that that country needed more financial support in order to improve communications between the capital and rural troops.

In the end, Amnesty International asked the United States to monitor El Salvador's use of American aid.

Because much of his audience consisted of law students Zalaquett spent a good deal of time describing the difficulties human rights cases pose for lawyers. In particular, he related his experiences after the 1973 coup d'etat.

At the time, he, along with other lawyers formed the Peace Committee which worked on behalf of 3,000 people believed to

be imprisoned, none of whom were released.

Zalaquett feels that under such circumstances a lawyer's job is not so much to win the cases but to create publicity and through the legal process obtain information relating to the missing people.

"Only a masochist could lose so many cases and still go on...so there must be another aim."

Zalaquett also described the dilemmas journalists face in countries where freedom of speech is limited. There, newspapermen may not want to appear cohorting with the government but at the same time want to keep printing. "One courageous headline and the next day your paper is closed. There is not much sense in that."

CUEW chooses exec

John Molendyk

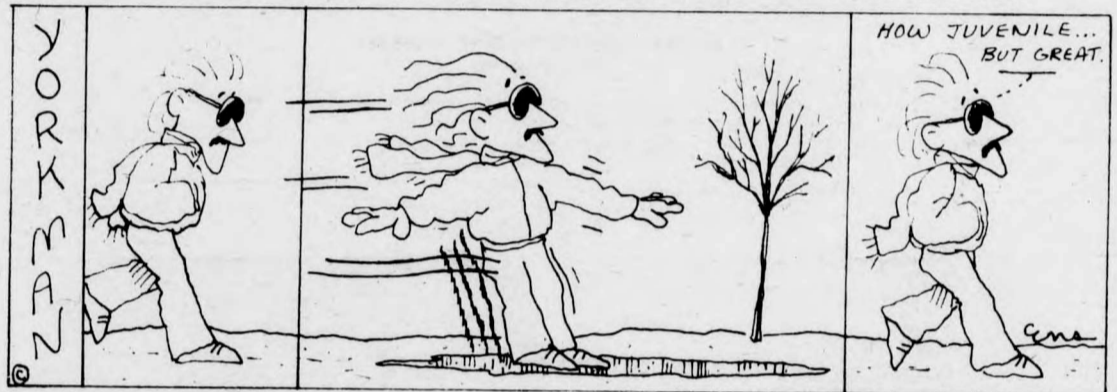
Members of the Canadian Union of Educational Workers voted last week for a new executive committee. The elected officers will serve in their positions until next April.

CUEW President Michael Michie won in his bid for reelection and will serve for a third term. Also re-elected were Treasurer Pat Rogers and Chief Steward (grievances) Leslie Sanders. It is Rogers' second term,

and Sanders' third.

For the position of Vice-president (internal affairs), Louise Fournier replaced Janey Patterson. Deborah Orr won the post of Vice-president (external affairs), and Abie Weisfeld replaced Leonard Pennachetti as Chief Steward (steward's council).

The elections, usually held every April were held up this year due to negotiations with York's administration over the terms of CUEW's new contract.



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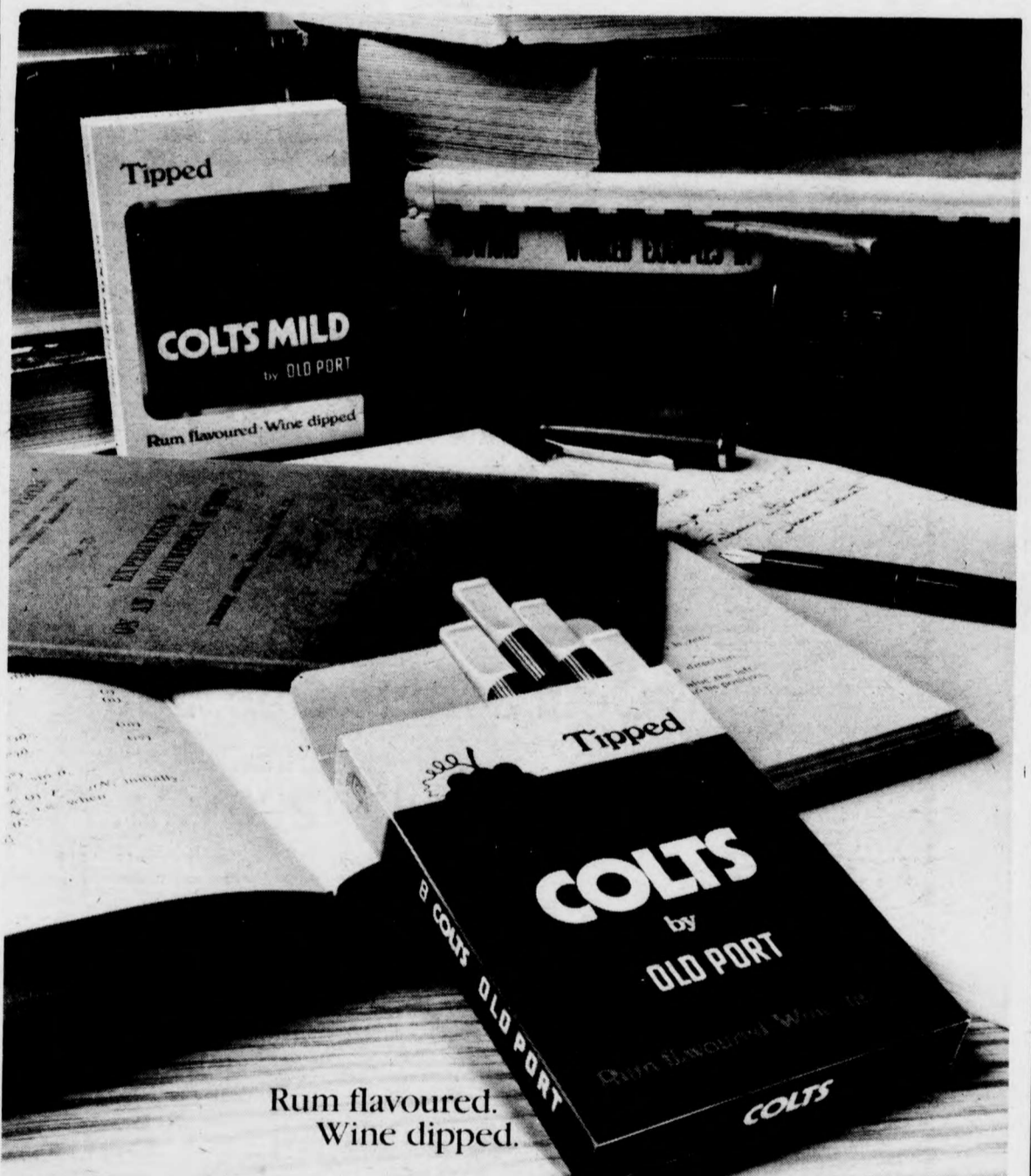
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