

# Canada



By PETER BOOTHROYD

Just after the last federal election, Richard Needham, a columnist with the Toronto Globe and Mail, wrote in a major article: "From being a French colony, and then a British colony, we have come to being a American one; and we seem likely to end up, some day in the not-too-far future, underneath the American flag . . ."

Culturally, economically, and politically, he cried, we are being absorbed into the United States. Yet, he "did not find any of these issues being deeply and seriously discussed in the (election) campaign by any of the political parties."

Significantly, *The Journal for Dissent* reprinted this article as "one of the most impressive articles to come out of the election campaign."

When a vital issue is not adequately debated in the standard public forums, the universities will often take it upon themselves to organize a "teach-in".

The teach-in, like sit-ins, kneel-ins, swim-ins, and shop-ins, is a form of protest.

This particular form was born in American universities by professors and students concerned about the growing war in Vietnam.

Angered by the inadequate and often one-sided coverage of the war in the news media and frustrated by the limitations of the university system to deal with crises and current issues, they created what must be one of the most constructive forms of protest ever devised by political activists.

The teach-in protests the lack of debate on an important matter in the news media, in election campaigns and in the universities themselves, by creating that debate.

This is not a debate in the usual "Oxford" or "American" style, for in the teach-in nobody is judged the winner, nor is the object to assess the speaking skill of a few speakers or their encyclopedic command of facts.

The purpose of the teach-in is to clarify the issue, point up relevant facts, and to make judgements on the basis of these facts. It is designed in such a way as to involve not just a few speakers but as many people who can and will participate.

Within this general framework, teach-ins vary greatly. They may be mostly protest or mostly education—that depends on the issue and the speakers.

They have lasted as long as 48 hours and been as short as an afternoon.

They have been organized around issues of Vietnam, civil rights for the American Negro and Canadian Indian, and the cost and purpose of university education.

They have laid emphasis on "name speakers", on local professors speaking out, or on spontaneous discussion in a large audience.

The details vary, but always there is the concern with comprehensively opening up all the sides to a vital question in a free debate.

Insofar as this debate is normally suppressed, the teach-in constitutes a protest against this suppression.

Insofar as the teach-in leads to increased understanding and action, it is educational.

The matter of Canada's very existence has not seen the debate it obviously deserves. Richard Needham's despair over the lack of election discussion on this basic issue has already been noted.

But it is not only the politicians—intellectuals are prone to regard people like Needham and George Grant, (author of *Lament for a Nation*) as quaint, naive or insane.

And so in Canadian universities the fundamental questions of Canadian identity are rarely raised. Sociologists confidently apply American texts to Canadian society; economists assume the necessity of American capital investment, and political scientists inquire into the quality of "consultations" between Ottawa and Washington.

(It is no wonder that in the schools, social studies are similarly superficial, and "citizenship training" sentimentalism.)

Perhaps only the CBC, the handful of Canadian magazines, and a number of daily newspapers can be credited with manifesting any real concern about our future as an independent country.

And even these rarely get beyond introspectively asking if there "really is a difference between Canadians and Americans", to the meaningful investigation of the limitations on Canadian economic, and political independence.

Or else (and here we are talking mostly of English Canada of course), they devote more space to worrying about the separation of Quebec than to understanding the conditions necessary for any kind of Canada to continue and the kinds of Canada that we want. From the earliest days of New France there have been continual expressions of concern for Canada's independent existence on this continent.