

Head slams the press, warns against 'hidden racism' during inaugural programme of 1975-76 Bearpit season

By OAKLAND ROSS

"Ladies and gentlemen: this is Radio York. Welcome to the 1975-76 Bearpit. Today's programme is called 'Sticks and Stones'."

After several weeks spent designing a new format, choosing a new host and settling on a new time-slot, Radio York's Bearpit programme, broadcast live from Central Square, finally began its third season on Tuesday.

Wilson Head, Atkinson social work professor and author of a recent study of racism in Toronto, was the guest. Jay Bell, founding president of the York Liberal Club, was host.

Head, a soft-spoken man with traces of a Georgian accent still tinting his words, was definite about the presence of racial discrimination in Canada.

"Yes, we have racism here," he

said. "Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents in my study had experienced racism at first hand on at least one occasion."

But Head stressed that it is not the blatant cases of racism that we have to worry about. Organizations such as the Western Guard or men such as former Toronto mayoralty candidate Don Andrews are openly fascist and racist: in a way, they reduce the growth of racism because people react against them.

"It's the hidden racism that we have to watch," said Head. "The people who show no malice toward other races until, say, a black family moves in next door — those are the people to worry about."

A WHITE COMPANION

In fact, the anti-black feeling in Toronto is surprisingly strong. Head, who is black, said that,

when walking down Toronto streets with a white companion, he often studies the expressions in the faces of passersby.

"The hatred there is amazing," he said.

In North America, racial prejudice against many groups disappears after several generations. According to Head, there is a "melting pot" process at work in Canada, just as there is in the U.S.

"Jews, Italians, Irish in time become virtually indistinguishable from one another and from other groups. But the black man cannot change his colour."

The recent government green paper on immigration has been referred to by various groups in Canada as a racist document. Head, who has studied the paper thoroughly, does not feel this is so.

"There are several instances of unconscious racism," explained Head. "On page 12 in volume one, for example, the authors refer to 'people of novel and distinctive features'. Now, that line is racist, but the document on the whole is not deliberately racist."

BAD TIMING

However, Head criticized the federal government for "very poor judgement" in its timing of the release of the paper.

"Introducing a document on immigration during a time of high unemployment was a great mistake," said Head. "People are afraid of losing their jobs to members of another group, and that fear can turn into racism."

The programme, which began slowly, soon attracted a large audience. Although a microphone

was available to members of the audience, few people used it. After the show, host Bell attributed the relative silence of the audience to the prevailing liberal mood on campus.

"People don't mind heckling or pestering someone like Don Andrews," said Bell. "But they're afraid of appearing racist if they take issue with someone like Head."

The programme closed with Head's indictment of the treatment of blacks by the Canadian press.

"Blacks never appear in the papers in Canada unless they're criminals," said Head. "You could read the papers or watch T.V. day in and day out in Canada and never know there was a black in the country."



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