

Excalibur

Everything secret degenerates; nothing is safe that does not show it can bear discussion and publicity — Lord Acton

Ramblings on York's rights report

After 18 months of closed discussion the presidential committee on rights and responsibilities finally made its report. Huge, isn't it. It takes an hour and a half for a quick read-through, about four hours to do the job once intensively.

It is unfortunate—for most of us at York—that the report was made public at this time of the year. If it had come out about a month or so earlier, then president Murray Ross would probably have received the feedback that he apparently wants.

Unfortunately, most copies of the report will probably gather dust wherever most of us deposited them with a vague promise to read them after writing those three exams or marking that hum seminar's essays.

However, perhaps the president and his friends on the board of governors won't be too sad if there are no extensive alternatives and/or criticisms posed. Evidently, Ross and York chancellor Frank Chalmers are both on Cloud 9 over the report. Apparently, Ross sees it as a magnificent document, even historic in its import and originality—even to the point, some Laskin committee members report, of looking upon it as the crowning gem of his 10-year career at York.

Near the beginning of the report it says: "The committee thinks it appropriate to say that it was not called into being by the president because of any existing or looming emergency."

That, gentlemen, is not quite correct. Sometime in November, 1967, two reporters from the Glendon weekly Pro Tem were interviewing board chairman William Pearson Scott for a feature they were doing on York's board of governors.

During the interview, Scott mentioned a furor that was then going on at the Universities of Toronto and McGill over a controversial article that had appeared in both campus' newspapers. Scott was incensed at the way the authorities at both universities were waffling and fumbling (so he thought) in disposing of the controversy quickly and efficiently, with the least publicity.

At that time, Scott—still board chairman—said that such goings-on must never occur at York. To that end, Scott said that in the next meeting of the board, he was going to recommend that some sort of committee be set up to look into discipline matters at this university.

Well, surely, York's crusty old leader got his way and in February, 1968, Ross duly set up the rights committee under Bora Laskin.

The purpose of revealing the forgoing was merely to illustrate the cooperative work relations between the more senior members of the York community.

The rights report can certainly stand a great deal of criticism. If EXCALIBUR can muster enough people interested in taking time to write on the report, then

we will carry discussion in our pages. However, there is the problem of time and inclination; the report was worked on for 18 months and systematic and sound critiques can rarely be put together over a weekend.

This, however, does not mean that EXCALIBUR legitimizes the report. The document was damned from its inception. The nub of it comes down to this: The members of this community were never asked whether or not they wanted such a far-reaching (timewise and lengthwise) investigation into their rights and responsibilities. We were merely told that such a committee was going to exist and that we were lucky enough to have students represented on it.

That's irreversibly contradictory and a gross affront to the basic principle that a person—and in turn, his community—should have the right to control, to as large a degree as possible, things which deeply affect.

Now although no one will admit that York is democratic, the influence of a slightly less undemocratic outside community, plus a highly politically-sophisticated community at York, points strongly away from the type of dictatorial decision-making that accompanied the birth and development of this report.

That was meant to clarify the facts of the situation we are working in.

In a statement on page 18, Ross says that one point about the report which made him happy was that it had representation from all three estates of this community. Unfortunately, that type of thinking cost Louis his head in The French Revolution of 1789.

Where were the workers of this community... if they don't play their part at York and pick up garbage, the place wouldn't be habitable after a week. There were no workers on the committee.

Where were the women of this community?... whether student, worker, faculty or, yes, even the board, this community is about 50 per cent female. They have an entirely different perspective on rights and responsibilities than men. There were no women on the committee.

The committee that made the report cannot be said to be representative of even half the community.

One final point should be made about the report in general. Despite all the critiques, the reality of the recommendations will only become clear when a situation arises that demands use of the court system and in turn, discussion and decisions based on the content of the rights report—whether approved by Ross with revision or without.

Next week EXCALIBUR will print, if it's finished, a critique of the content—specifically the underlying themes—of this rights report.

Songmy expresses U.S. imperialism

The calculated slaughter of the innocents of Songmy, the tiny South Vietnamese hamlet of the lyric name, is neither a mistake nor an aberration, neither a temporary moral lapse on the part of weary GIs nor the debased sadism of a few pervers.

The murder of more than 500 civilian residents of Songmy—children in arms, women and men—is the quintessential expression of U.S. imperialism and racism directed toward one hamlet in ravaged South Vietnam.

Songmy is all of South Vietnam. "C" Company is an invading army from the United States over a half-million strong. The attack on Songmy by "C" Company was an attack on the oppressed peoples of the world by the oppressor.

"I remember this man distinctly,

holding a small child in one arm and another child in the other, walking toward us," says the former combat photographer who presented concrete evidence of the slaughter. "They saw us and they were pleading. The little girl was saying, 'No, no' in English. Then all of a sudden a burst of fire and they were cut down."

Songmy is all of South Vietnam. What makes Songmy distinct is that for once the victims of imperialist aggression are given faces. There are photographs. There are eyewitnesses. But how different is Songmy from the thousands of tiny hamlets obliterated by U.S. bombs and napalm? How different are the residents of Songmy from the more than one-million South Vietnamese civilians murdered largely by U.S. firepower? How different are the few shocked and maimed survivors

of the Songmy massacre from the millions of shocked and maimed survivors of U.S. aggression?

Songmy is different because it has a face, the way the Czech village of Lidice had a face during World War II and to which Songmy is being compared. But in Lidice, remember, the Nazis only shot the men. The Nazis, of course, went on to slaughter millions of children, women and men—but is this any different from the genocide perpetrated upon the people of Vietnam by U.S. imperialism? And is it any different, really, from the more indirect and subtle genocide committed upon the hundreds of millions of the oppressed of the world who are born to misery, hunger and want to satisfy the economic interests of a capitalist ruling class intent upon dominating half the earth and its people in order to extract profit and luxury?

This is no mere rhetoric but a fact, as grotesque and ugly a fact as the truth of Songmy. The basic reason "C" Company entered Songmy is the same reason the invading U.S. army entered Vietnam and the same reason U.S. military, political and economic armies—whether they come in green fatigues or business suits, whether they come to "preserve democracy" or to "increase foreign trade"—have penetrated the third world. They come in their different garments with their different slogans to protect the economic and political interests of U.S. capitalism.

And when they meet resistance, when the people of an oppressed nation demand the right to self-determination, to

adequate food, housing, education and the right to freedom, the ruling class orders "C" Company into Songmy, into "Pinksville," to root out the "enemy." Under cover of the forest fastness, obscured by propaganda, hubris and white "superiority," muted by the drum rolls of patriotism and hidden behind the artificial brilliance of U.S. affluence, "C" Company burns, maims, rapes, robs and slaughters on behalf of the American Way of Life.

But because Songmy was made accidentally visible, because it acquired a face, because it was evident that some of the petty norms of war had been violated ("Thou shalt not murder a child at any distance less than 100 yards"), Songmy is now spoken of as an atrocity. A few soldiers are being investigated. Congress may conduct hearings "to get to the bottom of it." Liberals speak of "our guilt" and torture themselves between clean sheets in idle contemplation of the "American nightmare." And they ask, "What are we doing to ourselves?"

The movement in the United States must burn the name of Songmy into the American consciousness. Songmy must become our battlecry, but not Songmy of the aberration. Songmy of the moral lapse, Songmy of the few sadists. Unless we are able to depict the tragedy of Songmy in its proper context, as the logical, brutal everyday extension of imperialism and racism, we shall have utterly failed the hundreds of millions of oppressed, poor people who occupy the tiny hamlet of Songmy, South Vietnam.

—From Guardian

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Found at our door

Sir:

The lack of student response to the Laskin Report could have been predicted months ago. Considering the fact that only 12 briefs (three of them by students) were presented to the committee during the 18 months it sat, compared to the 81 heard by the similar Campbell Commission at U. of T., it is not surprising that many students at York are now no more interested in reading the report than they were in helping to formulate it.

Since the Laskin Report, if adopted by the university, will have far-reaching effects on the lives of all students one has

to ask the question: "Why the lack of interest?"

One main reason is that students at York have resigned themselves to their lack of influence and control at this university. After all, there is little to be gained in discussing the Laskin Report when it admits that the president will still have the final power of decision as vested in him by the York University Act.

For students, the report lays out rules, regulations, guidelines, and intricate court systems. From the administration it politely requests "self-limitation" and an "ear willing to listen".

Unsigned