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Ou allons - nous

By BRUCE ALEXANDER

(Eds. note: Mr. Alexander recently wrote a Parable for this page. He now reports on the Laval Conference. A graduate of Queen's University, he has done postgraduate work at the London School of Economics and is currently attending the Dalhousie Law School.)

This, the theme of the second annual Laval Conference on Canadian Affairs, was timely and challenging. Whither Canada? Meeting at a time when Canada is being hard put to determine what economic arrangements will best protect its faltering economy and confederation, the conference was regarded as a significant event.

To aid the deliberations of the 80 odd student delegates from across Canada, the Laval student council had summoned to be on hand a plethora of Ottawa politicians and academic pundits plus a solicitous group of organization men, reporters, discussion leaders and even a French Canadian version of the American Bunnies. No effort had been spared in the preparation of an atmosphere and a working arena worthy of the topic.

WHY DID IT FAIL?

Why then did it fail? With respect, partially because the organizers were concerned more with the politics and publicity of the conference than with its operation and results. This was a natural and forgivable error. The major failure, the inability of speakers and delegates alike to comprehend the nature and seriousness of the problems involved, cannot be so easily rationalized.

For this we as Canadians are all responsible. As citizens we have again exhibited the apathy and insularity that has traditionally isolated us from the major issues of the day until they have reached the crisis stage. As a nation we have lacked a leadership with sense or courage enough to publicize or act on these issues. In short, with the exception of certain prominent members of the business community, no one in Canada seems willing or able to check this disastrous drift towards economic and political ruin.

TWO MAJOR ASPECTS

There are two major aspects to Canada's economic problem. The first one is the sort and degree of economic planning Canada must resort to if it is to be put on the road to recovery. It must be fairly faced and accepted by all Canadians that Canada's boom has bust and without a massive program of government initiative has no chance of resurgence. After six years of recession we are confronted with: an almost imperceptible growth rate; the highest unemployment rate in the western world; wholesale loss of world markets; the flight of foreign capital; and the withdrawal of domestic capital. It should also be made clear to the Canadian public that the recent emergency steps to strengthen the dollar have failed miserably. We have succeeded only in offending our GATT neighbours and not in reducing import levels or encouraging foreign investment. The crisis has in fact only been postponed. What government action there has been such as the much vaunted Canadian Economic Council and the Maritime Planning Commission, lack the power or conviction of anything but political gestures.

What must be done involves more than the application of a time honoured political remedy. First of all, Canadians must relieve themselves of the boggy of state planning and control. They must recognize as a plain economic fact, that the assumed efficiencies and equities of the free market no longer exist, if they ever did at all. The alternative to planning at this time in Canada is not beneficent competition but the blind groping that advantages only the few Bay and James St. merchants who have always cashed in on the peculiarities of the Canadian market. In Canada to-day neither labour, nor resources, nor capital is mobile and until government assures entrepreneurs of the direction growth must take no new investment can be expected.

Secondly, we must decide what form this planning must take and this should depend primarily on priority rather than ideology. The British example of nationalization per se accepts perhaps in the case of monopoly public utilities is not necessary or advisable. A large public sector facilitates direction and planning of the private sector if government is willing to use it for this purpose, but reaps few benefits in itself. Sweden has shown us how a nation can achieve balanced growth, full employment and economic independence with little public ownership. Here selective controls and action have done an effective job of securing a high standard of living in a competitive world. Germany, with the aid of Marshall plan capital, a system of overall planning and private cartels, has done an effective job of rehabilitation. The French and Italian dirigiste models exhibit more extensive government ownership and planning.

In each of these countries government policy has been pragmatic rather than theoretical, designed to combat particular needs and problems. In each instance the program has been carried out with the full participation and approval of all affected groups, particularly labour and management. In Canada, by contrast, not even the most rudimentary form of overall planning has been attempted and outside of the periodic machinations of the Bank of Canada and the usually ineffective use of fiscal inducements, Ottawa has completely ignored its responsibility.

The second aspect of Canada's economic dilemma is the changing pattern of world trade. No longer can we rely on markets assured us by political associations or artificial scarcity. Our efforts to prevent Britain's entry into the European Economic Community have been unsuccessful, but this is unfortunate only to the extent that we may have compromised our position at the bargaining table and lost much precious time in taking remedial action. Insisting on commonwealth preference only guaranteed us a share of an already shrinking market and did little to aid our penetration of the larger European market.

The key to our economic future lies not in protecting old markets but in assiduously exploiting new markets with if necessary new products. In this regard President Kennedy's Trade Expansion Act deserves close examination. Under its aegis and authority Canada may negotiate entry not only into the vast American markets but into the combined markets of a united Europe.

RESTRICTING AND RESTRUCTURING ECONOMY

Adjustment to these changes will involve restricting and restructuring our economy so as to take full advantage of competitive advantages where they exist. This process although bound to be long and painful, should not be eschewed. As a nation we still enjoy commanding advantages over competitors in terms of natural resources and skilled labour which, when employed in compliance with an overall plan of balanced and equitable growth, should assure us a healthy future. To be effective such a plan must invite participation and cooperation at every level, and have as its only limitation the racial, regional, provincial and individual rights of all Canadians.

At a time of economic disintegration and political balkanization it is imperative that our leaders recognize the dangers in our present policy of equivocation and expediency. If there is a distinguishing quality of a true statesman it is his willingness to sacrifice career and party if necessary to the interests of his country. Canada has been privileged in having a few of these big men as its leaders and in each case they have elicited a nationalism that has lifted the nation over immediate obstacles. It is in need of one now.

Confederation was to a large extent a calculated risk depending on political will and conviction of the people to overcome natural obstacles to producing a viable nation. There are signs now that our will is weakening and the Laval Conference on Canadian Affairs has eloquently advertised this to the world.

THE LIBRARY

It is not our practice to comment on columns that appear in this paper, but we feel that Mr. Abbott has criticised the Dal library in unduly harsh terms in some respects this week.

We agree that there are a number of improvements that could be made in the library, the main one of course being an increase in the amount of space. However, the University, bedeviled as it is by financial problems, has stated an increase in library facilities and space will be one of the first projects to be carried out following the fund raising campaign.

It is frustrating to search the catalogues for books that are needed for some particular course only to find that they are not there. But at least some attempt is being made to build up the library, especially for graduate students, while working under the disadvantages at present apparent through lack of money.

We must agree with Mr. Abbott that the librarians should use their discretion to a greater extent when dealing with books on a three hour reserve. If there are four or five copies of a certain volume, only one of which is in use, it would not be unreasonable to have the three hour time limit extended so that the student does not have to break his researches by returning the book to the desk to have it signed out for another three hours. If there is a considerable demand for a book, then stick to the three hour ruling, but otherwise we do not feel it should be enforced too rigorously.

With reference to the change in the old Morse Room, now the humanities room, we feel this is justified in that it provides more room for students to study in. The library is hopelessly overcrowded as it is and any extra space that can be utilized should not remain unused.

We would commend the library staff for the job they are doing under the circumstances and add a prayer that Dalhousie will see a new and much bigger library within the next few years.

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

The College newspaper is recognized by many people as being one of the training grounds for future journalists, but apparently no one has let the School of Journalism housed at King's into the secret.

There are many problems in putting out a newspaper, even a student paper, which are not encountered in the classroom. In fact as we have learned over the past three years or so, the fast way to learn to write and put out a paper is to do it.

We have approached the director of the School of Journalism and offered to give his students some experience in actual newspaper work. In fact we begged him to persuade a few students to lend us a hand. But apparently the theoretical side of journalism is enough for them. Learn the journalistic composition of obituaries and you will undoubtedly find a ready made niche beside Walter Lipmann's in the Hall of Fame of the newspaper world.

But Pulitzer Prizes are not awarded for obituaries, unless the circumstances are quite unusual, so we would urge any student of journalism who would like to get a bit of practice and see their work in print to drop into the Gazette office. This goes for anyone else on the campus too.

LETTER COLUMN

Sir:

About three weeks ago I read with great interest your feature on rooming difficulties of students in Halifax. The caption—"Dogs, babies etc" was most apt; and no one who has met these difficulties, even in their 'lightest' form, will accuse you of undue exaggeration. By and large students (and not only students, but any seasonal roomer with a limited income) get a raw deal. This problem, however, is not as simple as it looks. It is a problem of Halifax—from Young Avenue to Gottingen Street. There are variations, of course, in the way you meet it.

Sometimes the mere reason of your skin being tinted 'brunette' produces a most interesting variety of the problem. The (prospective) landlady may take one (dim) look at you and with a forced smile hiss with clinical politeness: "I'm afraid it's just been taken . . . Err, five-and-a-half seconds ago." (How accurate).

As a veteran of three years varied "war record," the best hint I can give to the dimly student looking for accommodation is to go out on a pitch-black night. Don't spoil it by smiling and showing his flashing teeth or horrid eyeballs but cover his face with the peroxide-blond palm of this hand or sole of his feet monkey-style. And, if necessary, take an oath that he is from Timbuktu or some such distant land. You will be surprised, it works wonders — Christian love, that is.

Without doubt, however, one result of such massive railing is often to alienate the few but significantly sincere landladies who don't have to, but are willing to give accommodation to students in their private homes at very reasonable rates. If we have to expose the weaknesses in this set up, let us be honest enough to show some appreciation for the good work of this small number of pioneer Haligonian landladies.

Let us face the facts: sometimes a landlady who takes in a multi-coloured group of students runs the risk of being criticised by her pious and respectable neighbours for polluting the neighbourhood. Such efforts then calls for some courage and this courage, small though it may be, deserves to be commended.

As an example there are three foreign medical students currently staying with a family on South Park Street. I have spoken to them and they all tell me that they are very pleased with their rooms and that the house to them is a home away from their distant homes.

It is not right in my opinion to leave these pioneering landladies unduly maligned in a generalized, sweeping attack. I would like here to point out, however, that this letter is in no way to condone the usual rooming difficulties that need to be corrected; this is an attempt to look at an embryonic facet — one that we hope will grow as time goes on.

Sincerely,
A Foreign Student

Sir:

The essence of Mr. Alan Abbott's article in last week's Gazette could be summarized as follows:

"The purpose of university education is the seeking out and valuing of knowledge for its own sake. The present methods of education at Dalhousie are inappropriate for achieving the above purpose in that they are didactic as are the approaches taken in the studies of Law and Commerce. This problem can be remedied by reducing lecture time by one half hour and instituting more seminars and tutorials where discussion would be emphasized. This would result in the arousal of intellectual curiosity and interest which is prevented by the preoccupation of students with their work."

In presenting his views Mr. Abbott uses eight times as many words as have been used above and although he does thus fail to achieve the economy of words he advocates, he certainly makes up for this in the economy of ideas which his writing shows. The problem on university education is not quite as difficult to ascertain as Mr. Abbott would have the reader believe. The one constructive suggestion which tutorials, is one of which the university administration is made, that of instituting more seminars and instruction is hardly unaware, the difficulty being a lack of professors, lecturers, and graduate students to administer such classes.

Some of the words used by Mr. Abbott must be unaccustomed to keeping company with such shoddy ideas.

Mr. Abbott betrays his own prejudices in the discussion of Law and Commerce students. Although his criticisms may be justified this discussion seems to have little relevance to his theme except that if there is any analogy between nature and Mr. Abbott's mind then with respect to "fruits of thought" this is not Mr. Abbott's season.

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