

Do you know what "true" discrimination is? It is a virtue, a positive rather than a negative. Strange how the word has acquired a connotation bordering on the odious.

Were you under the impression that Canadians are warm and friendly? Is our friendliness something superficial, as opposed to intimate and fundamental? Strange how our cultural ways which seem so solidly rooted in the nature of things appear as bubbles and foam from a different vantage point.

Francis and Kofi have a problem which seems to be not an isolated case but an example of a general frustration; apparently many courses are repeated for lack of comparative standards.

In this issue we ask "How do foreign students react to us?" The logical followup query is "How do we react to them?" It has seemed to your editor that we Canadians (may I generalize?) are neither antagonistic nor actively exclusive, merely indifferent. This is unfortunate—for us.

Violet is not indifferent. It's always a big lift to an editor when a writer puts exceptional enthusiasm into an assignment. Perhaps you will enjoy the enthusiasm in her story, as I have enjoyed it in Violet. She has loved this assignment—quite literally. She has shared something with the "international" set, and is forever now an ardent advocate.



DANCE FROM THE PUNJAB (on an international topic) . . . photo by Harvey Elbe

THEY SEE STRANGE SYSTEMS

by Violet Vlcek

"Everyone is so friendly!" This phrase was repeated by almost every foreign student asked how he felt about being at the University of Alberta. It was much more common than remarks on discrimination or unfriendliness.

I do not wish to imply that our foreign students had no problems, but it was gratifying to learn that the administrative, scholastic, and "general strangeness" problems took precedence over social ones.

There are over 300 students from 40 different countries at U of A. It was impossible to contact a student from each country, so there will be many students whose problems have been overlooked by this article. The views expressed, however, are common to most of the students interviewed.

Mike Akpata, a Nigerian student in second year dentistry said he felt "very strange" on first coming to U of A. He expressed what all foreign students seemed to feel: "Home is so far away." This feeling of strangeness is there because "everyone keeps to himself—you are nothing to anyone else."

Mike did not feel that we are cool toward foreign students in particular, but that our whole

attitude is one of reserve even toward each other. "The person next to you in class will talk to you, but the next time he sees you, he doesn't even say hello. We find this strange because we are naturally warm to each other."

Mike has overcome the strangeness very well himself. He is an active participant in various campus activities such as Club Internationale, SCM and the UN Club executive.

He was very pleased with the academic standard at U of A. "A lot is expected of you and you work hard."

Charles Patrick, president of the Pakistan Students Association, and four other Pakistan students chatting over coffee in SUB felt they had as much social life as they had time for.

"We get invited to people's homes, but there is always a 'charity' feeling." Last year SCM arranged for every foreign student to be invited to a Canadian home for Christmas. One of the students described the following display of Christmas spirit.

"The invitation came from someone we didn't know. We spent the evening with these

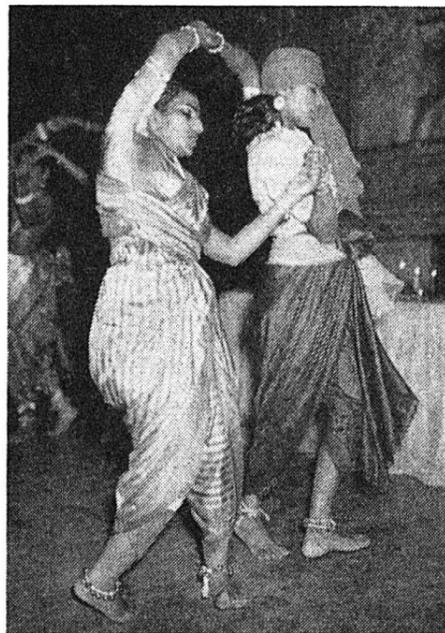
people, and I expected this to be the beginning of a friendship. They never called on us, and we didn't hear from them again." The good people obviously felt they had "done their duty."

The Pakistan students enjoyed the interest Canadians show in their country. "We like very much to be asked questions, but sometimes they are so amusing. They talk about the history of Pakistan, and it's only ten years old!"

Victor Akrofi, a third year dentistry student from Ghana, also enjoyed the interest shown by his classmates and friends. "But sometimes they don't think before they ask. For instance, someone asked me if there are any high schools in Ghana. It makes one wonder if they think we are completely illiterate."

Victor, like most of the people interviewed, found his closest friends among other foreign students. He did like campus dances, "but the girls are kind of quiet, some act as though they are doing you a favor by dancing with you."

Raji Kaur, Purnima Mishra, and Raj Gupta are three Indian girls who live in Pembina. They find our



DANCE OF SPRING . . . photo by Stenton

dating and exam systems strange, "and the weather is awfully cold." "The mud spoils our saris, said Purnima, then added happily, "but you are all warm-hearted enough to make up for it."

Raji, soft-spoken and quietly charming, smiled, "You have such a nice expression, "Hi!" Everyone is always saying "Hi, Raji!", and sometimes I don't even know who they are."

The girls have many friends of both sexes, but "dating" is not proper in their culture. "In India, a girl doesn't go out with a man alone. We just decide to do something and all go in a group. You aren't "with anyone."

The need for a boy friend seems to be replaced by very close family ties. "We are very attached to our parents. I would not consider marrying someone if I knew they would not approve of him."

Not having boy friends, the girls are very intimate with each other, "but with boys we are just friends."

"Canadian girls don't seem to get really close to each other."

"Canadian boys," said Purnima gaily, "are so nice and jolly and friendly."

Speaking of Canadian food, Raji said, "I just don't think of what I am eating." She spent a summer living in one of Garneau's popular room-and-board hovels, and expressed the experience as "disgusting." "She served left-over food for a week, until it began to spoil."

They all obviously were happy at U of A. "But we get so homesick. And if our parents knew we went to parties where men and even ladies are drinking! Our parties are entirely different, and ladies never smoke or drink."

Raji here pointed out that the red mark on a woman's forehead is not a mark of high birth. "It is meant as a beauty spot for girls and married women, and may not be worn by widows."

There were two foreign students who have encountered a very serious problem. Their academic life here is both disillusioning and disappointing.

They are Francis Sam and Kofi Amankwah, medical students who arrived from Ghana around Sept. 20. Both were pleased with the atmosphere at U of A. "I feel completely at home here," said Francis Sam of St. Aidan's residence. "The boys are so friendly and the administration very helpful."

Kofi, an Athabasca resident, was even more enthusiastic. "I can't believe I'm so far from home." He especially liked Canadian food, and approved heartily of residence dances.

Francis, living in a smaller residence, said that he has no social life yet. "At home I was very active on campus, but here, I don't know where to go to meet people." He was hesitant about going to social functions or club gatherings alone, understandable when one is 12,000 miles from home. "I would like to have a girl-friend," he added thoughtfully.

His tone changed completely as he began to talk about the seven years of studying before them. Both Francis and Kofi have taken the equivalent of our pre-med in a two-year course at a Cambridge College Branch in Ghana, but here they are obliged to repeat.

"We have done this work already," Francis explained. "We each have had two years of specialization. We have advanced physics, chemistry, zoology and mathematics, and we are taking it all over again. We had to study English too, and pass it before we got our certificates."

These certificates from Cambridge University are useless here. Simply because no standard of values has been established between the courses taken at a British College and those taken here. Francis and Kofi are wasting two years of their lives, and they are desperate about it.

"We need doctors in Ghana—people are dying. Why must I spend two years studying my geography and English all over again. I could be studying to save lives."

Both of these students were so serious. The most vital thing to them is to complete their studies and begin their work. "You just ache to be through," said Kofi, "they need us at home!"

It was obvious that they feel a deep responsibility. They do not expect pleasure out of their uni-