

Human Rights — Innate or Not?

Do you have any basic human rights? How would you feel going to a strange university in a foreign country for five years? Would you like to be an Indian, a Black, a Chinese in Canada? In New Brunswick? In Fredericton???

These are just a few of the questions discussed at the Human Rights Conference in the SUB last Saturday. Leading national, provincial, and university human rights spokesmen spoke on different aspects of human rights, the idea being to present a range of problems which students may be able to help remedy.

The Chairman of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, Dr. Noel Kinsella of Fredericton, expressed concern over "the lack of good studies in various fields such as philosophy, political science, and psychology with respect to human rights." He regarded university communities as negligent in this area of study.

The Canadian Human Rights Act stipulates that every individual is free and equal in dignity and rights. Dr. Kinsella proposed that the philosophy department should direct some study toward determining whether one's dignity and rights exist because they are innate or simply because certain laws dictate them. He prefers to regard human rights legislation as "a result of civic behavior, not a cause of it."

Also discussed was the possibility of establishing institutes of Indian and Black studies on campus. Dr. Kinsella remarked that the responsibility for these studies lies with the university community.

Allen Clark, eastern director of The Indian and Eskimo Association of Canada spoke on behalf of Indian rights. He considers the main issues concerned with Indian rights to be centered on: (1) a need for a clarification of Indian rights and (2) the present educational system which has little relevance for Indian people based on the facts that 75% of

Indian students drop out before Grade 9 and 98% before they reach Grade 12.

Mr. Clark revealed that many Indian problems with white society stem from a conflict of cultures. He posited as an example the difference in concepts of land ownership held by Indians and Europeans over a century ago. The Indians' concept of land as something "to be used" differed from the Europeans' idea that it was "to be owned". He contended that because of this conflict of interests, Indians didn't realize they were legally ceding their land by signing treaties.

Mr. Clark also advocated a complete turnover of administration of Indian affairs to the Indians themselves. He considered it rather "disparaging" that Federal and provincial governments are just beginning to realize this important need after being first proposed by Lord Elgin, Governor-General of Upper Canada in 1859.

Hugh McKervil, representing the Citizenship Branch, addressed the conference members on behalf of the Secretary of State. Many participants found his remarks provocative and stimulating as he flatly denied the existence of certain "inalienable rights", such as those declared in the Declaration of Independence. He views human rights to be "a matter of social contract, resulting from human behavior, and not God-given". He placed the emphasis on man for assuming the responsibility to guarantee human rights, and these rights must be "demanded and fought for".

Dr. Kinsella acknowledged the fact that many foreign students are being discriminated against, especially with respect to housing, but as of yet, none have presented any complaints to the Commission.

One participant proposed that a list be drawn up by the information centre of the university indicating those

residents of Fredericton who are willing or unwilling to accept foreign students as boarders. Dr. Kinsella immediately informed those present that activity of this sort is illegal and anyone participating in it would be "prosecuted" by the Commission on the grounds of publicly discriminating against foreign students.

Joe Drummond, national vice-chairman of the Black Coalition of Canada, began, "I am going to speak as a black man ... not with hate and arrogance but as a proud black New Brunswicker and a proud black Canadian. My role as a black activist is to get black people together." When asked what is the most pressing problem facing the black people today, he replied: "White people don't understand us and aren't trying to."

Drummond outlined the history of the black people, from their origins in Africa where they had advanced social, cultural, and political empires to their present second-class status. He blamed the beginning of their troubles on the advent of Christianity — "With the Cross came chains."

Black Power was defined by Drummond as (1) political (2) economic and (3) consumer power in our own community (4) self-development of our own leadership without interference of white society (5) black pride (6) black culture and history.

TIME OUT

by carolyn macleod

Don't knock it till you've tried it. That statement is gaining the status of a philosophy lately, the idea being that no one should criticize anything unless he has experienced it himself. In the first place, this is essentially a defensive statement, used by people who engage in activities considered by many others to be irrational or unconventional. It is also a challenge to outsiders to become participants in the activity before making judgment about it. This is putting the cart before the horse in many cases. It is like telling a man to marry a girl, and make up his mind whether or not she is the right one later. The point is: by then he has found out all right, but it is a bit difficult to change the situation by then.

By making first-hand experience mandatory for a valid opinion on such issues as uninhibited sex and the use of drugs, one of our most commonly used methods of forming opinions is discounted. This is the method of marshalling facts on both sides and coming to a conclusion based on them, by giving most weight to the arguments and principles you consider to be of the greatest importance. The people who want you to try something before you decide on its merits are really asking you to ignore all of your unfavourable facts and feelings, at least temporarily. They ask you to make at least a temporary commitment to that which you have not found enough reason to trust. If it were suggested that anyone commit himself to a religious faith without finding answers for at least his major doubts concerning it, everyone would regard the proposal as foolish. The same applies to the man getting married; he should be convinced before he commits himself. To try anything when you have serious doubts has long been considered bad practice on simple common sense grounds.

Another assumption of the philosophy of experience is that involvement will impart a clearer knowledge of anything than outside observation. This is not necessarily so. A person who is mentally ill certainly has a lot of experience and knowledge of mental illness, but it is his doctor, who has observed him and has more outside factual knowledge, who understands his illness better. Though the patient undoubtedly has deep first-hand experience, it does not give him a clear view of his condition. In fact, his deep involvement is the very thing which distorts his views and destroys any possible objectivity.

One must remember, however, that this line of thinking has come about in reaction to opinions formed by ignorance and prejudice. The people who depend on experience are tired of the way the majority of us have been making decisions. We have been prone to snap judgments about things new or unfamiliar, and these judgments are often unfavourable. We have also tended to accept things simply because they have the weight of tradition behind them — like poverty and war. Ironically enough, it is largely to overcome these results of ignorance and prejudice that most of us are here. It's about time everybody did a double-think.

It Was Ever Thus



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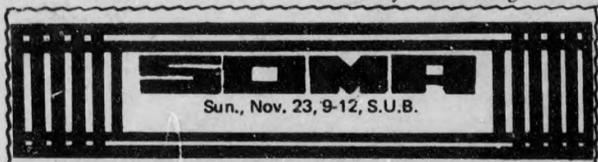
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Once upon a time Somebody thought it would be a great Idea to have a COLLEGE PUBLICATION that would be Clever and Newsy, that would be read by All and that Everybody would contribute to and that — well nearly Half a Century later we got the job as Editor. And since then Experience has taught us what it means to have people MAKE PROMISES and never keep them, to Rack our brains, and Paw the Air for IDEAS, and Burn the Midnight

Juice over blotted Manuscripts and stale jokes that Seemed snappy only a Couple of days before; and to have Old Friends shun us like a Plague either because They feared They'd be asked to write a Story or because they'd had Their Feelings hurt by Something in The Flipper when they did or Didn't get Written up! And we learned to Fight Every Month with The Printer and Swear and plead and beg and Threaten in order to get the issue out On Time

and then be asked 'bout a Million times a day "When will The Brunswickan be out?" by some Bird who Never contributed One Single Thing for the Magazine — (long sigh) — all of which has made us grow Old Prematurely and be SADDER if Wiser about Human Nature. However, This fills a Few Lines Easily AND as Aesop said 2,600 years ago "Every path has its Puddle."

Reprint from Brunswickan 1923



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