

Editorial

CARROTS FOR DOLLARS

Universities' collective strength shown at rally must now be used to its fullest

Two seemingly unrelated events occurred last week; faculty, staff, and students rallied together to protest chronic underfunding of post secondary education, and U of T professor John Polanyi was honoured with a Nobel prize in chemistry.

Yet the bond between education and research pulled these events together as Polanyi was invited to be guest speaker at last Thursday's rally.

Polanyi won a standing ovation not only from the crowd of 5,000 but also from the Toronto media, who gave the rally feature coverage. The significance of Polanyi's presence was such that both the *Star* and the *Globe* ran adjacent articles on the Nobel laureate and the rally.

It is doubtful whether the underfunding protest would have received equal media attention without Polanyi's address. Metro universities were relying heavily on Toronto's media, the most powerful disseminators of information in this city, to reach both voters and politicians. The universities' hopes were not in vain.

Yet Polanyi's overwhelming presence also had another effect. The media clung to the laureate's speech so readily that other underfunding issues were obscured in coverage of the rally. For example, instead of noting President Arthur's statement that while funding has plummeted, university enrolment has increased 25 percent in the past decade, the *Star* chose to reveal that "Speakers were interrupted by applause 81 times," and that U of T's marching band is titled the Lady Godiva Memorial Band.

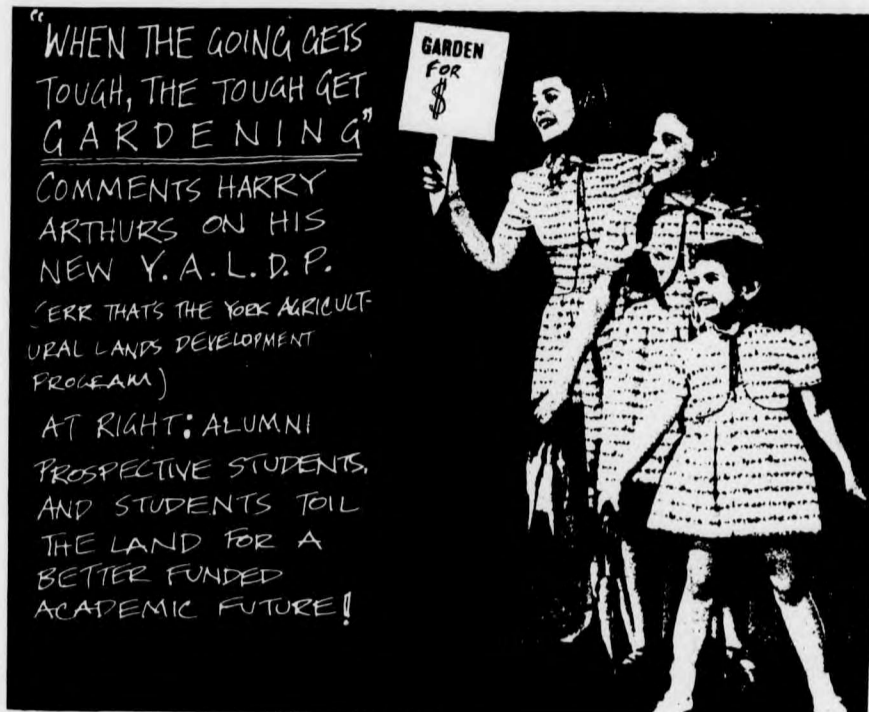
While the public was denied thorough coverage of the event, university constituents suffered an even worse omission when the question period scheduled to follow the speeches was cut short due to time constraints. Speakers were told to hold the podium for no longer than five minutes.

Instead, the 32 minutes allotted for speeches expanded into a full hour and a half, and only two questions from the floor were asked. At least those who stayed on campus and attend the Burton Auditorium rally got a chance to question our own speakers at York.

While the Convocation Hall rally was extremely successful in drawing public attention to the underfunding plight of Ontario's post secondary institutions, it failed as a democratic forum for discussion. Many attending the rally wanted not only to hear from political representatives, but also to challenge them.

Hence when Larry Grossman offered universities a 28 percent increase in operational grants over the next three years, no one could dare question his promise. Perhaps we should have taken Ontario NDP leader Bob Rae's words to heart when he demanded "Stop being so damn polite . . ."

Metro universities have made their point, albeit a tad too politely. That all five schools could pool their resources and their pride to form a unanimous consensus to protest underfunding, is an incredible show of collective strength. Yet it is a strength which must be used to its fullest; now that we have gained both the politicians' and the voters' attention, steps must be taken to ensure that both our questions and demands are answered.



Opinion

But did we try hard enough?

By JAMES FLAGAL

*You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometime, you might find
You get what you need*

The classic Rolling Stones' song played by a University of Toronto organist immediately preceding the rally at Convocation Hall on October 16.

But did we try hard enough? Have we in one fell swoop persuaded the government and the public at large that maintaining a healthy post secondary education system is a fundamental prerequisite in securing our province's future outlook?

There are many measures one could use to determine whether or not our attempts to lobby government officials are successful or not.

Of prime importance is participation. Approximately 5,000 students were on hand at Convocation Hall for the largest post secondary rally in the name of school underfunding, well exceeding the organizers' previous estimates. Unfortunately, when comparing this figure to the base population of students in Metropolitan Toronto, the number seems to lose its luster. With over 100,000 post secondary students in Metro, less than five percent of students attended the crucial event that will partly determine the future condition of university education. Classes were even cancelled to encourage mass participation for the lobbying effort.

On the homefront, York also endured problems in raising enough enthusiasm to reach Burton Auditorium's capacity of 750 people. At its height, the local protest consisted of no more than 350 students, and this disappointing level of participation occurred at a time when pubs were closed to encourage student attendance.

The rally, instead of being the focus of criticism, should pose as a catalyst for constructive dialogue on formulating an all-encompassing lobbying strategy to combat underfunding and restore post secondary education at the top of government budgetary priorities. To achieve this, the advocates of post secondary education (PSE) funding will have to face the harsh realities of the present system.

Attempts to resolve underfunding will require commitment, conviction

and mass support. "Politicians are not going to do anything on their own," said Andrew Macfarlane a U of T Scarborough student. "You've got to push them, that's what democracy is all about." As Bob Rae, leader of the New Democratic Party put it, "Students are going to have to get off their butts to fight for what they believe in."

"Stop being so damn polite about what's going on in your institutions," Rae said, "when you're making a claim—make it. And this involves an established persistent lobbying force which has its foundations at the local student association level. As OFS Communication Director Tim Stutt observed, there's a lot of ways students can get involved to help the underfunding problem.

In contrast to prospective participation levels, one could examine government response to determine the success rating on post secondary lobbying efforts. Ontario Treasurer, Robert Nixon, gave a clear indication of the government's inability to restore funding to national average levels. He explicitly stated after the rally that universities should not expect to see in the November pre-budget, announcements of the 170 million dollars required to bring post secondary funding up to the national average.

It is ironic how certain political figures tried to "score political points" as Rae so aptly described, especially in a room full of university students.

Grossman proposed an \$800-million funding package, a drastic measure, to immediately curb symptoms of underfunding in the foreseeable future. However, Grossman's credibility in fulfilling such a political mandate is definitely questionable, as Greg Sorbara, the Minister of Colleges and Universities was quick to point out in his own introduction of placing the funding problem in historical perspective: where was Grossman's commitment when he was in power?

But then again, this irony is part of the political system we live in. Opposition parties easily perform the role of instant healer, resolving all economic and social problems with the stroke of a pen. Anyone can make these kinds of promises, noted Doug Hayes, another U of T Scarborough student, especially when they are not in charge of the public purse. And

even in the wake of massive support for post secondary funding which includes research, those in charge of the public purse still find it convenient to eliminate 20-million dollars from the National Research Council's (NRC) budget. As a result, such innovative research sectors as photochemistry and kinetics were scrapped. Both program cuts ironically occurred the same week of U of T's professor John Polanyi won the Nobel prize. (Polanyi started his pioneering research at the NRC.)

"Governments do have limits on what they can do," Rae told the audience. And Dr. Polanyi asked, perhaps we are relying more on God than on government to solve PSE's economic difficulties. In essence, they are one and the same, waiting around for some miracle cure from above the clouds or high above Queens Park to cure the chronic underfunding.

This is especially the case for York which faces a two-front battle, and thus must formulate a two-pronged attack. Ontario universities desperately need money; York University desperately needs a revised funding formula. York's funding shortages are not only in the operating area. Overcrowding is concrete evidence that York needs capital funding, but the government seems reluctant to raise funding. Even if this did occur, with the present funding formula discriminating against York's past decade of student body growth, we would probably not receive the required funds.

The York University Development Corporation (YUDC) is an enterprise to start York helping itself with their underfunding and space problem. Relying on government for funding in the future will be like relying on God: institutions will have to start tapping into the private sector themselves and attract private interests to help subsidize post secondary education. The YUDC strategy is simple: York will use its bountiful land resource in order to address the scarcity of buildings. And here is where students can start getting involved, just flip to the back page and fill out the YUDC questionnaire.

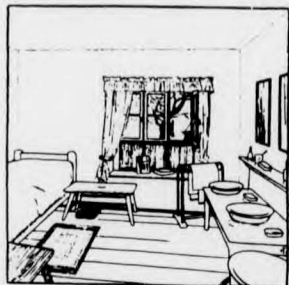
The channels to address underfunding are there for all to take advantage of; the question is—will they be used?

James Flagal is currently employed as Excalibur's news editor

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MAILING ADDRESS:
Room 111, Central Square
York University
4700 Keele Street
Downsview M3J 1P3