

Are university students being b

Editor's note: The following article was originally submitted to the Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Education, Public Services and Provincial-Municipal Relations by a group of faculty members at Mount St. Vincent University and was written by Larry Fisk of MSVU's Department of Political studies. Although some statistics may not apply to all Canadian universities, the attitudes certainly do.

A group of students at the University of Alberta were recently addressed by a speaker who entitled his talk: "The University is dead - God."

Some of us would be prepared to argue that in terms of matters that really count the university, if it isn't dead, is at least under the serious and critical scrutiny of experts in the intensive care unit and the present prognosis is none too favorable. For, whatever else we may wish to say about the youth culture (or however we define the long term significance of a counter-culture or cultural revolution) a profound questioning and dissatisfaction is in fact being expressed and changes demanded within the university environment. Perhaps Peter Berger's simple explanation helps us to understand. The dominant spirit of childhood: - the happy childhood that most middle class children share is confronting the second most dominant spirit, in technological societies: - the spirit of bureaucratization common to all institutions. The carefree, protected and highly personal life of childhood confronts the highly regulated and impersonal life of bureaucracy first of all in educational institutions.

Social institutions like the church of the family, or political institutions like political parties may once have been the most logical object of youthful attack but their significance in defining social reality seems very much to be replaced by the universities. Hence, the attack zeroes in on the more recently uncovered enemy.

The problem, as we understand it, is not so much that the university has the power to define social reality for us but, rather, that it does so on the basis of very particular, if not narrow, assumptions rooted in its present faculty and administration and their own professional training, most of whom fail to recognize the particularities of their own myth-making. We see three evil tendencies in university education in Canada. Universities seem to us to be increasingly antipersonal, politically reactionary and morally bankrupt. We describe these evils as tendencies because we do not believe all universities harbour them to the same extent although all halls of learning are subjected to the forces which foster their unwelcome growth. These forces include, we're convinced, tightly rationalized academic traditions, the social status of the university-trained, the effect of large buildings and the maintenance of them, the sheer size of most modern campus and their concomitant administrative needs, and the increased importance and power of universities in social and political life. Emanations arising from the above sources inevitably push the university in the undesirable directions which we now wish to describe more fully.

Anti personal

First we said the university tends to be anti-personal. We deliberately chose to say "anti-personal" rather than "impersonal" because of first expression intimates that university life is consciously against people rather than quietly indifferent. Let us explain.

Scores of introductory classes across the country have enrollments of 800 to 1,000 where the only advantage for the student is that his or her anonymity ensures an uninterrupted 50 minute nap. Or we might consider computerized registration which makes number 100667 more significant than my signature, or library regulations designed to keep books on the shelf; a library check-out service which dispenses more feelings of criminality than it catches stolen books; the profusion of faculty lounges which protect professors from unwittingly revealing their humanity to students over coffee, whatever the regulation, whatever the practice; the size, maintenance and development of the total physical plant in effect says (in the words of the bewildered freshmen): - "screw the individual student!"

There is a second and much more serious level of "inhumanity" in the universities and that is in the way the academic pursuits engaged in emphasize behaviour rather than experience. In the humanities and social sciences the observable behaviour of people is studied to the exclusion the introspective view of the one who is experiencing the behaviour. But experience is every bit as real as the behavior that we observe that

reflects it.

R. D. Laing, the provocative British psychiatrist has shown us that experience is but one side of reality and behavior another. There is no inner and outer in human experience save what we give those names. In order to understand persons we need to appreciate the total reality about them. We need to take seriously the experience which gives rise to behavior. As R. D. Laing says: "Our behavior is a function of our experience. We act according to the way we see things. If our experience is destroyed our behavior will be destructive. If our experience is destroyed, we have lost our own selves."

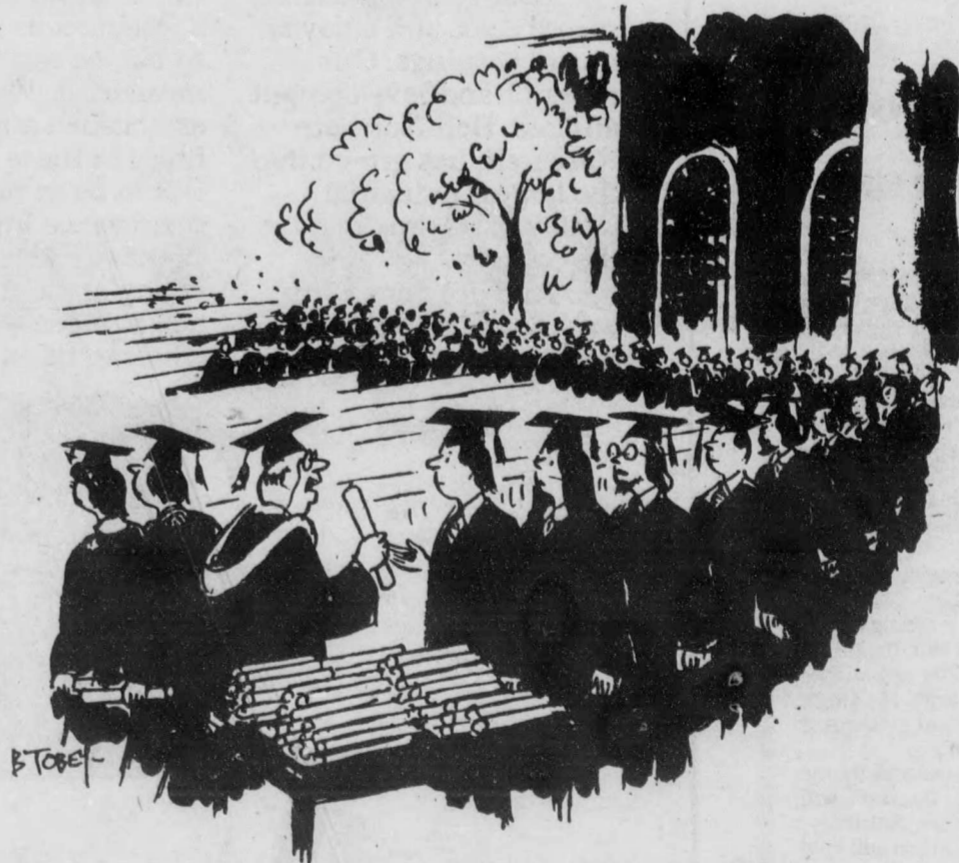
Lectures, reading lists, term papers and examinations all pressure the student to see social realities as something to be learned about, observed and memorized. There is little to match these activities which would assist students in appreciating their environment, sharing and extending their talents, accepting and critically weighing their own experience, improving their activities by practice and developing their own wisdom and morality. Is it any wonder university teachers complain that students are so inexperienced and non-reflective? Students are so because their training circumvents such self-reflection.

To use an example from the field of political studies we teach students about political institutions and political events but we do not attempt to practice political action or responsible citizenship and critically evaluate our own performance:

Is scientific realism anti-personal?

The young Catholic theologian, Michael Novak writes that the university faculty (and not the administration) is the real enemy of the student in this struggle for a new understanding. He says that "the faculty is the guardian of the prevailing myth by which reality is to be perceived; the prevailing definition of reason, method, argumentation and even perception. What the faculty says is important exists; what the faculty ignores does not exist."

"Realism is what one learns in college." To paraphrase Novak: - where all experience, and especially that of the student, is denegated social reality is what the professor leads students to read and observe and by the methodology which he advocates. Critics of this realism of analytical reason by consciousness which maintains, again as does Michael Novak, that, "myth and symbol, feeling and fantasy, experience and imagination, sensitivity and sensibility are given an explicit role in the expression of ethical and political perception and action." As advocates of realism we, the faculty have for too long been calling such dimensions of human understanding mere romanticism, irrationality or self-indulgence.



"Congratulations, keep moving, please. Congratulations, keep moving, please. Congratulations, keep moving, please."

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THE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS SAID HIGH SCHOOL.



AND I ST WANT TO



Is competitive work

Anti-personal?

Finally, I think the university anti-personal because of its inordinate hard, competitive work. Success, in uni is seen as what I achieve in relation to achieve by stepping over and on my fellow faculty members. The emphasis on sci makes all endeavors subject to the crit students but its extension in the psychol jealousy for another's achievement surrounding a new or previously unexpr hulking pride over a higher grade.

The emphasis on learning about things rules out an appreciation of the development and personal growth and which might better have constituted our success, and in a much less competi emphasis on hard work done in s miserably to appreciate how work ac private is profoundly indebted to accomplishments of other and the p critical environment or our contempo

Politically reactiona

Precious little research is carried on developing a better life for forgotten i issuing them with the results. What we r counter-research which imaginatively a attempts to propound and develop alternatives of outworn ways of doing Ivan Illich calls for such research, a alternatives to the products which now market; to hospitals and the profession keeping the sick alive (the research i heart transplant while thousands die dysentery) to schools and the packaging refuses education to those who are not o who have not gone through the curricul not sat in a classroom a sufficien successive hours, who will not pay for with submission to custodial care, s certification or with indoctrination in th dominant elite."

Provocative statements like Illich' remind academics that our quiet studi offices do not cease to be political ju avoid taking sides. Our decision not to study which would be given over to th against the existing economic and polit from being politically neutral is in f reactionary. We fail to recognize that e attempts at neutrality are rooted assumption that the political and educ and institutions within which we work a