

York in Wonderland

- **50,000 Students down the Hole!**
- **Internationally Renowned Kultur Kritik ... "Lulu" ... soon to visit York University.**

50,000 Students Down the Hole !

TORONTO, December 5, 2008 – I was beginning to get very tired waiting for the College street car late Tuesday afternoon, when a long pale man hustled past, clipping me with his patent leather briefcase. Thin hair fluttered in the dreary chill, as he muttered "Oh dear! Oh dear! 50,000 stolen!" It was not the stolen fifty thousand that caught my attention and made me start after him. No. Indeed, it flashed across my mind that I had never seen a patent leather briefcase, and, before I could think much about it, I was on his heels.

At the red light at Queens Park and University Ave., I caught up with him, still muttering and wringing his hands in obvious distress. "Everything okay?" I asked. "No. No. It's the 50,000 students who've had their education stolen," he wailed. I immediately thought of playgrounds all around the city filled with eight-year-olds chasing each other and yelling. Could their education be stolen? Would they lose the ability to acquire information? Or would counting blocks, readers and pencils disappear? My confusion must have been transparent, because he said, "The 50,000 students at York University, they have had their education stolen by the strike."

Rather than clearing things up, I became even more confused. He was certainly a quick read. He stretched his chin up with irritation. "The CUPE 3903 strike," he explained, "The one that has been going on since Nov. 6, 2008. That one. Those poor, POOR students, they have had their education stolen, and now it's almost Christmas!" Looking conspiratorial, he leaned closer to me, lowered his voice and said, "I happen to know through personal communication that even HIS majesty, Mamdouh Shoukri, President and Vice-Chancellor of York University himself, "is deeply disappointed that CUPE 3903 has put its demands ahead of the welfare of York's 50,000 students."(1)

"But aren't the strikers also York students?" I asked. Naively. Apparently. A flick of anger turned his mouth: "No." He corrected me. "Staff is on strike."(2)
"I thought it was TAs, GAs, RAs and contract faculty?"
"Well," he shrugged, "staff shmaff 'T' 'A's, same thing."
But here, I thought I knew something. "Aren't TAships, offered to graduate students as a funding package to offset tuition fees, and give them time to pursue the excellent research that York University desires? I mean, because of their excellence, York wanted them to choose York instead of another university?"

I had clearly overstepped my bounds. His tone went shrill, "Any similarity between those POOR 50,000 students and those education-stealing strikers is purely coincidental and completely irrelevant!" Giving his patent leather briefcase a tight quick squeeze between arm and coat, he gave a shifty glance past my left ear, as though planning an escape. Then his look brightened. A limo pulled up beside us on University Ave. pointed north. My pale companion called into the recesses of the beasts' interior, "Peter, Peter. My good man. My good man." Then his voice caught as he remembered his earlier distress, "50,000 stolen! Peter, it's so SO discouraging." As the limo door swung open, I caught a glimpse of a jolly looking gent, white haired, grinning from ear to ear in the plush darkness. His voice resonated, "My friend, if the Grinch is going to steal Christmas, he's not going to do it through you."(3)

With that the limo door closed behind the man with the patent leather brief case and he and the limo eased smoothly off into northbound traffic. As they went, I was sure I heard a faint little chuckle.

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(1) Personal email correspondence from Dr.Shoukri to a concerned member of the public

(2) Metro Toronto Wed. Dec. 3, 2008. "York University students...protest the ongoing staff strike at the university (p.3).

(3) Rosalyn Solomon. Strike drags, discontent grows. 24 Hours. Wed. Dec. 3, 2008. "MPP Peter Shurman was at the rally [at Queens Park Tue. Dec. 2] and said he plans to implement a private member's bill for back-to-work legislation. 'If the Grinch is going to steal Christmas he's not going to steal it through you,' said Shurman to the [about 50] students," p. 4. Students said they felt "Grinched." (Sun Media. from the personal website of Mr. Peter Shurman. (<http://petershurman.com/home/>))



Santa is coming into town!



Peter Shurman in good company.
What a happy couple!



Introducing: the Grinch

Internationally Renowned *Kultur Kritik* ... "LuLu" ... soon to visit York University.

This just in ... in the next few days, her agents have announced, LuLu will embark on her premiere appearance at York University Campus. On learning of the strike through York's press releases and 'official' media relations, LuLu found her way to websites, blogs, etc. where she experienced facets from the 'other side' of the story.

Advocating respect and common sense, combined with clarity and candor, LuLu has always been adept at reckoning the real gist of circumstances involved in human relations. She is presently sensitive to the predicament facing York students and CUPE 3903 teaching faculty, in their currently difficult relations with York admin. LuLu is keen to visit members on the strike lines at various gates on campus. Her presence is bound to be oracular, in a dialectical sense, and if we can convince her to stick with us for a prolonged visit, everyone at York, and the university itself, stand to benefit from the discourse she is stimulating. One can easily imagine her being involved with this blog and other related sites, for weeks to come.

LuLu already understands that contract faculty and TA's are the backbone of the teaching engine at York. "York's recent offer to convert long-serving Unit 2 members to full time faculty, offering them \$60,000.00 for a workload of 4 full courses, in addition to committee work and service to the university, is tantamount to creating a two-tiered system," said LuLu during a recent telecon interview, "a not so subtle form of slavery in relation to YUFA members who often earn twice that amount for a courseload of 2.5".

York's resistance to invest in raising the subsistence level of TA's to above the poverty level, could only demonstrate "a poverty of imagination" and a "predisposition for exploitation". She urges CUPE 3903 members to "press on" in solidarity until meaningful negotiations produce an equitable contract, useful to all. Look for LuLu soon on a York strike line near you!



LuLu!

York Is Us endeavours to redefine York University's identity for the university community and the outside world. We are seeking creative and analytical contributions for the XFile Bulletin and YorkIsUs.Org website. We also welcome technical assistance. Contact us. Give us your feedback. JOIN US.

http://yorkisus.org/xfile/pdf/XFile2_05dec2008.pdf

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