

Volunteerism in Canada

[Some Sunday morning Monday morning quarterbacking from the heads of it]

In the early and mid-sixties "volunteerism" bloomed on both sides of the border. Young members of the middle class were suddenly aware of poverty—at home and abroad—and certain they should do something about it.

In the United States, government sponsored volunteer groups began—the Peace Corps abroad and VISTA at home. In Canada CUSO—Canadian University Service Overseas—started, first informally, and then as a permanent organization. The Company of Young Canadians, the domestic program, followed in 1966 when the first volunteer, Peter Dall Broadhead, went west to a British Columbia fishing village.

A lot of water has roared down Niagara since.

CUSO and CYC have had very different histories, the first serene, the second hectic.

The overseas service, which has remained a private corporation though it receives government funds, has flourished. It now has volunteers in forty countries and there have been very few, if any, disputes with their hosts.

The Company of Young Canadians, contrary-wise, got off to a troubled start. Its first volunteers were very young (in their teens), very verbal, and very much emotionally involved in the problems of the poor. In 1969 the CYC became a hot political potato—some volunteers in Quebec were directly and openly involved with militant Quebec separatists. It seemed unlikely that the Company would survive what is now called "the flare-up."

It has, though with difficulties. Last year when the membership slumped below one hundred the CYC was overhauled, with more overseeing by the rest of the government built in. All members of the CYC Council, its governing body, are now appointed by the Cabinet.

The Executive Director, who had simply been hired by the company, is now picked by the Secretary of State (a minister charged with internal, not external affairs). The first man so picked last November was Peter Broadhead, the original CYC volunteer, now 29.

Meanwhile CUSO has gone its way, with twelve hundred volunteers presently abroad. David Catmur, the Director of Overseas Opera-

tions, has been serving as its acting Executive Director.

Interviewed in late April, Messers Broadhead and Catmur talked about where their organizations have been and where they hope to go:

[MR BROADHEAD OF THE CYC]

Is the Company of Young Canadians in good shape?

Things are moving a bit now. For about a year after the flare-up in Quebec, there was a stagnation in policy making and the frustration in the field was pretty high. The volunteers were still working, but they were down to about eighty when I came on in November.

What's the level now?

We're up to 142 now and doubling this month; we'll be around 250.

How has the administration changed?

It's much tighter now, and it's allowing us to build very rapidly. We are looking back at some of our hectic experiences to see how we can become a bit more innovative.

What caused the flare-up in Quebec?

We started in 1966, and between then and 1969 things were not going smoothly. We had, relatively, a lot of money and we attracted a lot of people on that basis. And, a little like the Peace Corps, everybody expected everything of us; and, of course, we couldn't produce anything for a while. We found we were attracting a very verbal volunteer, very inexperienced. The staff people got on a "yes yes, you're right" basis with the volunteers since they felt it was a participatory sort of deal, and they felt they couldn't say no—which was nonsense but in the meantime we got crucified. The volunteers got into a heavy, heavy theory-ideology kind of thing, and when the blowup came in Quebec our people were right in it.

Are the volunteers now less aggressive?

I think now our people are just as aggressive, but there's a shift of their aggressiveness into the work they do, not into expressing their ideology. We're finding this shift everywhere, not just in Quebec.