

Letters to the Editor

Oversimplification

It is a gross oversimplification of human nature to assume that once national distinctions become immersed in a mass world society mankind will thereby cease becoming involved in brutalizing conflicts. To give up the joy of indigenous, small cultures would gain little for mankind and would result in the loss of the human need to belong to a community with roots in a similar historical experience.

Canada, in maintaining its position as a satellite of the United States, will not assist in any way the pursuit of international peace and order. Indeed, an excellent case can be made for the value of an alternative North American experiment in nationhood. Therefore I have a bias. I want Canada to survive as an independent state and to extend considerably her economic and political areas of freedom and choice.

How do we preserve a Canadian space, sufficient political independence to develop our own form of society based on historical experience, and to offer a unique contribution to the community of nations?

At the moment we are faced with certain facts about Canada which are difficult to understand.

1. We are the only nation in the western world which opens its borders to all comers with the necessary capital whether it is in the long-term interests of Canadians or not.

2. We have by far the highest number of foreign professors on the staffs of our universities than any other nation of comparable size or wealth.

3. We rarely recognize Canadian excellence in the arts and sciences until stamped with the approval of United States or European criticism.

The only possible reason for these facts of Canadian society is found in our historical experience of colonialism. We are colonials.

Not all of us. Not any more. But most of those with power in our business, governmental and educational institutions still retain that special form of comfortable subservience, that pale imitation of empire builders, first in Britain and then in the United States, which is the hallmark of the Canadian colonial.

Where do we start to build a country which is not ridiculously nationalistic but not ridiculously subservient and self-effacing either? It seems reasonable to suggest that the impetus for such a goal should come from our educational institutions. Are Canadian universities investigating all aspects of Canadian society in order to provide the necessary knowledge upon which intelligent policies may be developed in such fields as government, the arts and social welfare? Certainly York University is playing a role in investigating world problems which we know are solved daily in the lecture hall and seminar room.

But is this university fully participating in the much more difficult and perhaps for now, the more crucial task of fostering an intellectual commitment to an examination of Canada's serious internal problems? Do York graduates have a good basic understanding of Canada's past and present in the light of its special situation in the community of nations? For, if they fail to understand their own society, how well can they cope with the conflicts within Canada today, the place where most of them will live, love, work, play and vote?

Obviously many students believe that York is not fully living up to its responsibility to the Canadian community. Certainly the cumulative effect of studying at York can be discouraging: Sociology taught without reference to one's own society; American and Canadian professors who deny the significance of Canadian Studies; a Black Studies course, but none on the Canadian Indian or

Eskimo; a course called Canadian Literature which excludes French Canadian literature, in translation, if necessary. One could go on and on with such a list. Taken one at a time, the situation often seems amusing. However, after years of sensing that the Canadian milieu is almost irrelevant to scholarship at York, one becomes concerned about the future of a nation whose universities fail to give adequate and comprehensive attention to the national scene. What kind of attitude is involved when students wishing to apply to Osgoode Hall Law School must first send their pre-law academic record to a department of Princeton University for assessment and then write two three-hour exams prepared by Princeton University? Is it too much to expect that students presumably interested in working in the field of Canadian law might be able to write Canadian exams and have their pre-law record assessed in their own country?

Of course this is only one example of the state of Canadian education. The results of ignoring Canadian society in our universities is reflected throughout the rest of the school system. We have many high schools in Canada which offer almost no complete courses in Canadian literature or society. To understand the extent of the malaise in Canadian Studies, one need only read the almost incredible report *What Culture? What Heritage?* by A.B. Hodgetts, which indicates the inadequacy of elementary and high school courses on Canada. Surely this situation could be improved considerably if the universities were producing graduates excited by the

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