

Last fall David Estrin, a second year arts student at the University of Alberta, attended a seminar of the Western Region of the Canadian Union of Students at the Banff School of Fine Arts.

He has written the following feature article on the subject discussed there: "Confederation and Western Canada."

His article will appear in two parts.

By David Estrin

Western Canadian students! Are you disgusted with this incessant chatter of trivia about Confederation that is continually descending upon your ears? Don't you think that it's time we stopped kidding ourselves about the "two" Canadas—the French and English speaking Canadas—and considered instead this heterogeneous conglomeration of peoples we call a nation? Let's be irreverent to this silly ideal of a bicultural Canada and dissent from those frustrated politicians who support the Royal Commission on Biculturalism. As university students, we have more than enough nerve to do so!

These in essence were the remarks of Dan Thachuk, law 2, president of the Western Region of the Canadian Union of Students, in his welcoming address to students of seven Western Canadian universities attending a seminar at the Banff School of Fine Arts on "Confederation and Western Canada."

If you, dear reader, are content to treat the topic of Canadian federation with the same apathy that you have exhibited in the past, read no further. This article will only describe in bigger, better, and more illustrious terminology that which has already dulled your brains.

Maintain Canada

If, on the other hand, you place some merit in living in a country which has no national flag, anthem, symbols nor identity, and still wish to maintain the something that we call Canada, read slowly and carefully that which follows. It is a report of what some very interested and intelligent men and students have discussed and concluded in a four day effort to analyze and exchange ideas on the Canadian union in an atmosphere where discussion and thought would be at a maximum.

Dan's remarks, of course, were made to get the intellectual ball rolling; but it seemed that the 27 students who attended the conference needed little prompting. From the moment Dr. M. G. Taylor, former principal of UAC finished delivering on Wednesday evening, Oct. 23, his keynote address "On Being Canadian in Canada's Century," to the time delegates arrived home on the following weekend, hardly a moment elapsed in which the many aspects of Canadian confederation were not discussed or hotly debated.

Most Important Issue

Dr. Taylor certainly fulfilled his task of keynoting the seminar when he described the future of Confederation as "the most important issue in perhaps the most

critical period of Canadian history." The key to Confederation, Dr. Taylor pointed out, is the heterogeneous complexion of the Canadian population. There are over 50 different ethnic groups in this country, he said, so that one out of every five Canadians is other than of French or English origin. Immigration will increase the numbers of the ethnic groups in Canada which do not belong to the two major cultures. "This immigration is both necessary and desirable, for new Canadians have made an outstanding contribution."

But English-speaking Canada's full acceptance of French-Canada's aims to maintain its language and culture could lead to similar demands from other ethnic groups. "If we think the aims of the French Canadians reasonable, will the other ethnic groups want equal recognition?" he asked. Dr. Taylor claimed a snow-balling world population would make Canada's wide-open spaces increasingly attractive to immigration in this period of "revolutionary change." Already, for instance, 26 per cent of Toronto is of other than French or English origin and 15 foreign newspapers are published throughout Canada, he said.

A veteran of two federal-provincial conferences, Dr. Taylor said French-Canada is in the midst of "the most exciting period in its history. I do not believe that Confederation is in fundamental danger," he said, citing a recent moderate speech by Quebec Opposition Leader Daniel Johnson as auguring well for a stable country.

No Loss of Identity

"We have shown that men of different languages, religions, national origins and race can live and work together in peace and harmony without losing their individual identity, cultures and values," he said. Therefore Canada's experience in nation building has prepared her people pre-eminently for the new world situation in which the most important fact apart from the threat of annihilation is the economical, social, and political march of the emerging nations.

And the university's role in Canadian life?

- A faculty drawn from many cultures;
- Large numbers of foreign students;
- Study centres of foreign cultures such as a proposed centre of Latin American studies at UAC.

To meet the challenges posed by the developing peoples, "we need to do more of what we are already doing; we must increase our economic aid many times. Our chief concern," Dr. Taylor said, "is with these peoples. We as Canadians must work with them as equals—as brothers."

We Are World Citizens

"Your Canadian citizen, if you will, is educated and regarded to

Banff Seminar Investigated Confederation And Western Canada

be a world citizen, the twentieth century's greatest need."

The next morning, perhaps a little fatigued after spending the night getting acquainted with each other amidst the brisk mountain air environment, the delegates assembled to hear Dr. R. C. Brown, of the department of history, UAC, deliver his address on "Confederation in Historical Perspective."

"All the provinces of Canada could use the same arguments as Quebec for more autonomy," Dr. Brown said in exposing the quasi-colonial state of Western Canada.

Historical Foundation

In explaining the historical foundation of Confederation and the West's role in it the professor of history questioned whether the West's "quasi-colonial status," that was outlined for the North West Territories in 1867, has completely ended.

Manitoba was originally slated to enter Confederation as some kind of a Crown colony, rather than a province, he pointed out, and the whole development of the North West Territories followed the same pattern as the colonization of Canada itself.

"Eastern Canada saw the West as its empire," he said, "and the West is still primarily a producer while the East is still the manufacturer."

Old Problems Persist

Dr. Brown said that pre-Confederation problems still exist, although the national policy of Sir John A. Macdonald was to create the industrial dominance of the East and to unite the country politically and physically.

"It is arguable that Western Canada's role has not changed significantly from 1867," he said. "That role may be described as that of the 'drawers of water and hewers of wood.'"

"I suggest that the problem of Quebec is not just bilingualism or biculturalism, although these are important and difficult to solve," he said. "What Quebec wants is almost the same thing Western Canada wants. Quebec wants to break out of its shackles imposed by English Canada and the Dominion government's imperialism. She wants to handle her problems in her own way; to run the affairs of Quebec by French-speaking people."

Demands Are Similar

"Lesage's demands for economic self-sufficiency, development of the province's own industries and the use of its own money in its own way are not dissimilar from what Western Canada wants

"Premier Lesage," Dr. Brown said, "wants to break the quasi-colonialism. If there is to be a reorganization of Confederation, though Quebec may take the lead, English-speaking Western Canada may find itself asking for many of the same things Quebec and Premier Lesage seeks."

When Calgary businessman Ed Davis warned students at that afternoon's session of the CUS Western Regional Seminar that he planned to say something nine out of ten of them would not agree with, he wasn't fooling.

To Much Fiscal Authority

"Economy and Confederation" was the title of his address, and the president of Haddin, Davis, and Brown Consulting Engineers told the delegates "there is too much fiscal authority in the senior government and too little in government closest to the people."

The self-styled capitalist and entrepreneur charged that our government, as presently con-

stituted, lacks the only type of body which would keep a corporation functioning. Decision-making for a 25-year period in advance is necessary for survival in business, Mr. Davis said, and this the government now cannot do.

"They are only in power for four or five years, yet they should make decisions for 10 to 25 years from the present." This tips the balance of power for decisions to the civil service and no matter how competent civil servants are, their first consideration is self preservation, Mr. Davis charged.

A careful look at Confederation is in order, he suggested, to see whether it fits today's situation.

Wrong Decision Better

"Confederation may or may not be of economic advantage, depending on whether we operate our economy with sophistication or incompetence. While Canada hesitates, the Americans find it better to make a wrong decision than to make no decision at all. This is a result," he said, "of a bias based on predetermined opinion, and one of our most serious problems."

As for a possible Quebec defection, Mr. Davis thought Western Canada would be less affected than other parts of the nation. But he wasn't advocating independence for the West. What he resented was the federal 52 per cent corporation tax and the way tax dollars were spread over the other provinces, into areas which did not regenerate any of the money given them.

Prejudices Protected

Yet Confederation can't be held responsible for our current economic difficulties. "It is up to us to provide a country where we protect the feelings and prejudices that we like to live in," Mr. Davis concluded.

Thursday evening after a refreshing swim in the Upper Hot Springs and a snowball fight in the water, the students welcomed to the seminar the Honorable Mr. A. E. Blakeney, Saskatchewan minister of Public Health.

"It's time for all Canadians to analyze just what French Canada appears to be demanding and the effect the demands would have on Canada," the former Education Minister and Rhodes Scholar said.

West Must Evaluate

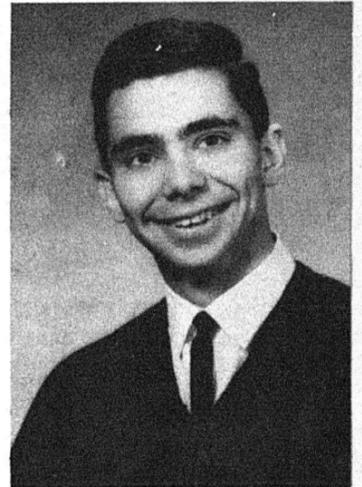
"It is time too, that Western Canada examined its position in the Canadian federation to ascertain those aspects of the union which are essential to our well being and those which can be modified either to our benefit or at the cost only of inconvenience and not those things essential to Western Canada," he said.

Mr. Blakeney rebuked the Compact Theory of Confederation in political areas, but suggested that in regards to the rights of the French and English, "the BNA Act was a bargain—a compact. The difference involved in analyzing Confederation is that of attaching the compact aspect to the political as well as to the racial."

In asserting that Quebec has a special role in Confederation, Mr. Blakeney concurred with the sentiments of the university delegates. "Certainly the French in Quebec should have all the rights guaranteed them in 1867," he said, "but consideration should be given to the demands for further rights for Quebec and to the French elsewhere in Canada."

Quebec's A Loner

Why is the Canadian union under stress today? The basic



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reason, Mr. Blakeney suggested, is the emergence of a strong French nationalism. Before Confederation the French thought they couldn't exist alone if the rest of Canada joined the United States. Now this attitude is being questioned, but the reasons for this are not clear. He conjectured that the spread of North American culture and the emergence of tiny nation states have encouraged Quebec that it can go it alone. This new attitude has in turn led to demands for:

- (a) greater recognition of French culture throughout Canada. One aspect of this would seek a bilingual civil service.
- (b) greatly increased economic power for the government of Quebec as opposed to the central government. This is usually stated in demands for the return to Quebec or to the provinces generally of much greater control over the major tax sources, the income, corporation, and estate taxes.

Demands Separated

"It is important," Mr. Blakeney said, "for Western Canada to separate these demands."

The demand for greater recognition of the French culture does not conflict with the goals set out in 1867; this is in effect what we were after and there is nothing in this to strike at the roots of the federal union, he said.

"However, if the other demands for the return to the provinces of the 'income-type taxes' were met, the consequences for Western Canada would be exceedingly grave," he said.

Economic Fight Possible

"The chief compensating factor of federal government for the prairies is the federal redistribution of taxes on an equal basis. This equality of national economic policy dictates where industries will develop. Without this arrangement we would be in an unacceptable position. If each province collected its own taxes we would have an economic fight on our hands," he warned.

"Accordingly, the only viable approach to provide the social services expected from the provinces is to provide that these taxes must go to the federal government in sufficient amounts to enable it to spread the fruits across all Canada on a near-equal basis."

"A federal union which imposed upon Western Canada the burden of a protectionist economic policy (as exists at present) but which did not permit the federal government to compensate for these burdens would be unacceptable to Western Canada," Mr. Blakeney said.

(Continued Next Week)