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The twenty-four hour journalists' nightmare

by Robert Morell

For good or bad, most observers of the political scene consider everything a government does during an election year as politically motivated.

Since the present federal government must call an election by February 1985, I was suspicious when I heard that the Ministry of Employment and Immigration was inviting representatives from 30 student newspapers to Toronto for an "information session."

It struck me that this session on youth unemployment could be considered the third action the federal government has taken in the last year to appeal to young voters.

In August 1983, a federally-sponsored National Conference on Youth Unemployment was held in St. John's, while more recently a Minister of Youth has been appointed.

But despite this suspicion, or perhaps because of it, I was still interested to hear what the representatives of the government had to say.

On Thursday evening, I reached the Inn on the Park, the fashionable Toronto hotel, our headquarters for the session.

That same evening, I, along with the other participants, was invited to the government suite to pick up information kits and to "begin putting faces with names." When I arrived at the suite—on the nineteenth floor—I knew my odyssey had begun.

On one side of the spacious room were the "officials" from employment and immigration, and facing them were three or four student journalists who had arrived before me.

I introduced myself to both groups, but I developed a strange feeling that I had somehow become involved in illegal and illicit activity. I have decided since that I felt guilty over the amount of public money being spent on the session.

The evening went pleasantly enough, with the arrival of more of my colleagues, and I realized that nothing more would happen before breakfast.

Breakfast happened at 8:30 a.m. on Friday morning in an ornate hall called the "Trillium Room." The Trillium Room is a large, fancy, versatile room with half-a-dozen chandeliers and tuxedo clad, dour-looking waiters scurrying about with pots of coffee and breakfast. Like the rest of the hotel, the room is very luxurious, and very expensive.

During breakfast, I discovered that the speeches being made started to alienate some of the students present.

For example, David Morley, Executive Director of Employment and Immigration for the Ontario Region, spoke on the work of the "specialized youth units" in helping young people who have "not adapted their psyche to the whole concept of

work," and who might need to change their lifestyles in order to become a part of Canadian society.

Wait a minute—it seemed amazing to a number of us that they would readily admit that they were in the business of molding people so that they would "fit in." That's usually something which people here accuse the Russians of doing, while we would never do that (e.g., crush individualism, force people to live by the norms of society, etc.).

"Well, we can't reach all of the people by advertising in your papers, so we want you to write stories," one of the speakers said later during the breakfast meeting.

"Yeah, sure," the long-haired writer from the University of Saskatchewan *Sheaf* said, nodding his head up and down vigorously, his lips pursed. "I wonder if they realize that I don't write advertising."

He was right. Many of the students must have felt the same way, for they were starting to resent being used as pawns in some civil servant's cost-benefit analysis. Whatever the federal motive, it was beginning to backfire.

So the breakfast ended, finally, and we trucked onto the bus.

Our morning consisted of visits to two special operations for disadvantaged youth, the "specialized youth unit" in Scarborough and the Metro Toronto Job Corp and Outreach Program downtown.

The programs the counsellors explained to us had absolutely no special relevance to university students except that everyone should be concerned about the plight of these people.

At the same time, we could tell that the people working with the job corps and the specialized youth unit were basically decent people who really cared about what they were doing, while we held doubts regarding the higher-ups.

"Career opportunities, the ones that never knock, / the only job they offer you's to keep you off the dock." -- Joe Strummer, *The Class, Career Opportunities*

Down at the job corps office, which is next door to Danny Goodman's dance studio, they are right on the front lines.

They run a woodworking operation where they try to provide young people with work discipline and 15 to 20 weeks of work in order to help them in finding permanent employment later on.

At the fifteen specialized youth units across Canada, counsellors help disadvantaged young people in choosing fields of work by administering aptitude tests, providing information regarding education and job training, and organizing group sessions.

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