

# Contributions:

## T-group sessions—what are they like?

By HOWARD HALPERN

From July 4 to 6, the Personal Growth Workshop organized a weekend of encounter for its members at Hart House Farm.

Halpern was present. He has been involved with PGW since it was formally organized in March 1969. He attended all four sessions at the farm this summer.

Before PGW was begun Halpern participated in a T-group set up by Psych Services in January 1969. It ran until May.

Twenty-three people sitting in a circle. Looking at each other, not touching each other. Wondering when it is all going to start.

"Why are we sitting here?" someone asks.

No answer. There never is. But the girl who asked the question continues to sit. Maybe she knows the answer but isn't telling.

One thing is apparent: something is keeping 23 persons in a circle. And something is keeping them from touching each other. This, despite the expressed desire of several persons to play what we call "encounter games", games that emphasize nonverbal communication.

No one is forced to remain in circle. Anyone can get up and leave. No one does.

Anyone can get up and touch another person. No one does. Why?

I am curious. I want to see what people will do. It is true, we have had groups like this before. But we have always had a leader to tell us to stand up, hold hands, walk around, choose a partner, touch each other's faces and whatnot.

This time, no go. We have a leader but he's not telling us what to do.

We have a structural problem. We feel uncomfortable sitting with each other, not having "something to do", and there is no structural way out of our difficulty.

One way out is to talk. In fact, if someone feels uncomfortable, he could talk about his discomfort. But this doesn't come easily, especially in front of 20 other people.

It is usually much easier to generalize, to talk about what "people" do, or what "most people" do, instead of talking about yourself. And this is what happened. The first hour or so was more or less a philosophical discussion. Among other things, we discussed the purpose of life.

Needless to say, the Personal Growth Workshop (with psychologists, not philosophers, to lead its groups) was not set up to solve philosophical problems. What happens in a group depends on who is in it. With enough people who are truly interested in getting to know others (that is, on an emotional as well as intellectual level) and with a strong leader, even a group of 23 (large, by most standards) will eventually get down to the level of gut feelings.

For those interested in neither talk nor philosophy there is yet another recourse: action.

The fellow sitting next to you is having a

conversation with a man on the other side of the circle. Questions are pointed. The conversation is becoming more hostile.

Without warning, the fellow sitting next to you walks over to the man and slaps his face. How would you react?

Several members of the group were disturbed by this incident. Some identified with the man slapped. I did.

But even those who were upset by this action agreed that it gave us something to talk about. For it all happened before our very eyes and could not be hid. Nor could our reactions. Or our feelings.

So we talked.

This was Friday evening, our first day at the farm.

I couldn't fall asleep that night. In the morning I ate breakfast with the others and slept for a few hours after helping with the kitchen clean-up.

In the afternoon I walked down a steep trail, with a few friends, to the swimming hole. The swimming hole is a small lake circled with tall green-leaved trees.

The water was cool, but the sun hot. And the swim was refreshing.

Around 4 pm the whole group met again in a circle. We met in Bryce Hall, a large one-roomed cabin where we had met the night before.

We talked a bit about what we were doing and what we wanted to do for the remainder of the weekend. One thing was certain: we did not want a repetition of what had happened on Friday. So we quickly broke down into groups of about 10 persons.

This time I fell into a group with six friends, most of whom I had known for several months. We talked for a while. There was some criticism directed particularly at one member of the group. But the atmosphere was generally one of friendship.

We held hands, and we put our arms around each other. We didn't feel we had to talk. Intimacy was something we all wanted and needed, after the impersonal encounter we'd had on Friday.

Our group "ended" when Mike, the cook, came by and a few of us went over to the kitchen to help prepare dinner. We all walked to the farmhouse together. I went into the living room next to the kitchen and played the piano.

For dinner, we ate beef stroganoff. Then people began to walk down the trail, in small groups, to the sauna bath next to the swimming hole. In the sauna we roasted and perspired together. When it got too hot and too sweaty, we would go out in twos and dive into the cool water and then come back for more.

When we'd had all we could take, we stepped outside, dried ourselves off, and sat around a big fire we had prepared. Anyone who was hungry could roast wieners and marshmallows and drink lemonade.

It was 2 am when the last group walked up the trail to Bryce Hall and went to sleep. I think we all slept that night. I know I did.

I woke up, next day, to the Sunday morning sunlight shining through the cabin window and across the floor to where I lay on my sleeping bag. I got dressed, walked over to the kitchen, and scrambled four eggs to share with a friend.

Later, a bunch of us crossed the wide field next to Bryce Hall and walked over to the escarpment. Near its edge we found scores of narrow caves formed from separations in rock. We crawled down into one cave and walked through an underground tunnel so narrow only one person could fit through at a time.

It gives you that down-to-earth feeling you get only from being 20 feet under-

ground.

At noon we returned to Bryce Hall to meet Werner, the Gestalt psychologist who had started us off by leading Friday's group. This time we held our group outside the cabin, under the sun.

We began by discussing group leadership, mainly for the benefit of those persons interested in training to become leaders. But after about an hour we turned to focus on particular individuals in the group.

It started with one individual who felt uneasy when he imagined himself as a group leader. One way of helping would be to allow him to play at being the leader of

our group, now. This was done, and it helped. It gave him confidence.

I know. I was that individual.

I feel I learned more about myself in this session than in any other during the weekend. For the first time, I saw myself as a separate individual, fully independent of the group, and yet still a part of it.

I remained in the group by choice, and by choice only. I felt I could get up and leave at any time without feeling unhappy or lonely.

One purpose in having groups, I suppose, is to eliminate the need for them. Outside the group, as well as inside, there are people, and there is life.

## Old pseudo-intellectuals still around but the new ones are coming in now

By AZIZ HOUSEN

Aziz Housen is a second year graduate student in psychology.

There is a difference between the old generation of pseudo-intellectuals and the new breed. The old-timers believed that they must be intellectuals since they went to university, the community of intellectuals. In accordance with this belief, they venerated everything and everyone connected with that community, not least of all themselves. That, you see, was the prevailing opinion of the day. The old generation is by no means extinct. Specimens are still to be found on our campuses among the professors and lecturers.

The new species of pseudos no longer respects any tradition save the current tradition (or dogma, to be more precise) that to accept any traditional belief is old-fashioned. Thus, they do not venerate anything or anyone connected with the university. University officials are their sworn enemies. At this stage of the game their locus parentis is the domain of the undergraduate and graduate school.

This is not to say, however, that these two generations do not share anything in common. On the contrary, they are more alike than different. The new pseudos, for example, despite all of their outward air of skeptical criticism, are equally firmly entrenched in the belief that they are no less intellectual, but that they are even more so. They are at university, after all, aren't they?

What then are the characteristics that make them alike? For one thing, they mouth the slogans of the time. The oldies did not really have any striking slogans so they did not mouth anything at all. The newbies, on the other hand, are afforded quite a colourful assortment to choose from. Their chief catch-word as regards

university courses is "irrelevance". The difficulty, of course, is that their utterances when properly, i.e. thoughtfully, uttered are important and significant. This makes it easy for an uncritical observer to lump them together with the real thinkers and intellectuals, not knowing they are at best second-rate copiers. They use the word "relevance", for example, as if that word had some intrinsic meaning. The truth is that "relevance" is a relational term. Unless the context is clear and thus may be tacitly assumed, one talks nonsense when one says, "X is irrelevant." One should say instead, "X is irrelevant to . . ." When you ask a pseudo what he means when he says, "X is irrelevant," they reply with a frown and a stare, as if that answered anything. What is happening is that they really do not know what they are talking about because they are not, in fact, talking about anything at all.

We should be perhaps less harsh in criticizing them. After all, they do have this vague notion that when they say "relevance", they mean "social relevance", i.e. "relevance to social goodness". This seems to imply that they want only courses in "The social relevance of X". There is no doubt that this is important, but, alas, the university is not a mammoth social agency and deals with more questions than that. Besides, you have to find out what X is, to begin with.

More often, unfortunately, "irrelevant" seems to be used as an abbreviated form to stand for "I don't understand," or "It's beyond me." Logical thinking, therefore, is by this criterion often said to be irrelevant, as must also be cartography and optics and physiology and quantum theory.

Most basic of all, the old and new pseudos are alike in that they have no concern for truth, or for the process in acquiring truth, namely critical inquiry. It is irre-

levant. It is too laborious, it is too much like having to be a genuine thinker. It's more fun to dabble in rhetoric, to win people over to your way of doing things (not of thinking — for what thinking?) so they too will shout your slogans, share your myths.

In place of deeper reflection, they settle for trite and worn-out phrases. To quote an example reported in EXCALIBUR: "The learning process is one of give and take . . . we are programmed through socialization to believe a university degree today is a desirable goal . . ." (September 18, 1969, page 13). These are new gems of truth espoused to radically alter our attitude to education? There are, interestingly enough, people who don't quite know that learning involves giving and taking (despite their lip service to the contrary), and these people are the old pseudos.

The old pseudos want you to follow their rules, accept their methods, for that is the only way to become an academic, an intellectual. The new pseudos want you to join in the revelry, to declare yourself a rebel and participate in the flag waving, for that is the only way to reach the status of an intellectual. The interesting thing is that despite their basic similarity — which, to sum up in one word, is superficiality — the old and new generations don't get along well at all. They clash with each other all over the place. They are the ones who carry on the battles. The new proclaim revolution, and the old cry out reprisal. Thus goes on so much of what is called student unrest. It's all very great fun and more and more people join in, and when they are through they say they've had a great university experience.

Who are the victims? It's those people who are idealistic enough to believe that the purpose of the university is to allow one to learn and to think. And because they do try to think and their thinking leads them to not conform with established methods they are burdened with all kinds of obstacles. These obstacles are placed by the old pseudos who form a large part of the faculty. In consequence these genuine students and academicians tend to sympathize and support the new pseudos although they do not actually share their attitude or manner. And because of this they do not have the reciprocal support of the new pseudos. They are the misfits, and as they do not have the habit of trying to make pseudo heroes of themselves they are not as often heard. There are exceptions, of course, such as when their thinking makes their position on some issue come close to the war-cries of the new pseudos, in which case he may even find himself being their spokesman, as he is one of the few rational persons among the lot. The unfortunate thing is that he may become very comfortable in this position of newly-found power and decide to remain, thereby joining the ranks of the pseudos and even transforming himself into one.

If one has to compare the two types of pseudos, the vote will have to go to the new breed. At least they allow opportunities for change and are given some direction from the true thinkers. But don't worry, if you are the pseudo type at all you will have no choice but to fall into the new category, for that is the climate now prevailing.

If you felt uncomfortable reading this essay as if it were addressed to you personally you are still safe. For if you can sense something wrong you can at least try to reassess your position. The committed pseudos, old and new, are too far gone to see.

### First inklings of suppression

## Trotskyites want policemen off campus

By JIM CHISHOLM

Jim Chisholm is the chairman of the Young Socialists, Toronto's Trotskyite movement.

Cops are coming on campus. Apparently a brand new bylaw brings York University under the jurisdiction of the Borough of North York. Metro police are now seen cruising through the campus (the classic showing of the battleship's flag to the colonial natives, without firing, as a reminder of their domination by an imperialist power and the power behind this domination) on the strictly legal pretext (of course) of safeguarding the interests of all — in the interest of fire safety.

Why the student parking committee is unable to handle this menial administrative task, which entails telephoning a tow truck to remove offending vehicles, is left unanswered. It seems the administration feels that the campus cops have difficulty in adjusting to this modern age of telephones and tow trucks as well.

In fact, if this were such a problem in the past why was this not brought forth to the students and faculty before? Why was a discussion not initiated before hand? Clearly this would have been the democratic way to operate.

The real reason for cops on campus becomes comprehensible once we understand the role of cops in the capitalist system. The function of the cops is to protect the status quo and private property. Just as they are pre-

pared to break up striking workers; they are prepared to interfere in student demonstrations in order to protect the interests of the capitalists. Last school year alone, cops attacked student movements at Simon Fraser, Sir George Williams, Regina campus of the U of S., Moncton University and several of the Quebec junior colleges (CEGEP's).

The reason why these demonstrations occurred is that the role of the university in capitalist society is not compatible with the needs and desires of students. The university is operated for the interests of a very small minority in this system — big businessmen.

This small minority directly has a major say in the running of the university by their almost complete domination of boards of governors. Courses are designed as job training centers to produce better technocrats for industry so that big business can secure greater profits. The structure, that Harry Crowe of Atkinson College dwells upon, of the master-apprentice relationship, that students must endure being the apprentice, trains students to accept obediently the same relationship in industry.

The university should not be oriented to the interests of a few big businessmen, it should meet the needs of all the people. The facilities of the university should be open to facilitate unions, high school students, tenants' associations, women's liberation groups and any other oppressed groupings, in their struggles to achieve their le-

gitimate rights. Computers should be used to aid anti-war committees and other progressive groups to plan demonstrations. The university courses should be oriented to examining the best way of ending the ills of this system. Students and faculty in consultation with the general public should have the absolute say in the running of the university. The university should become critical of the problems caused by the capitalist system in Canada and be used as a center whereby changes are initiated. The university must serve the aspirations of the people of Canada — not the capitalist class.

When students demand these and other just democratic rights, their demands tend to challenge the existing social system. York students are not isolated from this phenomenon. Many have demanded in past years that this university be run in their interests.

This struggle is bound to intensify as students are confronted with the contradictions between their needs and desires and the system's.

The Metro cops on campus are the first inklings from the administration that it is preparing itself to suppress any student "trouble" by attempting to establish that cops have the right to interfere in university affairs by having them conspicuously present in towing away cars. The York Young Socialists demand a full explanation from the administration on their decision. If no satisfactory one can be offered, the cops must get off the campus now and stay off.