

# Flawed book opens debate

By GEOFF MARTIN

*In the Interest of Peace: Canada and Vietnam 1954-1973*  
By Douglas A. Ross  
Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984  
\$35.00

IN THIS INTERESTING BUT flawed book, UBC professor Douglas Ross has reopened the debate over the Canadian role in Indochina.

Unlike James Eayrs, the object of much of his derision, Ross argues that Canada's actions in Indochina, as a member of the three International Commissions for Supervision and Control (ICSC) in 1954 onward and the International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICCS) in 1973, were taken in the interests of peace.

In making such a claim, he commits some fundamental errors.

He grossly overestimates, in hindsight, the possibility that the United States might have used nuclear weapons in Vietnam; he says such use would have been more likely had Canada not made its efforts to restrain the U.S. from 1954 to 1973.

To read Ross, one would think Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon had their trigger fingers perpetually half-on the nuclear button.

Certainly this impression fails to capture the reality of the time, especially during and after the

early 1960s when American nuclear strategy was revised (from "massive retaliation" to "flexible response") to account for the clear "disutility" of nuclear weapons in a limited theatre like Korea or Vietnam.

Despite his criticism of previous scholarship, Ross can be faulted for some of his own arguments.

In responding to charges that Canada, as a "neutral" observer, was biased in favour of South Vietnam, the ally of the West, Ross argues that both Canada and India (the third member of ICSC was Poland) leaned towards the South.

But this position, he implies, was an understandable reaction of the Canadians to the brutality of the North Vietnamese; it was not, he says, a case of complicity with American goals in Indochina.

Unfortunately, he fails to discuss fully accounts of intelligence passed by the "neutral" Canadians to American officials; he also does not discuss evidence in the *Pentagon Papers*, the top-secret study of U.S. decision-making in Vietnam, that the United States certainly believed that Canada's vote was their vote.

Instead, his only response to the charge that Canada gave more than it got is to overstate the danger, at that time, of American escalation, in the hopes that such an overstatement might justify Canada's dependent role during the twenty year period.



"Well, we must face a new reality. No more carefree days of chasing squirrels, running through the park, or howling at the moon. On the other hand, no more 'Fetch the stick, boy, fetch the stick.'"

## One sick individual

By KEN BURKE

GARY LARSON IS ONE sick individual.

Sick as in twisted. Sick as in morbid. Sick as in obsessive. Sick as in one of the most interesting cartoonists around today.

The proof is in the panels. Larson has purveyed his unique view of humans, cows, elephants, and aliens since 1978 through his single-panel syndicated strip *The Far Side*, now available daily in the *Globe and Mail*, as well as over 150 other newspapers. And the cream of this abnormal crop is now available in *The Far Side Gallery*, a collection of the best from Larson's first three books, published by Andrews, McMeel,

and Parker.

The closest reference point for entry into Larson's universe would have to be B. Kliban, of the original CAT craze. Visually, they both work with simple, rounded figures, saying and doing the unexpected. But while the dark side of Kliban's drawing frequently edges over into pornography — he is a regular *Playboy* contributor — Larson gains much of his worldview from his monster-haunted childhood. A childhood he describes as "sort of Theodore Cleaver Meets the Thing."

The best of Larson's cartoons display a kind of uneasy perspective on the world — the kind that comes from memories

of an older brother who loved to play tricks and nightmares filled with hoards of scary monsters. Even the Angel of Death isn't safe from Larson's satire. On his way into a suburb the angel is asked for ID before he is allowed to enter.

Two spiders spin a web across the bottom of a slide, remarking, "If we pull this off, we'll eat like kings!" Even Jiminy Cricket ends up in a bottle of formaldehyde while a gleeful insect collector sings "When you wish upon a star...."

If there is a formula to Larson's work, it is that he takes normal, familiar situations, and turns them completely on their heads. While there are not set characters in *The Far Side*, as in *Doonesbury* or *Bloom County* for example, Larson has certain types he subjects to the trials of the world falling apart. The crewcut freckled fat boy, the matron with a beehive hairdo and librarian's glasses, the nervous bespectacled patriarch, and numerous harried cave people all take their lumps.

Cuddly infants take on a whole new look seen through Larson's eyes. Two birds wonder why an afternoon worth of worms won't fill a baby up, and ants toting a wide-eyed moppet wonder how they're going to get their prize down the anthill.

Through all this, the reader doesn't have much room to feel comfortable about modern Western society. Today's perfectly normal cliché becomes perfectly absurd in Gary Larson's clutches. An alligator confesses in a murder trial, "Of course I did it in cold blood, you idiot! I'm a reptile!" and a dog with a samurai sword waits for the postman. It's hard to feel at ease when enthralled aliens watch from another planet as a nuclear war turns earth into a beautiful bit of fireworks. "Ooooooooooh!" they rhapsodize.

Part of the reason for this unease is Larson's tendency to side with the other side — animals. Using his favourites — ducks, elephants, cows, snakes, and dogs — and placing them in human situations, Larson often

revolts against the rule of humans.

By turning the tables on fables like the three little pigs — and making the wolf an obscene phone huffer and puffer — he not only makes a joke, but points to a larger question. Which society is weirder — his, the tale's, or the one we live in?

## Gay male artists establish cultural voice

By ROBIN METCALFE

Six gay male artists from the Atlantic region will participate in the 1985 Art by Gay Men show at Centre for Art Tapes in Halifax from March 12 through 29. The organizers of the annual exhibition, Jim MacSwain and Robin Metcalfe, have as their long-term goals to foster a community of dialogue among Atlantic gay male artists and to establish a cultural voice for the broader gay male community in the region. Two previous shows (Halifax 1982, Halifax & Fredericton 1983) were funded co-operatively by the artists and open to work on many themes. This year a grant from the Centre for Art Tapes will make possible

the payment of artists' fees.

The first two exhibitions served to establish contacts among artists and between them and their community. The designation of a theme for the 1985 show is intended to encourage a more active and focused dialogue. "Private Lives/Public Spaces" reflects a common tension in gay men's experience, between "private" desire and perceptions and their social contexts and consequences.

Besides the organizers themselves, participating artists will include Dan Anderson, Ritchie Doucet, Guy Duguay and Greg Wight, exhibiting work in such media as photography, audio, video, found objects and tests, sculpture and painting.

The Centre for Art tapes is located in the Alexandra Centre, 2156 Brunswick St., Halifax.

THE DALHOUSIE DRAMA Society will be presenting its second and final production of the '84-'85 season season this week. The DDS, which has presented *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *God over the past two years* will bring *What the Butler Saw* by Joe Orton to life from March 29-31.

The two-act sexual farce is being directed by Ron Wheatley of Halifax's Entr'acte Productions. The six member cast consists of

Peter Jarvis, Elizabeth Power, Kelly Green, Jeff Connors, Adam Copas and Dennis Brown. Sean Kelly is set designer.

Performances of *What the Butler Saw* will begin at 8 pm. in the McInnis Room of the Dalhousie SUB. Refreshments will be available on Friday and Saturday nights beginning at 7 pm. Tickets for evening performances are \$3 for students and \$4 for others and will be available at the door. There will also be a brunch theatre on

Sunday March 31 beginning at 11 am. Beaver Foods will supply the brunch. For this reservations are required and can be made by phoning the Enquiry Desk at 424-2140. Tickets for the brunch performance are \$7 for students and \$8 for others.

The DDS is in existence to supply those interested students who are not in the Dalhousie Theatre programme with the opportunity to partake in university theatre. This year's president is Jeannie Coholan.