

YUSA: *from nebulous body to union in two long, frustrating years*

By OAKLAND ROSS

Crowning a two-year struggle, the York University staff association (YUSA) was certified as an independent union last week.

YUSA is the first staff association at an Ontario university to organize all support staff (secretarial, technical, computer and library workers) into a single bargaining unit.

For the association's 964 members it has been a long, difficult two years, marked both by internal squabbles and by conflicts and frustration with the university administration.

In 1973, few of the members of the association favoured unionization, disliking the "militant" overtones of such a move. But as negotiations with the university progressed, the association's options were gradually whittled away. Unionization became, not simply the best, but the only means for YUSA to protect itself from mistreatment by the university.

Here are the highlights of the support staff's drive toward certification as a union:

MARCH 1, 1973. Outgoing YUSA president Alexis Thomain introduces the possibility of YUSA forming a union. If action begins right away, says Thomain, certification can be achieved within a year.

In these days, YUSA is a nebulous body of roughly 1,000 members. Thomain laments the lack of concern of the members for their association.

OCTOBER 25, 1973. Over 200 members of YUSA voted to form a "voluntary association" instead of a union. It is a compromise move which YUSA investigating committee chairman Warren Holder says will "allow the university to demonstrate good faith while protecting us legally".

In spite of the vote, there are reports of widespread dissatisfaction among YUSA members with the move.

JANUARY 16, 1974. The university administration effectively blocks YUSA's efforts to form a voluntary association by claiming the right to designate as many as 200 senior administrative and supervisory staff as management, thereby excluding them from the unit.

JANUARY 23, 1974. After investigating several alternatives, YUSA's negotiating team discovers the Arbitration Act. It will permit YUSA to declare itself

a non-profit corporation and to enter into salary contracts with the administration. Senior administrative and supervisory staff would not be excluded from such a unit.

On this basis, the team prepares to sign a "minute of agreement" with the university.

However, YUSA president Don Hathaway fails to inform certain members of his executive, as well as the general membership, of the move. YUSA vice-president Warren Holder, who has not been informed of the move, complains publicly about the "clandestine" manner in which the negotiations are being handled. So do other members.

FEBRUARY 1, 1974. The YUSA executive calls for a vote of YUSA members, in order to determine which of three alternative goals to pursue: certification as a union, voluntary recognition under the Ontario Labour Relations Act or consensual agreement (wherein the employer and employees are governed by the federal Arbitration Act, outside the jurisdiction of the Ontario Labour Relations Board).

FEBRUARY 14, 1974. Gabrielle Paddle and Denys Brown, the two candidates for the YUSA presidency, disagree about the direction the association should take. Paddle favours voluntary recognition; under the Ontario Labour Relations Act; Brown prefers consensual agreement.

But both say they will abide by the results of the vote.

YUSA members vote in favour of consensual agreement. The figures: consensual agreement, 119; voluntary association, 109; certification as a union, 49.

FEBRUARY 21, 1974. Paddle is elected as YUSA president, gaining 142 of 263 votes cast.

SEPTEMBER 19, 1975. YUSA is involved in an enlistment drive. Before being recognized by the Labour Relations Board as a voluntary bargaining unit, YUSA must obtain signatures from 65 per cent of an estimated 922 members. At this point, the association has signatures from 400.

The February decision to pursue consensual agreement under the Arbitration Act seems to have gone by the boards.

"We are working as hard as we can on voluntary recognition," says YUSA president Paddle. "If that is refused, we will go before the membership before seeking certification."

Thus, unionization rears its shaggy head once more.

DECEMBER 3, 1974. Representatives from YUSA and the university administration meet to draw up a common "exclusion list" (a list of job categories which would be excluded from the YUSA bargaining unit). After "two lengthy meetings" a significant disparity remains between the two sides.

The possibility that YUSA may forego further attempts to obtain voluntary recognition as a bargaining unit and instead seek certification as a union edges its way toward probability.

And then inevitability.

DECEMBER 16, 1974. By a margin of 202 to seven, YUSA members vote to seek certification as an independent union. The decision follows a breakdown in talks between YUSA and the administration over voluntary recognition of the association as a bargaining unit for York's 922 secretarial, clerical and technical employees.

YUSA executives and members prepare for a long fight. Paddle announces that she will definitely stand for re-election.

JANUARY 20, 1975. YUSA begins its hearings before the Ontario Board of Labour Relations.

FEBRUARY 24, 1975. Gabrielle Paddle is re-elected as president of YUSA.

OCTOBER 27, 1975. After nine months of study, the President's Committee on Staff Compensation and Personnel Policies reports that York misuses its most valuable resource — people. "Staff morale is low, people are becoming hostile to the system, and as a result a staff union is on



YUSA president Gabrielle Paddle, as she was in 1974.

the horizon."

NOVEMBER, 1975. YUSA is accepted by the Ontario Labour Relations Board as a certifiable bargaining unit for York's support staff, now numbering 964. However, the certification of YUSA is contingent upon a vote to establish that YUSA members favour certification. The vote is necessary since YUSA had fallen 43 signatures short of the required 65 per cent before taking its case to the Labour Board. A simple majority will determine YUSA's future.

NOVEMBER 5, 6, 7, 1975. Three-quarters of YUSA's members vote at polling stations set up on cam-

pus. Seventy-nine per cent of them favour unionization.

NOVEMBER 7, 1975. YUSA becomes an independent union, gaining the right to negotiate formally with the administration, the benefits of conciliation and arbitration and the right to strike.

YUSA's drive toward unionization is successful. But a new effort is just beginning.

NOVEMBER 13, 1975. Gabrielle Paddle declares that YUSA's major struggle lies ahead — the negotiation of a good first contract with the university.

Those negotiations will begin early in the New Year.

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