

Social Science 180A: Why students had to take over

By BOB ROTH

"We want something relevant," came the cry from the wilderness.

The wilderness in this case was Social Science 180A, a course in Canadian problems. To many students, however, the course had succeeded in becoming a Canadian problem in itself. On December 11, dissatisfaction came to a head.

You couldn't get into the lecture hall that day without passing by students handing out leaflets. At the top of the leaflets were the simple words, "WE ARE DISSATISFIED." The paragraphs that followed reflected a sincere sense of disappointment:

"... We were attracted to this course because we as Canadians felt it had relevance to our lives and still feel that it has great potential. . .

"The treatment of Americanization of Canada illustrates our dissatisfaction. Even while the lectures were being delivered, the process of Americanization was rapidly continuing. What do you know about Ryerson Press? How much was said about the implications of the natural gas sale? What does Quetico mean to you? Does it strike you odd that while American GM workers are back at work, Canadian GM workers will be on strike during Christmas? Is Trudeau becoming another Spiro Agnew in his suggestion that university campuses be surveilled? Are the recent CRTC regulations effective in ensuring Canadian control over our public media? Are these not real problems?"

One questioning sentence hit the academic nail right on the head:

"Is there any relationship between the omission of these problems and the Americanization of our university?"

York's New Tactics

The students had apparently come face to face with York's latest twofold method of dealing with the Americanization question:

1) Give the students Canadian content, but so mystify the issues they can't possibly make head nor tail of them.

2) Treat the Americanization question as though it were an academic exercise, completely divorced from what's happening outside.

The talk-but-don't-do-anything approach was also skillfully maintained by cleverly placing no emphasis on that area where students might have seen fit to act — on the question of the Americanization of the university.

But with only a week left in term the students had come to air their grievances.

The professors were late in coming to class that day. One student, after some initial prodding, went to the front of the room and asked the class if they wanted to spend the hour talking about course problems. They did.

Prof Disrupts Class

A short but lively discussion had scarcely begun when professor Viv Nelles burst into the room, interrupted the student speaker, dashed up to the microphone, and with a broad grin on his face promptly began lecturing as if nothing had happened.

The student speaker was somewhat unnerved by this experience, having been informed by reliable sources that interrupting people was impolite (at least it seems to be when you interrupt a prof). He sat down.

This implementation of the York Measures Act on the professor's part did not overly impress the students, however. The uneasy rustle of whispering voices soon filled the room. Then, a girl spoke up:

"There was a student speaking. . . I would like to hear him."

The entire class burst into applause. Nelles' smile melted away.

The class insisted that the student be allowed to return to the front of the room to continue chairing the discussion. As the student rose to take his place, a stirring round of applause again arose from the class.

Most of the students were clearly in basic agreement with the leaflet. Some charged lecturers with giving "lip-service" to the problem of Americanization. Many pointed out that most people knew there was a problem with U.S. domination of Canada, so the question should be "how

science," if we work under the assumption that the methodology of contemporary social science is designed in such a way as to mystify and obscure social and political problems, then we must heartily commend the professors for doing a superb job.

Professor Hoffman explained that Americanization was not given more attention because he "expected" it to become "a burning issue in the tutorial groups." He therefore "wanted to leave areas open" for these groups.

Of all the dodges, this if-you-don't-like-it-here-go-to-the-tutorial line is the most favourite among professors. Why then, do we have lectures? Obviously the professor feels some topics are

the American empire the less we have talked about it in specific terms. And the less we talk about it in specific terms the less we are capable of understanding why our country is disintegrating and why our political and economic elite co-operate in that process; most of all, the less we see the possibility of acting to change what seems like an inevitable situation."

With such access to student opinion, why then did professor Hoffman not make this problem more of a priority this year?

It was professor Nelles, however, who made the day complete when he attempted to place the blame for everything on the students, themselves (another popular ploy).

He told the students that Americanization was not a national problem; that it was not a concern in the West, for instance. The students, therefore, were parochial and narrow-minded because they had become pre-occupied with an issue that only concerned Ontario.

As was mentioned, such tactics are not uncommon. In this case, however, it is difficult to discern whether professor Nelles is deliberately taking his students for a ride or if he simply doesn't know what he's talking about.

Americanization Out West

Sure there is no concern in the West over Americanization. That's why Canadian Dimension, the Winnipeg-based national magazine, is one of the most nationalist in the country. That's why C.W. Gonick, a known and outspoken nationalist, was recently elected to the Manitoba legislature where he has made public speeches condemning the Americanization of Canada and Manitoba.

Apparently professor Nelles also failed to read the article EXCALIBUR reprinted from the Vancouver Sun which exposes the increasing takeover of B.C. vacation land by Americans. Has Nelles ever read anything by Gonick (Man.), James Harding (B.C.), or John Warnock (Sask.), all of whom live, or have lived, in the West and have a story of a different sort to tell?

Is professor Nelles aware that the royal commission on farm machinery pointed out that "the multinational corporations who dominate the farm machinery business. . . appear to set — on a fairly arbitrary basis — the prices at which these machines are supplied to their Canadian subsidiaries" — prices which, incidentally, were inflated by over 40 per cent in one case documented by the commission.

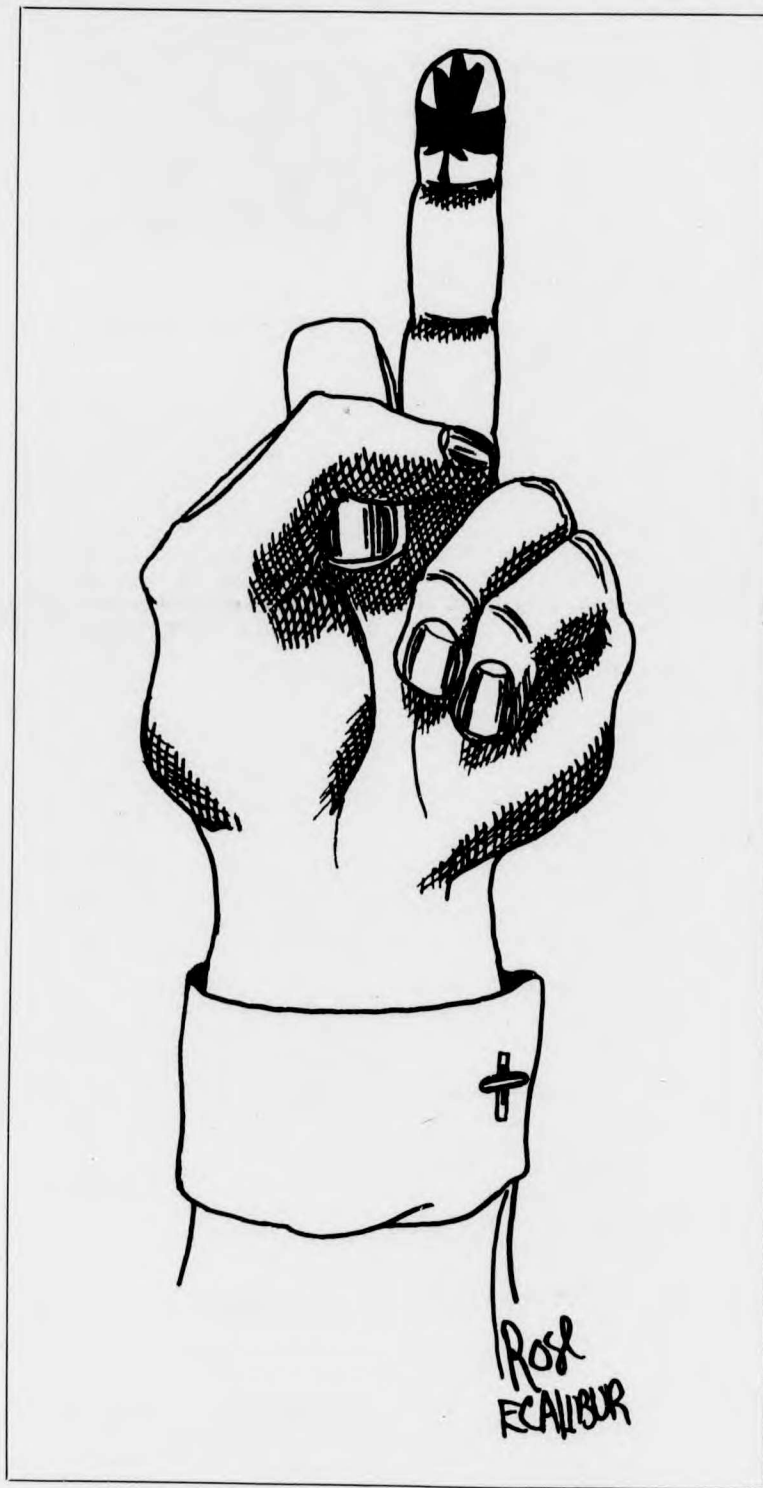
And what about the U.S. branch plant built in Brandon at a cost of \$30 million. A U.S. millionaire named Simplot, put up \$5 million for the project. The provincial and federal governments put up the other 25. And, of course, as typifies government give-away plans, Simplot retains ownership of the plant.

We hope professor Nelles is honestly unaware of these facts, or else he is playing his students for fools.

Students Hold Ground

But, despite the professors' efforts the students held firm. At the end of the hour-long debate they voted overwhelmingly to devote lecture time in second term to a further exploration of the Americanization question. Their intent is to bring in some outside speakers such as Ian Lumsden, Bruce Kidd or John Warnock.

How things will turn out is anyone's guess; only time will tell. But there's one thing for certain; to the students in Social Science 180A the phrase "struggle for Canada" has become more than just a slogan.



do we combat this thing" and "how do we get it out." Students should be learning "how to slow it down, to terminate it," they said.

The atmosphere was unmistakable. To the students, Americanization was not just an academic game; it was a real problem requiring real solutions. As one said, a "strategy" for action was needed.

The professors, at this point, swiftly responded by hurling forth the old cliches.

Nelles said the course was designed to give students some acquaintance with "the spirit of inquiry in social science" and an "introduction into the methods of social science." No doubt, Nelles' attempt to stop the first student speaker is an example of how he encourages such "spirit of inquiry" into the classroom. As for introducing students to the "methods of social

important enough to be heard and discussed by the entire class. Other topics are secondary and can be "left open."

It was precisely this sense of priorities that the students were concerned about. They wanted Canada's most urgent problem fully discussed, not "left open."

Had this been Hoffman's first experience in such a course, his actions would be more understandable. But, last year he ran into the same problem while teaching the same course under the title Social Science 372: The Viability of the Canadian State. The course was altered over the summer and this year became 180A.

Last year the students also protested. And their complaints were strangely similar to those of this year's students. A leaflet distributed in 372 said:

"...the further we have moved into