

An Englishman in La Belle province

By ALLEN GARR
Canadian University Press

Where I come from, when there is a need for a university the government diverts money allocated to some power project and builds a university. That's British Columbia.

Where I used to come from, when there was a need for a university the government would cajole the bears and bulls of Bay Street into pulling out of A.T. & T. or Noranda for a bit to provide funds for higher education. That was Ontario.

Universities in B.C. and Ontario are big business just like hydro electric and stocks are big business.

Building universities in Canada's richest provinces have become habit forming — like donating

money to the United Appeal. Good business. Part of our heritage.

For all of us, universities are as basic to the Canadian way of life as motherhood and apple pie.

After one trip to Quebec, however, I decided that either my analysis about Canada was wrong or La Belle Province is definitely not a species to be classed under the heading "Canadian way of life".

I took that trip across the Champlain bridge and away from the safety of English Canada to observe, much like I observed my first dissected cat in a grade ten biology class.

I drove to CEGEP de Hull on the outskirts of Hull — a city that comes to you through the courtesy

of the E. B. Eddy Match Co. Ltd.

CEGEP de Hull is one of the 23 Colleges de'Enseignement General et Professionnel which have been set up since August, 1967 to produce French Canadian technocrats.

The 1,016 students at CEGEP de Hull have, during the past week, joined their 44,000 counterparts in the rest of Quebec to protest their educational dilemma.

The essential issues which gave rise to the largest and most unified student uprising in the history of Canada are: the need for a second French language university in Montreal, government cut-back on bursary funds with a corresponding increase in loan interest, and the inadequacy of the training provided by CEGEP's.

I was told what the basic problem in Hull, and indeed all Quebec, was. I wanted to throw up.

I was told that 45,000 students in 18 out of the 23 CEGEP's and a number of universities were screwed up because of a "lack of communications" between the Quebec government and the CEGEP administration. At least they could find other words -- my first thought. That phrase has become so overused in English Canada as to have lost all of its meaning.

But Quebec isn't English Canada. Quebec is fifty years behind English Canada. Quebec is fifty years behind the world.

And after twenty minutes at CEGEP de Hull I found that Hull, because it is not close to Montreal, is even further behind than the rest of the province.

Montreal gets Ottawa's shoppers and culture types; Hull gets the Sunday booze hounds.

CEGEP's in and around Montreal get constant financial and moral support from UGEQ: CEGEP de Hull got two UGEQ officials in a two hour breeze through on the school's fifth day of occupation.

If Montreal can be viewed as the front of a Victorian mansion, Hull is certainly the back door.

The 200 kids who were occupying CEGEP de Hull knew it too. But it only depressed them and in the face of this isolation they went back to classes.

When CEGEP's were set up it was expected that only 30% of those students attending would head into the university prep course. The rest would be channelled into the technical course.

Given the perennial argument that people from working-class backgrounds tend not to gravitate towards university education and given that the average CEGEP student comes from such a background, government expectations make sense. At least they make sense in English Canada.

But for some reason or, better still, for some lack of reason, the figures were reversed. Now 70% of those enrolled in CEGEP's are in the prep course and want to go to university.

You would think that the government would be thrilled out of its nineteenth century mind. But that's clearly not the case.

They promised the CEGEP's another university some years ago in order to compensate for the additional qualifying students. But the promise was like the promise of candy to a child . . . hoping he would forget.

Even the technical course has been botched. The government has failed to create a demand in the job market for French speaking technicals.

The people at CEGEP de Hull know they have problems. But, the ones we spoke to didn't even know how to find out what the specific requirements were for university entrance, let alone how to coordinate their struggle with other CEGEP's in the province.

They are so young, so inexperienced, so confused, yet so much within their rights to protest government fumbblings.

But they are far away from Bay Street, British Columbia and my apartment over the Champlain bridge in the womb of English Canada.

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STUDENT COUNCIL MEETING

Subject: CUS
Howe Hall Library
7:15 Thursday