



U of A famed historical figure gone infamous

Psychology Department founder posthumously stripped of prestige

BY CRAIG SAUNDERS

VICTORIA (CUP) — John MacEachran held two PhDs and founded the department of philosophy and psychology at the University of Alberta. He was the university's provost until he retired in 1945. In 1975, four years after his death, the school named a lecture series after him, and later named a room in his honour.

But last month, the psychology department he helped create stripped him of his posthumous honours in the wake of revelations about MacEachran's role as head of the provincial eugenics board. Before it was disbanded in 1972, the board ordered the sterilization of more than 2,800 people.

According to University of Alberta professor, Douglas Wahlsten, MacEachran's involvement with the board became an issue in 1995; after a woman who was sterilized on the board's orders successfully sued the Alberta government.

Prior to the case, faculty in the psychology department only knew professor MacEachran from a blurb prefacing the lecture series. After a long list of academic accomplishments, with no mention of his role as head of the eugenics board from 1929 to 1965, it said, "[he was] instrumental in the formative stages of the Mental Health Movement in Alberta."

"This is what a lot of us were told," Wahlsten said. "It turned out not to be the case."

Earlier this fall, on Wahlsten's recommendation, the psychology faculty unanimously voted to strip MacEachran's name from the lecture series and from a small seminar room at the university because of MacEachran's activity on the board.

The Alberta Eugenics Board was created in 1928, during a period of strong support for eugenics in England, Germany and the U.S. The basic concept behind the eugenics movement of the time was to sterilize individuals judged to be mentally inadequate, thus preventing them from having children with the same problems.

In its first five years of operation, 206 people were sterilized under order from the Alberta board. The rate doubled during the Second World War, and dropped back down after the war. In terms of numbers of persons sterilized, the board was most active in the 1960s and 70s. Between

1964 and 1970, 584 people were sterilized.

The board was finally disbanded with the collapse of the Social Credit government in Alberta. MacEachran headed this board for 36 years. Its membership was named by the University of Alberta, but their actions were kept behind closed doors.

Supporters included prominent figures from the Canadian political right and left, including enduring and strong support from Ernest Manning, who was the premier

of Alberta for many years.

"In 1947, Involuntary sterilization of inmates was condemned as a war crime by the Nuremberg Tribunal," Wahlsten said. "In Alberta, they just kept sterilizing anyway...they were unaffected by 10 years of advancement in genetics. They just kept cutting."

The board continued to operate under principles and processes which became obsolete or questionable, including using IQ tests to determine competence.

They went so far as to order the sterilization of people who were naturally sterile, including a group of 15 men with Down Syndrome. The board ordered them castrated despite the widely accepted fact that these males were sterile and their Down Syndrome was not hereditary. The testicular material from these individuals was later used in an experiment.

Margaret Thompson, the board's geneticist at the time, defended the decision to castrate these individuals. Her

statement, which came out at the recent trial, was that the decision was to, "make assurance doubly sure."

James Ogloff, chair of the ethics committee of the Canadian Psychological Association, compared the MacEachran case to a recent decision made by the American Psychological Association. The U.S. association decided not to give a psychologist in his nineties an award because in the 1930s and 40s he wrote that blacks were less

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Chips off the old Soviet block ?

ERIN FITZPATRICK

(SLAVSK, RUSSIA) — Russia is a name synonymous with history. Speak it and images of crazy priests, lost princesses, famed astronauts and enigmatic philosophers come to mind. Russia's history has fascinated many since long before the Cold War and continues to do so. Even many of those examining the country's current state of affairs look no further than its origins during communism. Russia is often defined, even by Russians themselves, in terms of what it has done and where it has been.

But where is it going? For young Russians like Natasha Panarina, an accountant, Sveta Kotcherga and Stas Andreev, both students, more attention needs to be paid to the future of Russia.

"Communism is gone and that's good," says Panarina, "but now we have some strange system and nobody knows what it is...and they don't know the rules. They don't know what they can do. It's time we begin to think about something else, not always only communism."

While many Russian politicians, senior citizens and even western journalists remain preoccupied with lamenting and analyzing the country's past, young people seem eager to move on.

Their goals for their country are less grandiose and perhaps more realistic than those of their parents, who fixed their eyes on Lenin's "dream" of a communist utopia. Today's Russians only want to take care of themselves. "Right now we are on our knees," says Andreev. "We don't want to be pitied," adds Kotcherga. "It's like, we've gone from being a superpower to being like the third world. We want to be a strong and respected country again." The way to do that, each agrees is to establish efficient economic and political systems in Russia.

Panarina feels that the Russian economic system is in total chaos. "The reality is capitalism, but the laws are from communism. The Mafia is taking advantage of this

situation." Because the Mafia does business illegally, the Russian economy is growing very slowly, even as many become rich quickly.

The political system needs reforming too, according to Kotcherga. "When will we see logic in government?" she asks. "It's like, there are so many bureaucrats with nothing to do but make up all kinds of crazy rules and programs that nobody sees through...How can a country thrive when it's government won't stick with one plan for more than one day?"

Andreev talks of what has become somewhat of a Russian New Year's Eve tradition: Yeltsin making a speech at 11:50pm, December 31. "He talks about all of the changes he will make in the new year, but where are they? Russia is in transition right now, and we need reforms, action!"

Stagnant economy, stagnant politics, a people fixed on the past. To most young Russians it appears more and more like they will have to take this action themselves; changing their country from the bottom up, instead of waiting for it to happen from the top down.

"Now, every man is working for his own survival only," Kotcherga asserts. "We need to work together to improve our country's situation. We need to think about the bigger picture and not always our own small problems."

But despite their plans for a new future for Russia, even in the case of these hopeful young students, history seems to be repeating itself. Panarina and Kotcherga are educated, and have the potential to make the reforms they desire a reality; it appears, however, that like the typical

Russian politician, these women are all talk and no action. Panarina has already immigrated to Canada, and Kotcherga is in the process of applying. Traditionally, Russia's intelligentsia has always emigrated to lands of more promising futures, leaving their country in the hands of sometimes bumbling, sometimes terrifying, politicians.

Andreev is the only one among them committed to his country, but he too seems to be caught in Russia's historical loop. His answer for Russia's economic and political woes, for its lack of unity, its need for action, is none other than a return to communism.

Will Russia ever be able to get over its past, and stop trying to either recreate it, rectify it, reminisce about it, run from it, renounce it or repeat it? If these young Russians are any indication, only time will tell.

PROFESSOR PROFILE

Anthropology and the graduate ropes

BY JENNY AINSLIE

Dr. Lindsay Dubois is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Dalhousie. She teaches both introductory and upper level SOSA courses. After attending McGill University during her undergraduate years, Dr. Dubois went on to obtain a PhD in Social Anthropology at the New School for Social Research in New York, at which time she had the opportunity to do extensive travelling with her research. Dubois began teaching at Dalhousie in 1995, while completing her PhD. She defended her thesis last April and is now in the first year of a new three year contract with the university.

Gazette: What made you consider Social Anthropology as a career choice?

Dubois: I didn't even know what it was when I started university. My brother...said, "You know, you should take Anthropology. You'd like it." And so I did, and I did [like

it]. It worked for me.

What was your PhD research all about?

It's called "The Politics of the Past in an Argentine Working Class Neighbourhood". Basically, I did ethnographic field work, which means I lived in this neighbourhood, kind of like a housing project, in Argentina...for about a year and a half. I looked at how people in this neighbourhood understand and make sense of the recent past. It so happens that the period I was looking at, 1972-1992, includes the most violent recent dictatorship [in Argentina]...I was interested in what kinds of effects those kinds of political experiences have on working class people who aren't particularly involved in politics.

How did you go about collecting information?

Well, I got a sense of how they live in a day to day way...then I did interviews. I also did a lot of just chatting, hanging out, and talking to people. I participated in community organizations...one of

the more interesting things I did was a history workshop in which a bunch of people from the neighbourhood painted a mural about the history of the neighbourhood...You [have to] use a combination of techniques [because] people say different things in different settings that are contradictory.

How did you deal with the contradictory information?

You try and get as much information as you can, but then you have to just evaluate it. A lot of what I'm interested in is the contradictions...it's kind of interpretive.

So, is this research finished?

It's finished as a dissertation but I'm writing articles based on that research. And I'm about to start thinking about starting to write a book. It's exciting! I have [well] not very much, but a few things published, and by the time it happens it's like it's not even yours anymore. You write it down and it looks like your stuff and then it

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