

# YORK AND HISTORY

By Frances de Angelis

SEEMS LIKE OUR HISTORY STUDENTS ARE HAVING PROBLEMS

New courses, like new buildings, spring up on campus each year. So do new students. Excalibur presents on this page its first enlightening department survey, History at York.

## PAROCHIALISM IN HISTORY PROGRAM

Among the courses added to the history department this year was "Traditional Societies of South and East Asia", but it put only a minor dent in the parochialism of the history programme at York University.

According to this year's calendar, with the exception of this course on South and East Asia and another one, "The Commonwealth Since 1840", the history programme deals only with Canada (four courses), United States (four courses), England (four courses), France (three courses), Russia (two courses), Germany (one course).

There are also three courses on Europe, one on the city, "The Historical Study of the City", and one on methodology, "History as

an Intellectual Discipline.'

Why are areas such as Africa and South America not covered and Asia practically ignored? A number of explanations were suggested by Professor Albert V. Tucker, Associate Professor Lewis Hertzman and Assistant Professor Desmond Hart.

Getting qualified faculty is a major problem. There simply are not enough historians who specialize in these areas. Such a problem creates a vicious circle--not enough qualified historians to teach, not enough courses; therefore, not enough qualified graduates for future faculty.

High school is partially to blame. First, history taught in high school is insular in view, and whenever areas other than Europe and North America are studied, they are studied through 'European eyes'. (This was also true with all Canadian universities until about ten years ago, and progress away from this outlook has not been too great as yet.)

As a result historical interest in places other than Europe and North America is not stimulated. Also, because a large number of history graduates become high school history teachers, up to ten years ago the requirements called for so many courses on European and North American history that there was no room for more exotic areas.

Lack of funds is another problem. There is not enough money to buy the large number of books needed in a history program, complain the professors. What is more, at a time when the university needs more money

for the expanding programmes, the government is cutting down on grants.

There is also the difficulty of language. A history student needs at least a reading knowledge of the language of the country he is studying. At York, the Language Department is very limited in range and will have to be expanded. In addition, all the professors interviewed would like to see a fund set up enabling third year history students to spend the summer in the country whose history they are studying. This would be similar to funds established by universities in the United States as far back as ten years ago, and would cost from \$700 to \$800 per student. "Such money should come from private funds as in U.S. universities, but Canadians prefer to invest their money in administrative studies and, to a lesser extent, in science," says Professor Hertzman.

The university curriculum is also influenced by world events. Until recently, the opinions and wishes of the Africans, South Americans and Asians were of no interest to us. However, as events in these areas have more and more impact on world affairs, interest in them increases. Professor Tucker points out that Canadian Universities started offering courses on China only about ten years ago. And it was just recently that the universities of Toronto and British Columbia started East Asia Departments. Many universities in the United States such as Michigan and Indiana offered courses in these areas about ten years before their Canadian counterparts.

York University would like to get into the swing of things. While Prof. Tucker, spokesman for Glendon's History Department says there are no plans to have any courses on Latin America at Glendon, Prof. Hertzman at York Campus would like to add one course on Africa by next year if funds permit. He also would like to have representative courses on Africa, Asia and Latin America in operation within three years. He feels this could be done in co-operation with the Political Science and Social Science departments.

However, plans to have graduate studies in history within a year are almost definite. With graduate studies comes original research which at present is almost non-existent at York, though some original research is being done by Fourth Year Honors candidates who write honors theses with the permission of the de-

partment.

## HISTORY AND GENERAL EDUCATION

Although history is not a required course per se in the General Education programme, it does have a place in the concept of a general education. There are historians delivering lectures in almost all the York Humanities courses. Not only is the history department satisfied with this arrangement, but Prof. Hertzman feels history should be studied in conjunction with philosophy.

While there is general agreement as to the part history plays in general education, historians hold varied opinions about the influence of the Behavioural Sciences particularly Sociology, on history. Both Prof. Tucker and Prof. Hertzman feel that an understanding of sociology is essential to a historian.

Prof. Hart, however, feels that sociology is too influential. Although he agrees that a historian needs sociology, he also feels that techniques borrowed from the behavioural sciences, such as voting studies, take the human factor out of history. This he insists, rules out the influential individual, such as Diefenbaker.

Professor Hertzman, on the other hand, feels that social science techniques such as computer science are "one other tool among many but the historian is not rushing out to use it."

History today is moving from the traditional (political and diplomatic) to the behaviorist (philosophical and sociological) point of view, says Prof. Hertzman. This is evident at all universities but particularly at youthful

York where tradition has not as yet become established and where the faculty is more receptive to new ideas.

A major innovation in the department's approach to history is the adoption of a series of lecture courses in the third year. These courses are based on reading assignments with little or no writing of papers or reports involved.

Third year students are encouraged to take a fourth year honors seminar requiring intensive historiographical writing which would be the focus of their year's work.

Mr. Richard Schneider is currently conducting one such seminar in medieval history which covers the European society from 800 to 1200. The second part of the seminar will be given in 1968 when the interval between the Hellenistic period and 800 A.D. will be discussed.

Prof. Hart would like to see a further breakdown along this line in his American History course. His students could study various problems in American History in detail, if, for example, they concentrate on the Civil War one year, the American Negro the next and so on. This would also remove the monotony for the lecturer as he would be able to emphasize a different aspect of his subject each year and, therefore, make it more interesting.

## HOW YORK RATES

In spite of the shortcomings of the history department at York, all three professors feel that York University has done well. Professor Tucker expects York's history department to rival U. of T.'s 'in a limited way' in a couple of years. Professor Hart places us somewhere in the top four as far as undergraduate history goes. Professor Hertzman is more modest.

Although he thinks that people from the outside would be better judges, he ventures to say that apart from the fact that the library is inadequate and that we need older scholars, (young scholars are needed for breaking tradition but opinion of older scholars is also desirable), we are 'good'.

## HISTORY SERVING SOCIETY

A historian services society in a different way from an economist, a sociologist, or a doctor. The fact that world events influence the areas covered by courses shows we rely on history as a means of understanding current events in terms of traditions developed in the past. The historian, adds Prof. Tucker, is trained to examine myths and half-truths which motivate society in their way.

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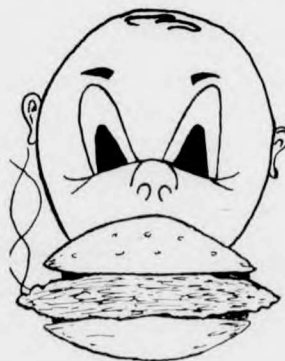
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