

Danger of violent conflict — warns federal Youth Report

by Glenn Wanamaker

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RELEASED its Committee on Youth Report Aug. 26, and already discussion seems to have stopped rather than continuing to provide a gauge of public opinion.

What reaction there was came almost instantaneously and was critical. The attitudes of adults were only valuable in that they reinforced the Report's feeling that only a minority of adults understand youth's dissatisfactions and desires.

The negative reaction to the recommendation to legalize marijuana was predictable, as was the fact that the criticism failed to take this proposal in the context of the whole report.

One newspaper termed the Report "an over-reaction" in that the Committee felt compelled to accept the demands of youth at face value.

THE MAIL-STAR BLASTED THE COMMITTEE in its own inimitable way, for its stand on the legalization of the soft drugs and for its recommendation to cease funding the cadet training program. It concluded that the older generation owed the young "the good life."

The Report found that youth could no longer accept the values of a society that placed material possessions and class status before human beings. Nor could they tolerate a system that discriminates, that perpetuates a de-humanizing and authoritarian education system, and that provides little information on how its political system actually operates.

Many of the criticisms directed at the Report concern specific observations or recommendations. Yet the overall feelings and hopes of youth are being overlooked. To understand why certain recom-

mendations have been made, it is necessary to look at them in the context of the entire report. No one topic, be it education, culture, or drugs, can be dealt with as a separate issue. Each is part of the whole.

TREATING YOUTH AS A CLASS and thus expecting that once they've reached maturity and entered the "real" world the problem of youth will disappear is as foolish as it is naive.

The Report says, "The attempt to 'define' youth is in many ways a pointless exercise, since the group exhibits all the heterogeneity of any other age group. Young people perceive themselves as a distinct group, not on the basis of age but rather on the basis of the commonality of their situation and attitudes; they are facing for the first time a morass of institutions which they find unsatisfactory and unresponsive."

Generally, the Report shows a very accurate understanding of the majority of this country's young people. The contacts they made seem representative and some of the terms of reference (books and music, etc.) provided a good background for the members in their attempts to assess the political and social views of youth.

There are areas that are lacking, but some of these were untouched intentionally because of other detailed government studies, such as the Ouimet Report, which included a report on youth in penitentiaries, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission of Inquiry into the Non-medical Use of Drugs.

Two areas, however, were not studied thoroughly by the Committee on Youth. One of them, poverty and youth, is dealt with in the context of education and unemployment, but there is little on the additional problems that face those with less money than others. Poverty is indeed only part of the whole situation but it is a complex and major part of it. In this light, it would have been much more effective to have studied it in depth so that the "upper echelons" of society could see, in facts and figures at least, what poverty means.

ONE OTHER SUBJECT, MENTAL HEALTH, is dealt with superficially and is hardly recognizable as a problem. Among all age groups is heard the complaint about "the same old rat race." Youth, as well, before they have even entered the labour market, are being pressured from all angles to get an education, etc., in order to make lots of money. There are social pressures — being part of the "in" group, personal appearance, etc. Youth is expected by so many areas of society to shape up and compete.

The toll of young people who cannot cope with all these phoney imposed standards is mounting, just as is the toll among adults. As a result, among youth, you find attempts to change these standards. People are being accepted for what they are and not what other people think they should be. Unfortunately, among many adults, this facade remains, hiding reality and increasing inhibitions to a ridiculous degree.

Mental health is extremely important in relation to what youth is attempting to do. It is too bad that in a fairly complete report, the Committee on Youth failed to seek information on this subject.

One of the most important recommendations, upon which much of the report is based, is for the setting up of a youth agency with the non-fille P2.

P2 would be a national organization with regional branches and community assemblies. Each branch is to consist of various sections. Every six months a public meeting would be held where proposals and plans of action could be studied. The structure of P2 is based on community participation with as little bureaucracy as possible.

It is hoped this new agency will stimulate the public into taking a more direct interest in determining its own destiny — socially, economically and politically.

"A SMALL STEP IN THIS DIRECTION," says the Committee, "is government support of

resources accessible to grass-roots control. These would include persons — among them, the young — at the local level in vital decision-making processes.

"Through such processes, local communities could define their economic, social and political grievances; and, perhaps, through direct action, influence action, influence other large organizations to bring their actions more in tune with human needs."

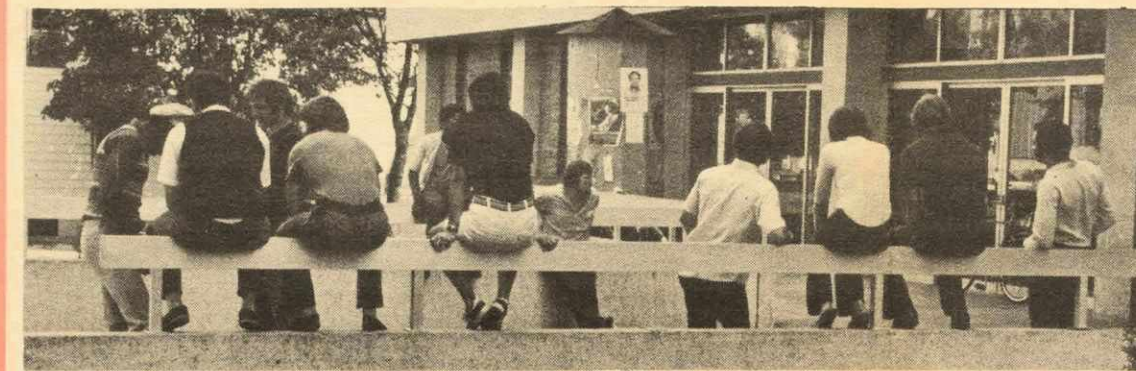


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The Report says that certain obstacles must be first removed if P2 is to be at all successful. There must be maximum participation among the greatest number of citizens possible, autonomous centres of decision, no bureaucracy, and a good deal of flexibility.

It should act as a channel for "multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary action, fund indigenous social action programs in priority to establishing direct programming, and use the full range of resources available in the community."

The P2 principle stems from the belief that participation from all sectors of society is essential. The scheme is flexible and quite complete. The Committee feels that all the above principles must be implemented in order that the goal of a society developing democratically towards a collective realization of human potential may be one step closer.

While proposing this new program, the Report says that the Company of Young Canadians should be abolished. The CYC, according to the study, is too tied up in the bureaucratic structures to do any worthwhile work. Financial problems as well have made the CYC incapable of fulfilling its proper function, and the group has done little to arouse public support or involvement in its activities.

Students throughout the country were unanimous in their criticism of the education system. The Report gives a very complete summation of the desires and changes that were expressed.

Students see the school as a massive organization — which becomes increasingly more "rigid, hierarchical, directive, and articulated." The process of learning facts and then spilling them out again on an exam provides little opportunity for experimentation and often decreases the desire to learn.

Even if students initially accept these conditions, they soon become disillusioned when they see the large number of unemployed BA's, MA's and Ph.D's. And they often find their father's job "repetitive, alienating and essentially unsatisfying."

Frequently a student finds that the skills he has acquired in school do not help get a job. "Thus the school only raises aspirations which the community cannot fulfill," says the Report.

The Report deals with education in its recommendations first because of its importance with most youth. It states, "An educated population is a national resource." It also agrees that education has a significant economic dimension, in that there is a direct relationship between education and

economic growth.

"IF A COUNTRY WISHES to increase its standard of living and its productivity, it must invest in human capital through education." If there is such a direct relationship, says the study, "it follows equally that there is one between lack of education and poverty." In this light, it is the responsibility of the federal government to provide financial assistance.

Thus it was recommended: a) that any tax transfer between the federal and provincial governments include a clear statement that it is for the purpose of post-secondary education.

b) that the Department of the Secretary of State be requested to determine whether such transfers have improved educational opportunity for all Canadians and whether further structural safeguards should be implemented to ensure that universal accessibility based on ability becomes a reality.

c) that the government appraise and evaluate its entire system of support to post-secondary institutions, and that educators and students be involved in this appraisal.

The Canada Student Loan Plan is attacked by the committee firstly through the assumptions on which the Plan is based. And that is the premise that parents are responsible for paying tuition costs at post-secondary institutions. These costs, with various other subsidies from the governments, are not too hard to meet for middle income families, but are extremely difficult for disadvantaged families.

The report states, "The Canadian state, if its rhetoric on the subject is any indication, has declared that higher education and an educationally mobile population is a mandatory principle." The study finds it incongruous that the federal government pays Youth Allowances to keep children in classes up until high school. "Strange logic then, to find that when the post-secondary level is reached, the state suddenly does an about-face and expects parents to pay for both tuition and maintenance."

Furthermore, says the report, the present loan plan amounts to no more than .05 percent of the total federal budget. The committee recommends:

a) that the Student Loans Plan be revised immediately so as to remove, or reassess the requirements for parental contributions, for savings from summer employment, and to increase substantially the amounts of individual loans.

Education is of prime importance, and the Committee feels that research on new methods should be carried out. To do this, it recommends that the federal and provincial governments set up a Task Force to study the aims, methods and structures of post-secondary education.

One of the flaws in the 'system,' for youth, is the strong requirement to work for one's betterment — i.e. to reap the financial rewards. It is a strong status symbol if one has a high paying job; it is one's "social obligation," "a means of self-definition," and it is a "self-sacrifice which precedes abundance and freedom." But as the Report says, "No one can realize the promise of work without a job."

CANADA MANPOWER CENTRES are perceived as "notoriously ineffective." The study says that certain retraining programs "have been so useless they seem more diversionary tactics than serious efforts to create opportunities for youth."

"Given the central importance of work, unemployment sends psychological shockwaves resounding through the young person's mind. This, according to the Committee, leads from deep feelings of inferiority to the destruction of self-confidence to a sense of futility to profound depression. The Report warns that if this despair becomes a general malaise and is increased, its implications are revolutionary."

Many adults have the impression that youth does not want to work but this is clearly a misconception; the Report concurs youth does want to work but not under the narrow job strictures stipulated by the employer as this stifles creativity, and not for the prime purpose of making as much money as possible.

Work must be for the benefit of the whole community, not a degrading and boring routine for the benefit of employer.

THE GREATEST SINGLE PROBLEM that the Committee encountered among youth was unemployment. The statistics provided some reasons.

The DBS seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for teenage males in 1970 stood at 15 per cent. "This is a whopping 2.3 times the national

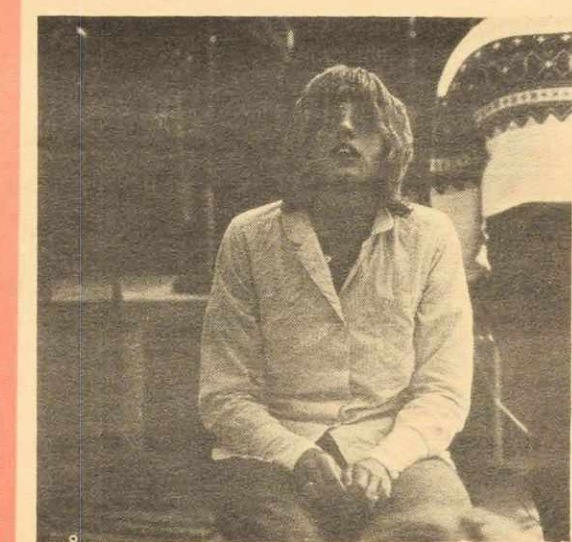


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average." For teenage females, the figure was 11.4 per cent or 2.5 times the national average.

The Report says the main reasons for this high rate is the very structure of the Canadian economy — to get a job you need experience; to get experience, you need a job. As well, there are many more people in the job market, and this will not reduce as some people believe when the 'baby boom' subsides. It recommends:

a) that consideration be given the idea of the trimester, co-operative or quarterly systems.

b) that Manpower be examined critically to improve it as a student placement service.

c) that the federal government establish a Canadian Youth Employment Directorate to participate in the development of all new government social and economic programs to guarantee that the specific problems of youth are considered.

The relationship between youth, drugs and the law has resulted in a further deterioration in trust and credibility in all of society. The Committee has taken a strong stand on the marijuana issue and, as a result, widespread criticism has been directed towards the Report for this particular recommendation.

Medical evidence regarding soft drugs, such as marijuana and hashish, has not convinced the Committee members. Adults, they believe, are often irrational in their condemnation of drugs because they fail to distinguish between the hard and the soft drugs. Many of the youth agree that

some hard drugs are mentally and physically destructive, but this belief undergoes erosion when confronted with the oft-times ignorant appraisal of the adult.

THE REPORT ALSO SAYS, "The disintegrating relationship between the law and youth revolves around drugs." This arises from daily evidence that young persons see or hear about policemen using unethical and illegal methods to arrest drug users. In many cases, it is the occasional user of the soft drug that is arrested rather than the professional criminal who sells the impure hard drugs.

In its recommendations, the Committee states: "We are convinced that if there is no change in the law, Canadian society will have to suffer a growing cynicism among social workers, police officers and those who work in this area, and increasing disrespect from an entire generation... Furthermore, there is no medical evidence to prove that cannabis or its derivatives, is physically addictive."

They recommend that the federal government legalize the cultivation, sale, possession and use of cannabis for men and women 18 years or over, and that the responsibility be given to the Department of Health and Welfare for the quality control of cannabis production and distribution, as well as the development of a drug education programme on the effects of all drugs.

The legal system was found to be discriminatory and at times repressive. Youth is generally becoming more hostile to the police and the legal system because of the attitudes concerning dress, hair length, etc., and the unethical methods sometimes used in connection with drug arrests. The Report warns that this broadly based negativism on the part of young persons could be explosive; thus government action is necessary.

They recommend that a "constitutional guarantee of fundamental rights and liberties binding upon all sectors of society" be enacted. They also recommend that the age of majority be lowered to 18 for men and women.

This recommendation is a bit difficult to understand. There is a Canadian Bill of Rights, but only rarely has it been used successfully in a court of law. If its purpose is to make discriminating against long hair a crime, then the only result will be increased hostility. As for the age of majority, the government should have no doubts about accepting this recommendation.

There is one aspect of the legal proposals that is quite significant. That concerns the Report's remarks about identification cards.

"Just as a citizen should never have to carry a dog tag to prove his humanity, so too he should never have to carry a travel permit or work card to justify his presence any place."

This observation should prove useful to the Quebec government, which has been pondering the possibility of making the possession of ID cards mandatory. At any rate, the Committee recommends that in the development of a general citizenship policy, youth be accorded full and equal rights with other members of the citizenry.

Throughout the country, young people felt that their education was providing them with a distorted view of history and the political system. As they get older, they sometimes find that the idealized view of democracy — that the people have the power to determine their own destiny — is misleading and disillusioning.

It observes: "Most of Canada's political structures seem rigid and essentially unresponsive to the requests of the public. Elections seem an unwieldy carousel of speeches, handshakes and political advertising, which are about as relevant as they are sincere..."

"Young persons, when they demand a larger role for the citizen in the political decision-making, are defining a new, more participative role for the individual in the democratic process."

"If political institutions remain rigid, the resulting sweeping criticisms are directed at the Canadian political system. With rigidity comes the individual's isolation from the source of power and the inability to generate change peacefully. With isolation comes a despair about the future, a loss of hope, dangerous in its articulation."

ONE OF THE BASIC VALUES that society has upheld for ages is the importance of religion. Religion is no longer the strong unifying force that it once was. Instead many youth find it frustrating and negative. Many cannot tolerate the hypocrisy of the organized church — believing that the church preaches one thing and does another.

"Rigid dogma or flexible relevance offer little satisfaction. Youth point to the discrepancy between the total commitment of Christ and the spiritual ablations of a prosperous middle class. But these traditionally committed youth constitute a minority; the majority could not care less..."

Many young people retain a divine principle but they feel that the traditional church is just another dimension of "the annihilating materialism of 20th century North America."

FAMILY LIFE AS WELL AS RELIGION, has undergone some dramatic changes in recent years. Youth are eager to try new life styles and this sometimes serves to undermine family interaction.

"If anything characterizes this relationship," observes the Report, "it is the sharp break between the perspectives of young persons and their parents. Some would say that this conflict stems only from a gap in experience, knowledge and wisdom. Time will bridge it, they assert, by forcing the adolescent to accept the existing norms of adult life."

(cont'd. on p. 8)



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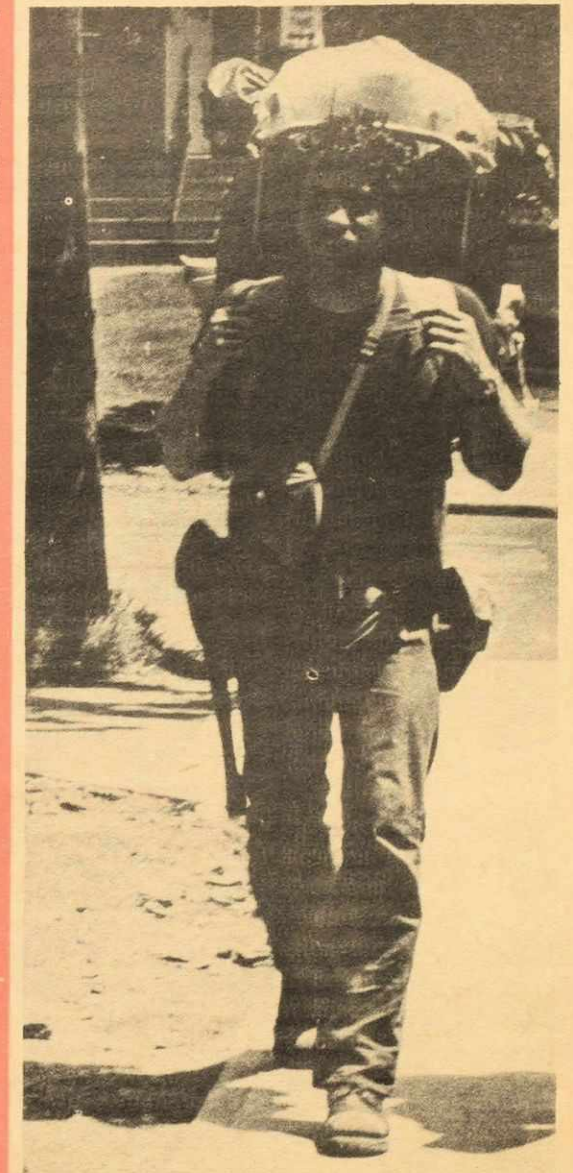


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