

About those books

The struggle for Canadian content

By GLEN WILLIAMS

It could have been happening anywhere at York on the day (Feb. 12) that EXCALIBUR showed that there were only 5 required books by Canadian authors on 14 first year social science and humanities courses.

A professor and his class in a lecture hall: some sighs, a few regrets and a conventional wisdom.

"It's too bad" he said, "that there aren't more Canadian textbooks."

While this chestnut would have gone over well in almost any other York classroom, in this particular case it was delivered to students in a third year Canadian Civilization course — a somewhat more sensitive group to the problems of Canadian content.

Consequently, a student got up and asked: "Do you suppose that there are more than five Canadian books which could be used as texts?"

There was a dead silence as the attention of the class centred on the professor.

Not used to being challenged, he cautiously cleared his throat, looked a little embarrassed and said:

"I suppose so."

The student was quickly on his feet again with another, more pointed question.

"How many more Canadian books would you think could be added to the list?"

"I'm really not very sure," he replied.

"Would you say 10, or 20, or would it be closer to 30?" the student pressed.

By now thoroughly embarrassed, the professor admitted that he really had no idea of how many suitable Canadian books could be found.

Typical of many York teachers, this man had no concept of the range of Canadian material available. (See Page 8.)

Like many of his colleagues, he had accepted the conventional wisdom which said that there were no books and he had not bothered to give the problem very much more thought.

Three basic attitudes

Three basic attitudes need to be examined if we are to understand why such a fallacious concept can be accepted by our 'professional' academics.

First, we must recognize that conscious agents of U.S. academic imperialism really exist — that such people are not simply figments of an overtaxed rhetorical imagination.

We must understand that some Americans believe that they come from a superior culture and that they see themselves as being here to raise our standards.

They lay before us all of the glitter of the American Way of Life — technology and mass consumption, individualism and individual freedom, and U.S.-style democracy.

They show us none of the filth that this way is built on — pollution, racism, political repression, imperialism and aggressive war.

The arrogance of a conscious agent is unbounded.

In raising the issue of York's Americanization, for example, one conscious agent asked his first year students to decide between having him "someone from L.A.; from the swinging West Coast" or some "stodgy old Canadian."

Because conscious agents see themselves as missionaries, they are

going to be the last ones to look out for Canadian material.

To such people we may as well be a nation of illiterates.

However, not all Americans teaching at York can be described as conscious agents.

Indeed, many have come to Canada disillusioned with the assumptions behind U.S. society.

In their classrooms, consequently, they describe what is really going on in the United States. They are, if you like, anti-American.

But very often they don't get beyond that.

They fail to realize that if what they are teaching is to have any positive impact, they must teach Canadian students how capitalism and how American imperialism relate to Canada.

Unconscious agents

Until they are able to make this transition, anti-American U.S. professors are really unwitting and unconscious agents of U.S. academic imperialism.

Instead of requiring their classes to read U.S. books written by apologists, they ask their students to read U.S. books written by critics.

The effect is quite often the same: a schizophrenic Canadian who lives in Canada but thinks within a U.S. framework and therefore within a colonial mentality.

Ironically, the attitude which is most directly responsible for so few Canadian texts being on first year courses can be associated with York's Canadian faculty.

They are the ones who should have been putting pressure on their foreign colleagues to Canadianize themselves.

However, no stimulus has been given.

Often educated in U.S. or British graduate schools, many Canadian faculty carry a vaguely-concealed

contempt for their culture and history.

Like Africa's rois negres, they have identified themselves completely with the values of the imperial centre — the U.S. scholastic colossus.

'Progress', in their eyes, is creating a Canada which is a carbon copy of the United States.

These Canadians are not only contented with teaching their students U.S. material, but will vigorously defend the position that Canada is better off being in the American Empire.

With these being the three prevailing attitudes among York's faculty it is easy to see why available Canadian material is not being presented.

At the same time these attitudes should be related to the fact that there is relatively little Canadian material published compared to the amount of work which could be done.

A number of equilibriums operate so as to maintain a relatively low number of available Canadian works.

1) **no books — low incentive for writers — no books**

Writing is for most people a social act — they write so that others will read.

Anyone thinking seriously about writing a book about Canada knows that it will have very few readers and that it will not be assigned to large university courses.

No Canadian books are on the present curriculums and there is no reason for a Canadian writer to believe that his book will be an exception.

So, we offer very little stimulus for him to devote the energy required to produce a book which we say we need.

2) **no books — low incentive for publishers — no books**

While writers may be motivated by their potential readers, publishers are capitalists.

They are not about to waste money producing or promoting a Canadian book which, because of its origin and

its subject matter, has little chance of capturing bulk orders.

Further, in Canada most publishers are closely tied to the American Empire.

As branch plant operations they are actively engaged in promoting all the U.S. books that are being used in Canadian universities.

What possible concern could they have for developing Canadian studies when they are able to dump a few thousand U.S. texts here every year? 3) **no books — low student interest — no books**

We have seen the attitudes of many of York's faculty to developing Canadian studies and we have seen that there are few Canadian textbooks on York's courses.

What possible stimulus is there for students to become interested in doing research on Canada?

What possible stimulus there for students to become interested in doing research on Canada?

Or, if a student does become interested in doing research on Canada, where will he get the conceptual tools which will allow him to explore his environment in a meaningful way?

Not in York's social science courses where he is taught by omission that Canada is a somewhat parochial sub-variant of the groovy United States.

Colony and pillar

It is impossible to conceive of a Canadian social science unless it is one which is organized around Canada's central economic, political, and social reality — Canada is at once a U.S. colony and a pillar of the American Empire.

York's social science program is not only Americanized in content, but the entire conceptual framework behind its organization is irrelevant to this country.

With little stimulus in terms of content and no conceptual framework, except that of the U.S. scholastic machine, it seems certain that the cycle of 'no books — low student interest — no books' will not be broken with this generation of Canadian students.

Again, let it be made clear that there are few books compared to the amount of work which could be done — but there ARE books.

What of their quality? It is with considerable fear and many misgivings that EXCALIBUR has presented a random list of available Canadian texts on Page 8.

Many of these books are little more than bourgeois status quo apologies for Canadian exploitation of minority groups and the working class; apologies for Canadian racism and political repression; and apologies for Canadian imperialism and her supportative position in the American Empire.

In short, we find the politics of many of these books repulsive.

But we still recommend that they be read.

At present, these books are all we have and we must come to grips with the material which is presented in them.

If we are to be critical of our society, our criticisms must be rooted in Canada's social realities.

If we are to be successful in changing Canadian society, we must first understand the way in which it is constructed.

So, read the books — with care — but read them.

