

Strike shuts down classes at York

ALEXANDRA POSADZKI
THE EXCALIBUR

TORONTO (CUP) – Part-time faculty at Toronto's York University went on strike on Nov. 6, sparking the cancellation of all classes.

Before the strike, the York Federation of Students officially endorsed CUPE 3903 – which represents teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and contract faculty – in its negotiations with the York University administration.

According to YFS President Hamid Osman, the decision was made on the basis that YFS supports students, noting that some members of the CUPE 3903 are graduate students.

Although YFS acknowledges that the strike may put a severe dent in the quality of education and the financial situation of some students, Osman says their decision to support the union was made with the intent of reaching a fair and equitable agreement.

"If we remain neutral, we're doing more harm to students, because we need to support one side to put pressure on the other," Osman said.

"Students need to back students, not the people that rose our tuition fees 4.5 per cent each year over the past four years," he added.

A number of students agree with Osman's position and say students should support one another.

"I think you need solidarity," said Gail Agee, a fourth-year political

science student, who expressed worry over whether the situation may prolong her graduation. "It's an inconvenience, but we want the best for the TAs."

Agee was not alone in her concern regarding graduation. Paul Bund, a fifth-year philosophy and history student, says he intends to apply to law school at the end of this academic year. He fears having to study for his finals while also studying for his Law School Admission Test if the winter semester is extended into the summer.

Bund, however, does not agree with the YFS's pro-union stance: "I think it's not exactly thought through. The justification I heard is that they're students, and by default, they support students, but I don't think they're looking at the specific context, with the state of the economy and, in my opinion, the very high demands of the TAs," Bund said.

Adrian Swidzinski, a third-year environmental studies student, is concerned about what would happen if the semester got extended into the summer. He worries he may not have enough time to earn the necessary money for tuition so he can return to school next fall.

"I don't see how this can be good for the students. It's only hurting us, so I don't see why [the YFS] is supporting [CUPE 3903]," Swidzinski said. "I can't afford to lose any time."

"On the other hand, everyone's got the right to strike," Swidzinski added.

Osman says that YFS endorsed CUPE 3903 on the basis that

the administration's treatment of workers is problematic.

He criticized York's offer of a 2 per cent wage increase, which followed their initial 3 per cent offer.

"That is despicable," Osman said. "How can you lower your first offer and say: 'We're giving these workers a fair deal?'"

The university told CBC that it offered the CUPE members a 9.25 per cent increase over three years.

He points out how Robert Drummond, dean of the faculty of arts, received a 15 per cent wage increase, and how York President Mamdouh Shoukri receives a salary of \$450,000 a year.

According to Osman, this indicates a hierarchy regarding the importance of university workers.

"The senior administration needs to take a pay cut and spread that wealth to the members of CUPE 3903," said Osman.

Keith Marnoch, York's associate director of media relations, had no comment on this.

In response to the accusations of YFS that administration seems unwilling to bargain with the members of CUPE 3903, Marnoch says they have been at the negotiating table as often as the union.

In light of the current economic downturn, some students concerned that in order to meet the union's demands, the university might have to raise tuition fees.

Osman says increasing tuition fees is unnecessary, and that it is possible for the university's current budget to be reworked in order to accommodate the union.

Barack rocks election

SARAH RATCHFORD
THE BRUNSWICKAN

U.S. Democratic election candidate Barack Obama will go down in history as the first black man ever to sit in the country's highest office.

The 47-year-old Illinois Senator spoke to an excited crowd in Chicago's Grant Park last Tuesday night.

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer." His words met with the cheers of thousands of people.

The newly elected President speaks with revolutionary overtones. He addresses the concerns of humanity as a realist, making reference to such issues as "two wars, a planet in peril and the worst financial crisis in a century."

"There's new energy to harness, new jobs to be created, new schools to build, threats to meet and alliances to repair," he said. "The road ahead will be long, our climb will be steep."

We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there."

Obama was commended by both rival John McCain and president George Bush, says a report by CBC.

Just after it was verified that Obama had obtained the minimum of 270 electoral college votes, McCain told supporters in Phoenix that he had phoned his opponent to

Americans hit the polls in record-breaking numbers, with as many as 136.6 million ballots cast. An estimate of 64.1 per cent of eligible voters cast ballots, which, the CBC reports, is the best turnout in about 44 years.

Across the country, registration numbers were up as well, soaring up to 7.3 per cent above the 2004 election's number.

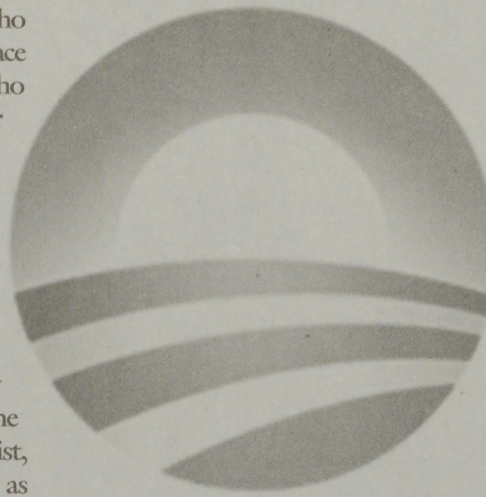
Canadians have been extremely caught up in this election as well, some going so far as to assert that they would give up their vote in this country in order to obtain one in the U.S. presidential race. Prime Minister Stephen Harper spoke on behalf of Canada.

"I look forward to meeting with the president-elect so that we can continue to strengthen the special bond that exists between Canada and the United States," he said in a statement issued after Obama's victory on Tuesday night.

Harper also says the two countries should work together on the "important issues facing families on both sides of the border."

North Americans will soon see how Obama goes about proving his statement "Yes we can," which has many implications, both social and political.

The president-elect will be inaugurated Jan. 20, 2009.



UNB ranks in top five in Canada

The University of New Brunswick has been hailed as one of the top five universities in Canada by Maclean's magazine for the second year in a row.

President John McLaughlin said in a press release issued Monday that "we are proud that UNB continues to rank amongst much larger institutions."

Maclean's rankings are determined through the analysis of publicly available data, and comprehensive universities are defined through having both a wide range of both graduate and undergraduate programs, as well as a significant amount of research.

The rankings for comprehensive universities are as follows: Simon

Fraser (1), Victoria (2), Waterloo (3), Guelph (4), Memorial (5), UNB (5), Carleton (7), Windsor (8), Regina (9), York (9), and Concordia (11).

The University of New Brunswick was established in 1785, and as such it is one of the oldest public universities in North America. The university has over 12,000 students that hail from over 100 countries.

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