

excalibur



York debates 'tainted' money from 'world's richest fascist'

by Daniel Wolgeleenter

An open forum to debate a \$1 million donation from a Japanese billionaire, who once described himself as "the world's richest fascist" did not convince the administration to give the money back, President Harry Arthurs said Tuesday.

The two hour forum in the senate chamber heard from many faculty members upset over the November 22 donation from a foundation headed by Ryoichi Sasakawa. Sasakawa has documented ultra-nationalist and underworld connections. Many of the 50 people in attendance called for the donation's return.

Professor Bob Wakabyashi, who resigned as chair of the East Asian studies programme to protest the donation, told the forum that Sasakawa was an overt fascist in pre-war Japan. Sasakawa was a "worshipper of Mussolini" who was involved in supporting the war and planning assassinations of those who did not, he added.

Wakabyashi said Sasakawa was arrested and interned by the United States in 1945. Although he spent three years in jail, the U.S. decided not to pursue the charges. Sasakawa was, however, classified as a class A (worst rating) war criminal by the United States.

A 1947 report by the U.S. army called Sasakawa "... a man potentially dangerous to Japan's political future."

"If Sasakawa were to come to Canada, he would be subject to indictment as a war criminal," Wakabyashi said. He added that because the Japanese consul participated in the donation, York would be "whitewashing" Japan's and Sasakawa's war crimes in a "gross falsification of history."

Sasakawa heads the Japanese Shipbuilding Industry Foundation (JSIF) which earns about \$10 billion per year from legal speedboat-race gambling. Only about three per cent of that goes to the foundation.

Wakabyashi said Sasakawa's money has not been

legally earned because gambling in Japan inevitably branches into prostitution and extortion.

Sasakawa has made sizeable philanthropic contributions to countless other charitable organizations, including the World Health Organization and UNICEF. In 1983, he received numerous humanitarian awards, including the United Nations Peace medal and the Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award.

Arthurs said the decision to accept the money was made without knowing details of Sasakawa's past. Arthurs said after the forum, however, that York should keep the money because it is "sufficiently distanced" from Sasakawa.

He said the scholarships will bear Sasakawa's and York's name. The foundation which donated the scholarship will not have any control over how the money is used, except for the stipulation that the money go to master's or doctoral students studying in the areas of political economy, environmental protection, and Canada as a Pacific nation.

The decision to accept the scholarship "involved a tight judgement call" because of the ethical considerations, Arthurs said.

He defended the decision to accept the donation, saying it put York in good company. Universities all over the world have already accepted one of 50 available scholarships, including the University of Nairobi, Princeton, Yale and the University of Sussex, Arthurs said.

York is the first Canadian university to receive the award, which Arthurs called the largest in York's history.

Five master's scholarships with a \$12,000 cash value and five doctoral scholarships valued at \$16,000 will be given away every year, dean of graduate studies Sandra Pyke said.

Many faculty members complained that there was not enough consultation within the community on the issue. Arthurs said the senate had not been consulted before the donation was accepted but that the graduate studies

committee headed by Pyke was involved in the consultation process.

The committee contained no experts on the Far East.

Arthurs said the negotiations with the JSIF were conducted in "good faith" and not in a "clandestine fashion." He said negotiations with donors were not conducive to broad-based debate among members of the university community.

"I don't think a university can run efficiently if every decision is a matter of collegial debate," Arthurs said.

Vice-president (academic affairs) Kenneth Davey said the representatives of the Sasakawa foundation were "very upfront" about Sasakawa's past.

"The literature released by them indicates that the whole thing is a move of expiation on his part," Davey said.

Professor Norio Oto disagreed with the idea that Sasakawa was trying to expiate himself with the donations. He said the purpose of Sasakawa's philanthropy is to deflect criticism from his questionable business and political connections.

"I feel we have enough evidence to return this scholarship and by doing this I feel that York University will really shine as the defender of liberalism," he said.

Pyke defended the acceptance of the donation, saying it provided much needed cash to a starved graduate studies endowment pool. She said York is at a disadvantage in a cash starved Ontario university system compared to other more well funded Ontario universities because it is located in expensive Toronto. She said York does not have enough graduate housing to accommodate all the worthy applicants.

She added that York was only able to offer scholarships to 56 per cent of incoming A graduate students this year.

Political science graduate director Ken McRoberts said he supported the acceptance of the scholarship despite never being consulted on the issue.