

Slater speaks out

This is the text of the address given by York president David Slater to the York convocation exercises on May 29, 1971. It was widely reported by the press.

Many times during the last year Canadianism — of studies and faculties — has commanded attention in our universities, and at this university in particular. I use this opportunity to set out briefly my own present views on this subject. While I take personal responsibility for these views, you should know that they have been widely discussed within the university and have received a good deal of support.

Objectives and opportunities

My thoughts can be ordered best by starting with our objectives and our opportunities. I take it as a generally agreed objective in the Ontario universities and at York that we should aim for first-class teaching, learning and scholarship.

It is also generally acknowledged that, in many fields, studies of Canadian problems, Canadian institutions, Canadian data and Canadian circumstances are essential parts of a first-class academic performance in this country.

But what is and what is not meant by this essentiality of Canadian studies? What links are there between these essentialities and the sources and citizenship of faculty members?

Canada different from U.S.

The essentiality arises fundamentally from the fact that Canada is in many important respects different from other nations. The case that most needs making is of difference from the United States. In contrast with that country, we are a small nation with neither the opportunity nor the responsibility of giving major consideration to our effect on the rest of the world. We are a genuine federation with real power and responsibility carried by our provinces, while the U.S. is much closer to a unitary state with token federalism. We have the large problems of bilingualism and biculturalism with the objectives of lasting preservation of these heritages. These are in some senses more difficult and in others easier than the color problems in the melting pot society of the United States. Governmentally we have a concentration of powers without the full development of a bill of rights and of laws and jurisprudence concerning civil liberties. The U.S. by contrast, has separation of powers, the constitutionally entrenched bill of rights and the long record of explicit laws, jurisprudence and practice of civil rights. Our cities are generally of a younger industrial urban age than those in the U.S.; we are much more recently a predominantly rural country. We have a much more rapid growth of a young adult population.

These differences are of major import for most aspects of our social, humane, philosophical and legal performance and studies. Unless our studies are infused by these Canadian facts they are likely to be substantially irrelevant, or misleading, or grossly wrong. Unless our students can confront behavioral hypotheses with evidence, and especially the evidence that is at hand from their own experience or that they can appreciate because they can test the validity of the data of their own land more readily than that of others, their search for the truth is going to be that much more difficult.

Universal knowledge

But it does not follow that studies in the social, humane, behavioral and legal areas must be confined to Canadian subject matter. Nor that the subjects should be mainly packaged into Canadian study programs. Much of the knowledge that is relevant for Canada is of other peoples or other things. The comparative method is often the most effective single way to discern what is like and different in one's own problems or experience. No particular pattern of packaging can suit the variety of teaching and learning tastes of students and teachers.

It should be unnecessary to say, but unfortunately it isn't, that most of the knowledge of the world is not of or about communities or nations. There is not really a Canadian mathematics or physics, or chemistry, or astronomy, or cellular biology, or plastic theory of structural design. And an astonishingly large portion of the applications of knowledge have little to do with community or nation. Much of the engineering is of the world rather than nations; and so is much of the econometrics. Moreover, Canadians are people of the world, who ought not to be confined to a narrow sense of Canadian relevance anyway.

I turn now from the objectives of quality in education and the essentiality of Canadian studies to the opportunities and means of attainment. And, in particular, to the matters of Canadian faculty. I take it as fundamental that, in those areas in which knowledge of and interest in Canadian data, problems, and institutions are particularly critical, that ordinary good standards of professional competence require of all faculty, regardless of origin or citizenship, a knowledge of the Canadian data, problems and institutions. It is also fundamental that we aim for the first-class in faculty and that we would do no service to our country by deliberately choosing second or third-class teachers ahead of first-class teachers. I take it also as fundamental that we must be plugged into the knowledge of the world and its applications. Our

operations and performance will depend crucially on the opportunities open to us and to a degree on our policies.

It is especially important that we differentiate between the opportunities and thus the operations and performance of the past decade or so, and the future. Nothing could be more misleading than a simple extrapolation from the immediate past into the future.

Canada, between 1960 and 1970, was faced suddenly with a three-fold expansion in the demand for university places. The source of Canadians as university teachers for the 1960's and 1970's was predominantly the Canadian university population of 10 to 15 years earlier. Despite the pleas of the university community, very little public response to preparation for the deluge of the 1960's and 1970's took place before 1960. Canada was especially weak in graduate work in the humanities and social sciences. Taken altogether then, even allowing for reversal of the brain drain, it has been a basic fact of the demography and older educational patterns of this country that the Canadian universities could not have been staffed, and certainly could not have been staffed to reasonable levels of competence, during the last dozen or so years unless there had been a drawing on potential teachers from other parts of the world. During the last dozen years, the proportion of university teachers who were not at any given time Canadian citizens was bound to increase greatly.

York's factors

These facts bore most heavily on particular groups of institutions: those which were new, rapidly growing, becoming large, emphasizing work in the social sciences, management sciences, and behavioral sciences, and aiming high in standards of teaching and scholarship. While other factors are also to be taken into account, this is the fundamental explanation of York's substantial reliance on recruitment of persons from outside Canada.

The pattern of staffing in the past may be explained or even justified in terms of the necessities and opportunities of the day. But may there not be serious problems for today and tomorrow? Of course there will be problems and some of them will have citizenship aspects. But I do not believe that the problems are going to be large, pervasive or persistent.

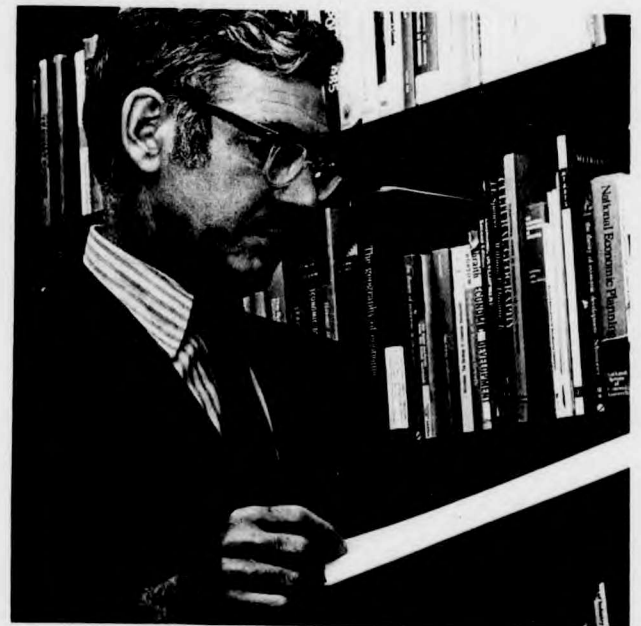
It is generally recognized that there are now and will be increasingly in the future, large numbers of excellent Canadian teachers and scholars, trained to the best standard of the world. The crop derived from the demographic facts and educational effort of the last decade will be reaped in the next decade. Canada has developed a number of good centres of graduate study and research which are just now producing a promising body of teachers for tomorrow.

Effectiveness of scholars

Further, the crucial question is not of the origins of people that are hired, but of the effort and performance of those who stay and are asked to stay in continuing appointments. While it is true that foreigners are at some disadvantage in Canadian knowledge and interest in the early years of their stay in Canada, the longer they stay the more enmeshed they become. And generally the ones who stay are among the more successful teachers, scholars and contributors to the university community, and become more effective participants in Canadian university and community life. Foreigners bring to Canada knowledge of elsewhere which is valuable for comparative methods even when the concern is areas in which the essentiality of Canadian studies exist. And, in many areas, the knowledge and its application is not of community or state. The question, then, is not one of Canadian studies or citizenship but rather of effectiveness as teachers, scholars, contributors to the university community and of knowledge, responsibility, sense and sensitivity to the Canadian milieu.

I believe that Canadian universities in the future can be expected to achieve the high standards of academic performance which we all desire, through increased reliance on Canadian and Canadian-trained professors. Other things being equal, any department of program will choose a Canadian teacher and scholar ahead of a foreigner, for ordinary common sense reasons of self-interest and high academic attainment. In fields in which Canadian knowledge is important, the Canadian has a comparative advantage. In all fields, the probability of a longer term of career commitment of the Canadian recruit is higher than the person who has not had a home for an extended period of time in Canada. The ability of people to settle in happily and effectively into their homeland is generally greater than to other places.

“Canadian universities should aggressively seek out Canadian talent and Canadian trained talent”



President David Slater

No miracles here

But even with this prospect we should not expect miracles or exclusiveness. A large proportion of the best Canadian students will continue to go to the best graduate schools in the world, most of which are outside Canada. A substantial proportion of the best Canadians, by choice of specialization and opportunity, can be expected to seek posts outside Canada, whether or not they received their advanced training in Canada. Even if the academic balance of payments was neutral, two-way flows of emigration and immigration of university teachers should continue and be expected to continue. Canada will continue indefinitely into the future to lack people of particular skills or knowledge from the Canadian citizen or Canadian-trained academic community.

Policy

While I feel that the passage of time, the new opportunities and the application of good professional standards will promote the attainment of our objectives, certain actions and guidelines should also be set out and followed. In the hiring, retention, tenure and promotion of faculty members the following seven points seem to me to be very important to keep in mind:

- 1) that Canadian universities should aggressively seek out Canadian talent and Canadian-trained talent as candidates for appointments;
- 2) that in the interests of attracting and holding the most knowledgeable and effective faculty, Canadians should have preference in appointment, other things being equal; in other words, Canadians may be expected to be appointed if they have the relevant qualifications and qualities in preference to non-Canadians, unless a candidate from elsewhere is clearly superior;
- 3) that there should not exist a high intellectual tariff wall around Canada or around Ontario universities or around a particular university;
- 4) that Canadian academic life must not be parochial in standards or in area of concern;
- 5) that those who are retained on the faculties of Ontario universities, and York in particular, should be judged on the basis of a high degree of professional competence and performance in teaching, in research and scholarship and in service to the university community;
- 6) that in those fields in which Canadian data, problems, or institutions are particularly critical, ordinary good standards of professional competence shall be assumed to require of all faculty, regardless of origin or citizenship, a knowledge of the Canadian data, problems and institutions;
- 7) that normal practice will be for all new academic posts to be advertised adequately in Canada, outside of Canada in places where Canadians are trained, and generally, in the province; and that institutionalized procedures for review of candidates and applications should be designed to negate possible biases arising from the "old boy" network; not only should justice be done but seen to be done.