

A youth draft and a year-round school season

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haps we are not talking about the violent overthrow of government, but if we are talking about a radical transformation of the established order, as many students are now proposing, we run into what many entrenched people call "subversion". How will you be able to reconcile the CYC's work and indeed the work of anyone in the proposed civil service with the fear many people have in regards to student action? After all, the only satisfying work that students will indulge in will be of radical action, trying to overthrow the established order of Canadian government, perhaps not in a violent sense but certainly in a radical reformist sense. Will the taxpayer pay for action he fears? Surely that is what has been plaguing the CYC.

Pelletier: I take for granted that in the field of reform, of radical change, there are objectives, constructive ones, that can be placed beyond the generation gap or the differences between students and the adult world and I think that these are the areas where there can be common action. Whether it would eventually bring radical changes and shifts in society, we cannot know in advance, but I am not afraid of that. I think that we need radical changes in our society. I think we need reform in our society and the only problem is to carry them out without violence. I don't think we need violence in our context . . .

I think there is enough in common between what the government wants to achieve and what youth can realistically expect to achieve so that we can work together. If this hypothesis is not valid, I would say that society can't go on; there would be no way of reconciling the two groups and we'd have civil war.

CUP: Students at university are now worried about a co-opting process that absorbs dissidents into tokenistic positions of responsibility. How, getting back to my earlier point, would you allow them a sufficient freedom of action to satisfy them and the taxpayer at the same time?

Pelletier: I think that any individual at a certain point in his life has to come to terms with reality.

He'll do it in a conservative way or a reformist way or a revolutionary way but what he wants to achieve is always less than what he will achieve. What you would like to do is always different from what you will be placed in a position to do. That's what I call coming to terms with reality. It is from those positions of reality that we must act.

I think there is a spectrum of youth opinion that resembles the spectrum of opinion you will find in the general population except that you might find a higher degree of radicalism in youth, and so much the better if it were not we would be headed for a very dull future. But I believe strongly myself in the possibility of acting together no matter what kind of radicalism exists in youth because there is enough of a common denominator in society, which includes youth, so that you can work out. As I said before, if this didn't exist it would mean the country, the society no longer exists and you'll have civil war. You must deal with a democratic process, otherwise it's the rule of force and we are not ready for that.

CUP: Perhaps I've misunderstood your basic orientation. I've the impression that the press regards your statements as an expression of concern with student unrest which after all has been led by a small vanguard of students and that you are trying to deal in some way with this dissident group.

Pelletier: I am very deeply concerned with any minority group. I think I made it very clear that if we are to have a youth policy it will have to be audacious and daring otherwise it couldn't exist because this is the mood of youth in 1968. Many of the proposals put before me were not as far-fetched or irresponsible as they sounded and I took two of the most extreme ones to show that even these must be studied.

Now I realize full well what this peaceful conscription would mean, let's just see the problem with the labor movement. I've been with them for twelve years and I know what their reaction will be: "You're just getting cheap labor!" It's a tremendous problem but what we're trying to do is to try and not close our minds to any of the possibilities for a move

forward and a chance for youth to express itself and do what it wants to do.

CUP: Have you any specific proposals you would like to see implemented?

Pelletier: Oh! There are numbers of them, only to recite them would be a little long for this interview. But I wouldn't do it for another reason because I believe the proposals that are the most interesting come from youth itself. Adults must realize that youth has a much more acute sense of the future that we do which means I wouldn't trust myself or any government to find better objectives or be more attuned to the future than youth.

CUP: The 12 month proposal — was that off the top of your head or was that studied as well?

Pelletier: Well, this is a provincial jurisdiction and a student proposal and I gave it only as an example and may be I shouldn't have because I'll probably get complaints that "Federal people are talking about provincial matters" but I personally find it so reasonable that I used it as an example here and because there are so many adults who would consider it unreasonable just because they never considered it.

In an automated society, students are discovering and we are discovering too in trying to create summer jobs for them that there are fewer and fewer jobs for them to obtain. Who is going to support the 80% of students or more whose parents cannot afford to send them to university? It's perfectly normal for the government to support students while they're studying but if the government is going to support 80% of the university students for doing nothing the four summer months, I think it's preposterous.

CUP: What about free education at the post-secondary level?

CUP: Do you expect student stipends in the foreseeable future?

Pelletier: Yes, but I see it in the future where the students who gain advantage through their studies would have to pay back society in either money as they do with bursaries and loans or through work.

CUP: Trying the compulsory civil service concept with the year-round school idea?

Pelletier: This is not at all repugnant to me. I think you have to consider the latter if you put the former into application because you have to maintain balance in the society.

CUP: Then it's a couple of years.

Pelletier: Yes, at least.

CUP: When will students hear about preliminary positions and a call for consultation?

Pelletier: I'd say within three or four months. One more thing . . . The speech in Montreal was really a declaration of intention rather than set policy . . . it's the role of a minister to air ideas of this kind of determine civil reaction . . . it was really more a form of gauging public opinion than formulated policy.

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