

Editorial

Security complex

On the eve of final negotiations between the administration and the Graduate Assistants' Association, we find ourselves pondering which agreement would be best to avert a disastrous strike that York can ill afford.

The central issue we've been led to believe is job security. The administration's latest proposal in this dispute is that PhD students in the upper years of study be less eligible for teaching assistantships. The rationale behind this is crudely reductionistic: because PhD students in their sixth and seventh years no longer qualify as Basic Income Units, which bring in revenue from the government, they should not be entitled to financial help in return. Given that many students don't plan their graduate careers according to funding formulas, we think it is unfair for the administration to consider such a proposal. For some advanced students, financial assistance is just as crucial as it was in their first years of study. Furthermore, such a regulation might reduce the attractiveness of graduate education at York—a suicidal disincentive to an overall enrolment that is declining faster than anywhere else in the province.

Although we dislike the administration's offer, it is impossible for *Excalibur* to support the Graduate Assistants' Association when it is unclear what their proposal is. It is not inconceivable that it could be as unacceptable as the administration's. We only now for sure that the union's motive is a poorly articulated fear of the administration's proposal. But where is the

data to support the union's side? Why did the union lead the administration into arguing over this issue and making such a crazy offer in the first place?

Much more research needs to be done by the union to assess the security of York graduate students, and how their situation compares with grads at other colleges. Are there enough assistantships to keep York's graduate program competitive with others? The union must show us the hard evidence that York grads are getting a poorer deal in terms of financial support and that upper level PhD's are being discriminated against. According to our investigations, there has been no decline in the number of teaching assistantships offered at York over the past several years. Also, the same percentage of grads (41 per cent) in years six and seven are employed as teaching assistants as in years five and below. Surely this is not an unfair figure considering that so many of the remaining PhD 6 and 7 students are part-timers who have secured high paying employment elsewhere.

We believe the Graduate Assistants' Association should approach contract developments more carefully than any other union we know. There is a large measure of support, flexibility and trust in every graduate assistantship: support in the sense that each assistant receives a guaranteed salary regardless of hours put in so that academic concentration need not be burdened by economic worries; flexibility so that grads can alternate between assistantships and other forms of support

as their fortunes and circumstance dictates; and trust that eligibility will be based on a sympathetic consideration of need, competence and scholastic achievement. Can a contract successfully incorporate these elements in legal language?

Furthermore, we are concerned about the union's increasing tendency to view themselves as workers. They are not workers, but aspiring professionals—and professionalism implies a dedication that goes far beyond the limits of contractual clauses. The increased unionization of their profession may lead to specific on-the-job-benefits, but it may also seriously erode the relations between teaching assistants, professors and students. A trade union mentality does not inspire the rapport and collegiality that should be features of a university environment.

Therefore, *Excalibur's* proposal for tomorrow's negotiations is that the entire matter of job security be dropped. A temporary loss of pride to the union (they were the ones who got themselves into this kettle of fish in the first place) may be slight in comparison to the long-lasting deficiencies of a hastily worked out settlement with the men upstairs.

The time has not yet come when graduate teaching assistants should transfer their faith from their professors and graduate directors to legal documents. A quick compromise on the issue of job security as it now is being argued, rather than an abandonment of the matter altogether, will place the members of the GAA in a lot worse position than where they are now.

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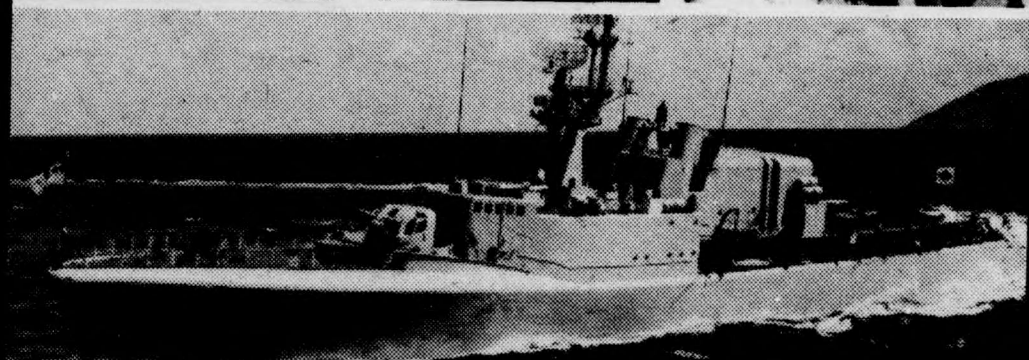
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