

Peter Reilly - a radical in Conservative clothing

By GREG GERTZ

Conservative MP Peter Reilly came off looking like an out-and-out radical compared to the York students with whom he met here Wednesday, October 10.

The first-term MP for Ottawa West, who once booed co-party member John Diefenbaker in the House for criticizing Stanfield, informally discussed such topics as the War Measures Act, supermarket prices, taxes on capital gains, unions, and work projects like Opportunities For Youth.

He spoke to a group of fewer than 14 persons, most of whom were members of campus political clubs. The poor attendance was due to Reilly's late arrival and confusion as to where the meeting would be held.

Reilly, pale and suffering what he described as "agonizing pain" because of a recent auto accident, was originally scheduled to deliver an address on The Trudeau Regime, but decided instead to field questions from the small audience.

When one student suggested the recent food price hikes were justified and did not contribute significantly to supermarket profits, Reilly replied, "The farmer is gaining next to nothing from these price rises. The national grocery chains are making all the money. Price controls have to be established and they should never be taken off."

He said the M. Loeb Co. of Ottawa, which controls the IGA chain, showed a 106% increase in profits last year. "David Lewis knows what he's talking about when he refers to the 'corporate rip-off.'"

Another student said Opportunities For Youth and the Company of Young Canadians were "phony jobs" which

only wasted the taxpayers' money. Reilly disagreed.

"CYC, OFY and similar projects can't be written off," he said. "They are designed to provide jobs for people who can't find jobs. If it weren't for them the permanent unemployment figure would be 8 per cent. There have been abuses but good things have also been done. What is needed is better administration."

He applauded the new setup whereby each MP will appoint a committee of 10 in his riding to consider OFY applications. "I have a few ideas of my own already, and I'm sure my committee has some," he said.

Reilly, a former journalist, said he entered politics originally because "I was mad at the imposition of the War Measures Act" during the October 1970 crisis. When some students indicated they supported the use of the Act, Reilly countered, "There was no evidence of any plot against the government that had even a chance of success".

"The government should have intensified its police work, not turned the police force loose and suspended all civil rights," he said. "The War Measures Act didn't contribute one wit to the recovery of Cross".

He said bottles were thrown through his window, his phone tapped, his family harassed and his briefcase stolen from his car by the RCMP after he criticized the government's handling of the crisis on Ottawa television.

At one point Reilly said, with a smile, "I would have joined the Communist party if I had known where to go" when younger. He said he chose the Conservatives because their base of support was the broadest.

"The NDP's power base is too small, as is the Liberal's in Quebec. The Conservatives are the only party that elected members in every province".

Shortly after his hour-late arrival,

Reilly suggested that members of the Young Progressive Conservative Club, which arranged his visit, knock on classroom doors and inform students that he had arrived and would speak.

When the students balked at his request, he chided, "Come on, let's get a little radical."

It was a statement that could have been repeated many times during the afternoon.

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