

Some additions and alterations to the Slater doctrine on Canadianization

By IAN LUMSDEN

It was good to see York president David Slater, in his speech to Atkinson's spring convocation, (published in the York Gazette) address himself directly to an issue that has evidently troubled an ever-growing number of Ontarians ranging from the premier of the province to the man in the street. The question involves the national character of our universities.

It is about time faculty and administrators (as opposed to students) began seriously to debate within the university the implications of the de-Canadianization of our post-secondary institutions. I do not propose, however, to discuss the pros and cons of the citizenship question here but will merely take up one or two of the points made by Slater with respect to York's recruitment policies.

Amongst the actions and guidelines which the President would support are the following. (1) "Canadian universities should aggressively seek out Canadian talent and Canadian-trained talent as candidates for appointment;" (2) "Canadians should have preference in appointments other things being equal;" and (3) "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".

The last point is crucial for many people, both within and without the university, who evidently doubt that neither the procedures nor justice exist at present. The issue of the de-Canadianization or Americanization of York would have abated by now if statements such as those of Slater had been enough to mollify the university's critics. Actions evidently speak louder than words. If it does not lie within the president's jurisdiction to see that justice is done and seen to be done, then upon whom else does responsibility lie? To be specific, I see no reason why the university could not immediately implement the following institutionalized procedures to ensure compliance with his stated objectives.

Before the president and the board of governors ratify an appointment of a foreigner recruited from abroad the following steps could be taken:

1) The department recommending the appointment would be required to give a public explanation as to why it had been unable to appoint a suitable Canadian to a vacant position and to explain what steps had been undertaken to aggressively seek out such a candidate.

2) There would also be provision for unsuccessful candidates to contest the recommendation of a department if they believe they have been treated in a prejudiced manner. The guild effectively protects its own at present. Therefore, I suggest the appointment of the equivalent of a university ombudsman (who might well have additional responsibilities) aided by an advisory group of Canadian faculty, students, and representatives of the public at large, who would investigate and report publicly on the policies and practices of departments in which justice had allegedly not been done to a Canadian applicant. It is a commentary on our universities that such people increasingly feel compelled to go elsewhere in the pursuit of satisfaction — to MPP's, to the press and even to the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

They have no alternative so long as Canadian applicants are being treated in a manner of which the following case is indicative. This occurred at York last session. A Canadian Phd from the University of Toronto applied for a job in a department (Atkinson's history department

— ed.) that is chaired by an American (Madelyn Dick — ed.) and whose composition is becoming increasingly American. The applicant (Jean Cottam — ed.) was denied an interview for a junior vacant position even though the applicant had a more than adequate graduate record and the original application was supported by references from scholars with an international reputation in their field. Though advertisements for the job stipulated that a Phd was required the position was filled, typically, by a fellow American who had not yet completed his Phd at a mid-western state university. Those of us who expressed concern at the treatment of the Canadian applicant were told that the application in question was not even amongst the top 25 (sometimes raised to the top 50). Plausible, I suppose.

But if respectable candidates from one of Canada's leading graduate centres do not have credentials that compare favourably with a score or more candidates trained outside (with or without Phds), what is one to make of Slater's contention that "it is generally recognized (outside of York?) that there are now and will be increasingly in the future large numbers of excellent Canadian teachers and scholars trained to the best standards in the world." Finally, what can "aggressive" recruitment of Canadian talent possibly mean if it does not even include the price of a Toronto bus fare to interview a jobless Canadian Phd? This is but the most glaring example of prejudiced treatment to which Canadians are now exposed in their own universities.

In his address to Atkinson College the president also touched upon the question of the national character of the academic curriculum offered by York — appropriately, since there is an intimate relationship between curriculum and faculty. The former determines the character of the latter just as much as vice versa.

Because our universities have by and large failed to develop academic programs relevant to the regional and national needs of a dependent neo-colonial country and have opted instead for curricula originally tailored to the needs of an imperialist capitalist state, we have tended to attract foreign professors possessing a particular set of ideological values — Gabriel Kolko (an American Marxist history professor of York) notwithstanding. The economics, sociology and political science departments in which visiting Americans teach, and which they increasingly control, are not noticeably different, despite token gestures to Canadian regionalism from their U.S. counterparts. But there was nothing inevitable about this and it had nothing to do with international standards of academic excellence (or some equally meaningless abstraction) and it most certainly had nothing to do with the liberal assumption that "most knowledge of the world is not of or about communities or nations." Our universities are what they are precisely because their founders, administrators and faculty members have, in the main, accepted the ever-growing penetration and domination of our economy and culture by American imperialism. If they are aware that alternative university models have existed in the past and still exist today, they have taken pains to ensure that students and the public at large remain ignorant of their existence.

It is perfectly true, as Slater points out, that econometrics is of the world, as I have discovered in the University of Havana (of all unlikely places). But it is most certainly not true that econometrics is equated with economics to the virtual exclusion of political economy and economic history at most universities that lie at the margins of the American empire.

American foundations and American(ized) professors will be found everywhere trying to "modernize" such universities. But where their efforts have been consciously resisted, such as in Chile, students and public benefit from academic curricula that include not only the "facts" and short range theories or methodology that characterize the "value-free" scientific method developed in the metropolitan centres of the empire, but also analyses which have developed at its margins and beyond its ideological boundaries.

Whereas Canadian universities are becoming anaemic imitations of metropolitan multiversities, Chilean universities are vibrant and dynamic (and here I refer to the social science faculties of which I have direct knowledge) precisely because they have increasingly addressed themselves to the specific needs of Chile. In the process they have been able to attract top scholars from all over the world who want to contribute to Chile's struggle for economic development and national liberation. Because Chileans have consciously determined the nature and purpose of their universities there is no contradiction, for example, between the national objectives of the Centro de Estudios Socio Economicos of the University of Chile, or of the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional at the Catholic University, and the large numbers of foreign scholars attached to them.

It is fantasy at best, and ideology at worst, to assume that the value of Canadian universities to the regional and national communities that support them will be increased by the substitution of Americanization for the effete Anglophile vestiges that may linger here and there at the University of Toronto or McGill. It is time for us to be self-consciously parochial and to discriminate in what we do and how we teach and research with our relatively limited resources.

Let us concede, as our prime minister has done with respect to the development of Canadian-owned industries (though his objectives be merely manipulative), that we cannot compete throughout the field with America's metropolitan universities. Furthermore, unlike its rulers, we have no need to study everything that is going on in the interstices of the empire. To be precise, what rationale is there for offering a multitude of courses on Asia, Africa and Latin America (supplemented by expensive library holdings), countries and regions, with which we have relatively little in common, whereas to the best of my knowledge, we offer no courses on Australia or the Scandinavian countries from whose experience we might have a great deal to learn (not to mention the paucity of work done in our country). It is

about time we recognized that the branch-plant character of our Americanized universities makes them ineffective at home and renders them second-rate in comparison to universities in many other countries with far fewer material resources than we have.

Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy have written of modern economics that "it has made its peace with things as they are, has no ideological or political battles to fight, wants no confrontation of reality with reason". The air of stillness that hangs over York for example, suggests their insight could be applied to the university as a whole. It is stagnant (witness the professional study of Canadian history and politics) because it has ceased to confront reality with reason. And no amount of swinging courses on witchcraft, sensitivity training, or modern dance will revive the institution unless it begins to reassess its purpose in relation to our particular reality which happens to be that of a potentially wealthy but unevenly developed dependent capitalist state in whose national metropolis our university happens to be located.

Obviously, the vast majority of my colleagues cannot agree with my sketchy analysis but I challenge them to disagree with my description — particularly at the end of term when anything up to 75 per cent of the students no longer bother to attend their lectures.

If they are honest with themselves, I believe they will admit they find their intellectual environment as alienating as do their students. If I am right, they might be persuaded to adopt Chilean practice in the hope that it would contribute to the gradual articulation and definition of the character of a relevant Canadian university. I say gradual because at present I suspect that most people are totally confused about the function of a university. Salaries and promotions aside, most faculty members have notably never questioned let alone answered, why they have chosen to teach particular courses or do particular research in a particular university in a particular country. Students do not know why they are going to university and what ends they expect to achieve by doing so, and parents are torn between resenting the escalating costs of universities and feeling compelled to send their children there in ever larger numbers. The task of self-education in a colonized country is huge and it involves everyone.

In Chile, at the beginning of each academic year university classes and offices are closed for a week which is devoted to intensive public debate and study of questions similar to those that I have posed. The discussions are widely aired both within the university and in the national press. We could imitate the Chileans by holding a plenary forum with delegates representing students, faculty, and administration and the general public, which would be supplemented by departmental and divisional meetings organized along similar lines. It is about time that we, particularly in our capacity as faculty members and administrators, began to justify our presence in the university and ceased hiding behind the smokescreen of academic freedom and license. When we eventually transform our universities into relevant that is, effective and cultured, institutions the citizenship issue will have been reduced to relatively minor dimensions. In the meanwhile, so long as a minority of new appointments go to Canadians and foreigners are in a majority in 15 out of 16 departments as was the case in the faculty of arts last year (Excalibur, Dec. 3, 1970), the issue of citizenship will remain in the forefront of university problems.

Why must people who attempt to work at York be forced to go to the press or MP's or even the Human Rights Commission to get satisfaction