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NAKED CAME POLONSKY:

The television-less generation

By JOE POLONSKY

"You know you are winning an argument, when your opponent drags in memories of Nazi Germany into a defence of his position." For instance, in the days before pro-Canadianism, i.e. anti-Americanism, became liberal chic; a speaker suggesting that the number of Americans allowed to man the faculties of our universities should be limited, would find his protagonist shrinking in horror at this barbaric suggestion, rebuking the speaker for adopting these same kind of callous, chauvinist principles which inevitably led to the machinations of the Nazi Machine.

Similarly, after the occurrence of a Spiro Agnew oration, in which he called the kids bums and traitors and reminded them to love America or leave it, you can count on an offended New York Times columnist to scorn Agnew for so crudely indulging in the same kind of rhetoric which permeated the Nazi propaganda.

Similarly, after having been told by a security guard that you must park your car in the red lot instead of the blue lot even though the blue lot in which you are currently parked is three quarters empty and that you shouldn't get angry with him anyway as he is just a little man following orders, you uncontrollably burst out with, "Sure, just like Hitler's S.S. men."

Well, the modern, more sophisticated thinkers have found a new whipping boy. Television! The tv set is held responsible for the popularization of the revolt of the black, the revolt of the young and the revolt of the women. And not only that, it elected John Kennedy, Pierre Trudeau and Bill Davis and has in its spare time, managed to reduce modern life to an endless string of mundane choices, in which important decisions revolve around whether to use Palmolive or Lifebuoy, Excedrin or Anacin, Molson's Export or Molson's Golden. Why, television is a regular Pandora's Box of Banality. The modern thinkers have made the boob tube a bruised tube.

Now, I do not think that one would have to be of a particularly strong utopianist bent to contend that York University is not, in fact, an ideal community. The colleges, which four years ago, were still thought to be the saving grace of a sprawling commuter university, have sunk into oblivion. A student politician advancing the notion that people should see York as a home away from home, is only letting himself in for a host of paternalizing pats on the head from those members of his peer group who know better. York is no longer a community to be experienced.

Rather, it is seen as ripe grounds, where a young into the classroom at 10 am sucks out of the professor whatever knowledge he or she is willing to deposit for the whatever knowledge he or she is willing to deposit for the day and then promptly at 10:50, without so much as mumbling a "what's happening" to the person seated next to him, leaves the classroom, dashing off to the library to read Karl Marx on Alienation so that in the next tutorial, it shall be painfully obvious that he understands the essential Marx while the other students have merely touched the surface. And so much for the York Community Experience, Monday, Nov. 1.

Unfriendliness has become a way of life at York, a

phenomenon only equalled by that of political unconcern. Things of a political nature are not the stuff of which a growing intellectual mind must concern himself. So you have noticeably for the first time on this phenomenon of visiting academics, who only a handful have heard of before, outdrawing visiting politicians. Even on a sunny Friday afternoon, an American academic can be found packing them in at the lecture hall, while a politico can consider himself lucky if he manages to fill a seminar room. The young minds are anxious for an academic siphoning alone.

One of the causes then, for this cold, individualistic, "straw in the professor's learned chocolate milk" approach to university, is the fact that nobody who goes to York watches much television, especially those who don't live with their parents. All those knowing minds who told us how bad tv was for us, have convinced us to stop watching it. Therefore, they can hardly blame tv for our problems, because we don't watch it. It is difficult to tell someone that the only reason she voted for Bill Davis was because of his television campaign, when she responds with, "I haven't watched any television in three months." We have become the first generation that has stopped watching television.

Tv is a very communal and emotional experience. Although the act of watching it is a passive one, which is done while one is alone or with a few people in the privacy of one's living room, its effects are exactly the opposite, especially for political or cultural concerns. Of course, Woodstock Nation was partly the product of millions of young people being all able to experience a cultural phenomenon at the same time. We all felt the Woodstock festival. We were part of that community. We were there with our bodies and our souls. And a partial explanation for why the Woodstock Nation failed as a political movement is because it stopped watching tv and the experience of community disappeared.

The only large rally to be ever held at York was the one which occurred a year ago following the death of Pierre Laporte. We were there. It was probably one of the few times in the past year on which we felt obligated to turn on the tv.

I know that one of the main reasons why I particularly felt involved in the trial of the Chicago Seven was because I was at home visiting my parents for the last two weeks of the trial and watched Walter Cronkite every evening. I remember that on the day the decision was reached to send the seven to prison, even my mother, who hardly sympathized with The Cause, was overwhelmed with the raw emotion of these young boys going to jail. It was only because I watched the event on tv that I became so emotionally involved in it. It was much more than another event chronicled in the Star.

The crap notwithstanding, television has a powerfully positive effect on us. It integrates the mind with the heart, the individual with the community. We should be careful in our analysis of it as the cause of all the floods and the plagues, the rapings and the pillagings, the revolutions and the counter revolutions. Revolutions are not made on television. But perhaps television cannot help itself in the making of the revolutionary experience.

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