

A philosophical dialogue on Yusa

By René Schmidt

Setting: Athens. Yusa, the scribe, is parading around the market place with a sign. He is on strike because the sophists who employ him treat him badly.

Sympathus is a concerned friend and is asking the advice of Socrates the wise.

Sympathus Socrates, a perplexing question has occurred to me just now. The sophists claim that Yusa, the scribe, is over-ambitious, greedy and excessive. Can a scribe be all this, Socrates?

Socrates I know few answers, but many questions. Can a slave become a statesman through ambition?

Sympathus No Socrates.

Socrates Can a slave become anything other than a slave through ambition?

Sympathus Of course not.

Socrates Is a scribe a slave then?

Sympathus That's hardly the point Socrates.

Socrates But do you agree Sympathus, son of Strep-tococcus?

Sympathus Yes of course Socrates (irritably)

Socrates So, if a scribe is not a



slave, does it not follow that through greed and over-ambition, a scribe can become a statesman?

Sympathus It would seem so. Socrates Can a scribe also become a doctor or sophist dramatist?

Sympathus Surely Socrates. Socrates And what drives a

man to become a doctor or dramatist or sophist, ignorance and stupidity perhaps?

Sympathus But Socrates, Phlebitis the doctor and Scrotum the sophist are living proof that ignorance and stupidity can lead to riches and success, yet Yusa the scribe, is neither ignorant nor stupid, yet

the sophists attempt to pay him less every year!

Socrates Bravo Sympathus, you amuse me much. But haven't you heard the sophists speak of Yusa? They say he refuses to do simple tasks like cleaning sandals after his scribing is complete. Is this not so?

Sympathus Yes it is true Socrates, but must a scribe perform the work of a shoemaker or messenger, or lover perhaps?

Socrates I will return your question with one of my own; Can a slave refuse his master Sympathus?

Sympathus But Socrates, you said that scribes were not slaves!

Socrates So I did, so I did...

Sympathus Oh wise Socrates, the Sophists also claim that Yusa spent time thinking for himself instead of leaving the thinking to those who had been trained how, like themselves. Is it evil for a man without letters to think?

Socrates Wherein is the brain housed Sympathus?

Sympathus In a man's head, surely.

Socrates And where is housed the brain of all animals, great and small?

Sympathus Also in the head Socrates.

Socrates And which head is bigger, Sympathus, that of a man or that of a horse? Consider well before you answer.

Sympathus That of a horse, of course.

Socrates Is a big man stronger than a small man?

Sympathus Yes

Socrates And doesn't this relationship exist over the whole world, that big is better than small?

Sympathus So it would seem.

Socrates Then does it not follow that since a horse's head is much bigger than a man's head, and his brain likewise, that horses should think while men, especially men like you Sympathus, ought to accept and not question the ways of nature?

Sympathus You are such a wise man Socrates.

Socrates Thank you Sympathus, I know this.



comment

Sit-in in Macdonald's office was a taste of socialism

I've always figured it's supposed to happen this way. But I wasn't prepared to see it happen here, this year, at York University. The administration put YUSA and the rest of our community up against the wall. We came out fighting and won.

I was part of the student sit-in on the 9th floor in support of YUSA's demands. It was one week of hard work, solidarity, and tremendous personal and collective growth. It ended with a victory: YUSA with a fairly decent settlement, and us with all four of our original demands met by MacDonald.

Incredible. The experience has opened up for us tremendous possibilities in the fight against cutbacks.

University people first heard about cuts around 1972. Their implementation has been going on since then. But this strike was the cut's first inescapable manifestation at York.

And its going to get much, much worse. The government with its optimistic forecasts is looking forward to continued annual budget cuts at places such as York that equal this year's \$5.7 million figure. The expected world-wide recession next year, or in 1980 at the latest, should make the situation of social services, like universities, even more desperate.

The YUSA strike was our first victory against these government priorities. But it is part of a war which can only end in the decimation of our post-secondary system, or in fundamental social change.

Social service cutbacks are allied to increased state subsidization of corporate profits and attacks on workers' living standards. All industrial countries are scrambling to improve their competitive position by these methods. The international order is no longer expanding as in the '50's and

'60's. It is a mess and getting worse.

Canada with its 85¢ dollar is no exception to this game. But it is a game that can be won only at our expense, and at the expense of students and workers in every nation of the world whether "Communist" or Western. The game is called capitalism and state capitalism, and it's got to go.

Its true that looked at from the broader perspective, cutbacks are necessary for the system. But it's the system that

should be attacked and not our hard won rights. If we are going to be able to continue to fight, we must say, "Capitalism or no, we're standing up for our rights."

But is a new system of freedom and plenty possible? Can we achieve socialism?

Look at what the strike has taught us. We learned that the administration was not part of our community. They are henchmen for the government and the corporations.

We developed some im-

portant networks of solidarity between the various unions and with the students as well. We went out with militancy, and we won.

And at the sit-in we went through an incredible experience of developing democracy. Our initiative was stirred. Our bureaucratic tendencies were shoved back further and further as the week progressed. We experienced the first glimmerings of "mass" democracy from below. Socialism was in the air.

To hell with the system. Lets fight the cutbacks. Lets stand up for our rights.

Ian Kellogg

(This extra-length comment piece was authorized by a vote of the Excalibur staff assembly, but does not necessarily reflect the view of anyone other than the writer. Any member of the York community can appear before the staff and request a comment piece. Letters of response are invited.)

letters

All letters should be addressed to the editor, Excalibur, Room III Central Square. Letters must be typed, triple-spaced, on a 66 stroke line. Letters are limited to 300 words (seven column inches). Name, address, or phone number must be included or the letter will not be published. Excalibur reserves the right to edit for grammar and length.

Deadline Monday 4 pm

Liked staff aim; didn't like strike

To YUSA Strikers:

You have probably heard this a lot lately; I want to express sympathy with your demands, as I also struggle to survive on a mere \$3,000 a year. Though I agree with your demands, I question the validity of your methods. It is a damned inconvenience not to have the use of the library and bookstore, and to have classes continually disrupted by the strike. It is sad that the innocent must suffer in the quest for societal change, and therefore, I hope for successful negotiations YUSA and the administration of York University.

To the administration, faculty members, and also to the taxpayers of Ontario I ask the question, 'Are cutbacks in education justifiable?' To those of you who are presently raising children I ask, 'What are your aspirations for your children?' Will their education be short-lived too because it is deemed an unsuccessful economic venture in the eyes of Canadian policy-makers?

For those of us who are presently close to graduating, the option of being forced into the working world prematurely bears grim

consequences. It must be termed a sick society when the pursuit of knowledge and the aspiration of leading a fulfilling life leads only to chastisement.

I do not claim to have any grand solutions to Canada's economic dilemma, but do ask that those in power re-examine their decision to amputate the educations of Canadian youth. Education should be a right as well as a privilege, and can be well worth the money and effort that is put into it.

Karen Gordon
(3rd year Sociology student)

Newsbeat is an advertisement

There is a misrepresentation in the advertisement headed "University Statement on Strike" (Excalibur, Sept. 28). The University is of course a community of faculty, students, and staff. The advertiser speaks for certain administrators, the BOG, and possibly—in part—for the University Senior Policy Committee.

All in all it is disturbing to see that Excalibur is publishing paid advertisements in the guise of news items under the heading "University Newsbeat." Excalibur has been a valuable in-

dependent voice within the University. Its independence will be jeopardised if the paper appears to support a policy of news management and does not check facts for itself. The item titled "The President Reports" (Oct. 5) contradicts a statement published by one of the Presidents own VPs and contains a number of misrepresentations which a journalist could readily detect. Your readers in the academic community should be able to count on an almost professional standard of journalism.

Nicky Lary
YUFA Information Officer

Unionism means political action

Until fairly recently, say about four years ago, the workers of this country were reasonably successful in obtaining a fairer deal for themselves through unionism. Thus between 1960 and 1975 the share of the national wealth going to the workers rose from 65 per cent to 75 per cent.

In the last few years however a new situation has arisen; sure enough the workers have asked for and obtained substantial raises, but the capitalists have simply raised their prices proportionally, so the workers are no better off in

real terms, and in many cases much worse off.

Under these new conditions we may conclude that Unionism by itself is no longer much of a weapon, and we must look for something better, such as political action. This means voting for, and if necessary forming, a political party committed to whatever it is that the workers want. Of course the workers must first clarify in their own minds what they do want.

For example, striking Staff members should answer this: if their 9% raise necessitates increased Government grants, as I think it might, then where should the money come from? It could be a) the Capitalists, or b) better paid workers or c) everybody equally (e.g. by an increase in Sales Tax). If they answer c) it means taking money from people even poorer than themselves; I hope few would support that. If they answer a) they should vote for a socialist party; if b) they may have to form a new Egalitarian Party. (They might well answer a) and b).

In the meantime The Staff Union has my fullest support, including 1/3 of my wages while the strike lasted.

Prof. J.M. McNamee,
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At Kinson College