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CUPE 3903 RESISTS CORPORATIZATION AT YORK

This essay is an updated version of an article, also by James Beaton, originally published this summer in CUPE's Organize.

Through its strike actions CUPE 3903 is resisting the corporate mindset of York management. The new corporate model of the university is characterized by job insecurity, pressure to reduce wages and benefits and privatization.

Some trends of the corporate university are as follows:

- An increased reliance on contract faculty. Tenure track jobs are in decline while at the same time student enrollment continues to increase. Contract faculty are increasingly being utilized as a "flexible" labour force that can be expanded or contracted at the will of university management.
- As a result of initial government cutbacks and strategic spending policy, university administrations are redirecting their research and teaching to "industry relevant" programs. Many university administrations want to increase funds or recoup lost revenues by making themselves attractive to the state and industry by prioritizing technology and business oriented programs. For example, a recent strategic plan for York University argues that as a result of government policy, York administration will be redistributing resources from Arts and Social Sciences to programs such as technology and business (Michael Stevenson, York University, May 1999). Through the Ontario Superbuild Growth Fund, the Ontario government has recently announced the creation of 57,719 student spaces through an investment of \$660 million of public funds and \$737.9 million in private funds (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, February 22, 2000). None of the approved projects were specifically designed to expand Liberal Arts programs and are in fact focused on expanding spaces in applied science, engineering, technology and business programs. Current federal and provincial government spending policies for research also make conditional the formation of university-private sector partnerships before any government money is granted to the university.
- Privatization of universities means that students face higher tuition and debt-loads. The tuition price index for Ontario by Statistics Canada shows that between 1990 and 1999 students experienced approximately a 145% increase in their tuition. In many universities and programs student fees provide between 35-50% of the operating revenues. Graduate and professional school fees are deregulated in Ontario. The budgets for the research granting bodies such as SSHRC for graduate students have been essentially frozen over the past few years following initial reductions. York tuition has increased during this time

period. The most significant increase was the introduction of summer fees meaning that graduate students essentially pay the same tuition during the summer as they do during the regular academic year. During the summer, graduate student funding decreases so that students are basically working just to pay their tuition. Graduate summer funding is insufficient to meet the basic living requirements such as rent and food so many graduate students must take part-time employment in addition to their employment responsibilities to the university. As a result of this they have less time to research and publish--activities that are essential for future academic employment. The summer is a time when classes have ended and graduate students could make progress on their own research but instead are working so many hours just to pay tuition and living expenses that they are unable to do so, thus lengthening their completion time.

- The introduction of technology into the university may be used by administration to replace faculty, control their work or increase the use of "virtual" classrooms. As universities seek to lower costs, they may begin to replace university faculty and the "classroom interaction" with televisions, computer screens and web-based courses. Acadia University already requires many of its students to purchase laptop computers to submit their assignments. York is increasingly emphasizing the importance of "technology enhanced" learning. As Ontario universities attempt to compete with private technologically based universities such as the University of Phoenix this provides pressure to lower labour costs and emphasize the introduction of technology. Ironically, the introduction and maintenance of the computer systems, software and infrastructure is likely to be of considerable cost.

CUPE 3903 rejects the privatized corporate model of the university and through bargaining seeks to improve the working life of its members as well as the overall quality of education at York. As a response to corporatization and privatization CUPE 3903's demands include:

- Wage increases for the membership.
- Protection from tuition increases for current and incoming graduate students.
- Increased number of conversions of contract faculty to tenure stream.
- Multi-year contracts for long serving contract faculty.
- Reduction of class size.
- Protection from technological replacement of labour.
- A fair first contract for graduate assistants.

While CUPE is currently walking the picket lines, the York administration has adopted a hard-line corporate management approach to bargaining. CUPE's proposals seek to ensure some level of accessible graduate education and improved security for its contract faculty while York administration is only concerned with reducing people to dollar figures. With an \$18 million surplus York remains intransigent in refusing to provide a fair and reasonable offer to the lowest paid educational workers on campus.

The York administration is offering a wage increase below the rate of inflation, threatening to take away tuition protection from future graduate students, attacking job security provisions for contract faculty and offering next to nothing for newly unionized graduate assistants. Clearly the corporate oriented management wants to build a university that is commodified, emphasizes private interests rather than the public good and relies upon cheap and insecure labour. Through bargaining CUPE 3903 is resisting these trends and building a better university at York.

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