

York Campus is showing stability in the midst of change

This is the text of the speech delivered by York president Murray G. Ross at the York convocation ceremonies, Friday May 30. It was widely reported by the press.

I have the very great pleasure on behalf of the senate and board of this university of congratulating formally the members of the graduating class to whom we pay homage this morning. The academic standards of York are now sufficiently well established that graduation from York is widely recognized as a considerable achievement and one that places the graduand on equal footing with graduates of the better universities on this continent. We can, therefore, offer congratulations with sincerity, in the knowledge that those graduating today have talents and capacities that are possessed by only a small minority as a whole.

There are other grounds for congratulating today's graduates and the members of faculty with whom they worked.

Last five years turbulent for universities

The past four or five years have been among the most turbulent in the history of universities, during which there have been demonstrations of dissatisfaction and dissent that have led to disruption and paralysis in many universities. That such has not been the case at York has not been merely a matter of luck. All of us at York have been affected by the disturbances of our times, we have had our proportion of activists and radical students, we have had our share of ambitious young politicians, we have had on campus agitators paid by outside agencies. Thus far, however, there has been on campus a disposition to look rationally at our problems, to work co-operatively towards solutions, and to move rapidly towards reform whenever there was agreement to do so. This process and its results have not been, and never will be, satisfactory to the small group of extremists and exhibitionists on campus, but the fact that

the majority of students and faculty were able to achieve a degree of agreement and reform that kept the campus stable in the midst of change is surely a situation that reflects honour on both students and faculty.



York president Murray G. Ross

Lest I seem to be suggesting that we have been backward in moving with the times, let me mention just two of many developments at York University.

Students share management and control

Students are now an integral part of the operation of this University and share in a significant way in its management and control. In the past year students were represented on senate, on all faculty councils, on almost all departmental committees, and on every important administrative committee in the university. In all, there were students serving on over 75 different university committees and councils. But surely it is of the greatest significance that, without any dissent or confrontation, without television or the press, York has been able to make such great progress in meeting the legitimate options for one of our first year courses in which no grade other than a pass or fail will be recorded. There are some people, both outside and inside York who feel this is the most significant development in higher education in Canada.

However this may be, York has been able thus far to be flexible, to introduce significant change, and to experiment without serious disruption. Had we had disruption it is unlikely that we would have achieved the progress we have. Violence and irrational behaviour is not a proper substitute for the committee process, difficult as it may be, if reform and student objectives are to be achieved.

I congratulate members of the graduating class and members of the faculty for that which they have been able to accomplish at York University. This University is a better place than when you first came here.

President Ross left a lot out of his convocation speech

It is difficult to discern whether Murray Ross' reference to "campus agitators paid by outside agencies" in his convocation speech is a result of an acute case of paranoia or simply a cheap political grandstanding tactic.

Anyone who has heard Ross speak at convocations before probably was not surprised at his accusations. He has made a habit over the past few years of warning audiences about his student "agitators."

In his 1967 convocation address Ross said there were "real questions about the motivations and capacities of many students who are assuming positions of leadership on the campus today."

In 1968 he became a little bolder and said "agitators" were trying to create "university rebellion." He described his bogeymen as "a small group whose ends have no relation to the welfare of the university or the love of learning."

Finally, this year, York not only had "agitators", but "campus agitators paid by outside agencies." As usual, however, Ross declined to be more specific about either their actions or their identities.

In 1970 he will probably tell the graduating class that Che Guevara is alive and well and hiding in Vanier Residence.

Desire to propagandize

What is probably behind it all is a desire by Ross to propagandize in advance for any student action that may occur on campus this year.

By setting the "correct" atmosphere of anxiety and fear among the York and Toronto communities, Ross can blame any student "unrest" on "outside agitators" instead of confronting the real problems on campus, should any embarrassing situation arise for him before his retirement at the end of the year.

This tactic is similar to that of the U.S. John Birch Society which attributes the black revolt in the United States to "communist subversion".

In this way, the real problems of our so-

ciety — imperialism, capitalist exploitation, racism, pollution, poverty — can be ignored, just as Ross tries to ignore the real problems at York — over crowded classes, stifling lectures, irrelevant course content, authoritarian structures, and closed decision-making.

As typifies the line for the administration at York, Ross' speech contains numerous references to "cooperation" between students, faculty, and bureaucrats on campus.

Ross contends that "students are now an integral part of the operation of this university and share in a significant way in its management and control."

Ten students out of a senate body of 150 and a handful of students on faculty councils is hardly significant when talking about "Management and control".

A few questions: Why can't students be allowed to go through the financial books of York University? Why do most important committees meet behind closed doors? Why does the senate have the right to go into private closed session and kick out observers from the community it is supposed to serve? Is token representation (usually by appointment rather than by election) significant?

Ross also contends that "York has been able to make such great progress in meeting the legitimate needs and desires of its students."

Which "legitimate needs and desires"? What about decent transportation from the city to York? What about a day care centre for students with children? What about an end to oppressive course content and self-satisfied professors?

Community should have power

Those are specifics. Generally speaking, the legitimate need and desire of the York community is to gain control over its own environment, and an end to rule by a group of absentee governors.

What happens at York between students and administration is not co-operation but,

co-optation. Yet even at that, it was only recently that Ross became the champion of tokenism. Only after he saw the disruptions at other universities did his earlier overt authoritarian attitudes change to become more subtle.

In 1967, for instance Ross spoke against meaningful student participation in running the university community. At the spring convocation he said:

"But when students demand to become voting members of governing bodies and insist that they hold public meetings, enthusiasms on the part of the board (of governors) and senate for a close association with students diminishes rapidly."

This last spring Ross said: "There has been on campus a disposition to look rationally at our problems, to work cooperatively towards solutions and to move rapidly towards reform whenever there was agreement to do so."

It sounds fine, but the reality of last year on campus indicates a York University of a different colour.

Course was boring, irrelevant

Last fall, for instance, 1,800 first year students were crammed into Modes of Reasoning 171, a compulsory course. The course proved to be boring and irrelevant to a number of students so they circulated a petition which asked the course director to devote one lecture to a discussion of the problems of the course.

Hundreds signed the petition and it was presented to the course director. Not only did he fail to display "a disposition to look rationally at our problems" but he refused to even consider the petition.

In fact, it was not until students disrupted a lecture that things began to move for them. In this case, the university was not "able to make such great progress in meeting the legitimate needs and desires of its students" without "dissent or confrontation."

Another instance of the breakdown of "rational dialogue" at York occurred on

May 31 at Glendon College's first graduation ceremony.

Student union president Bob McGaw attempted to reply to a speech made by the university orator Edgar McInnis. As soon as he started to speak, officials on the podium, Ross among them, cut the sound off and declared an abrupt end to the ceremony. McGaw never got to speak.

There you have it in a nutshell. A member of York's ruling class was allowed to speak before the graduates and their parents but an elected representative from the student body was prohibited from doing so.

It is also interesting that the administration was so bulging with confidence in its ability to "cooperate" with students that it had Metro police (three uniformed and two plainclothes) called on campus for the Glendon convocation.

Students like McGaw are trying to transform the university into an institution that will better serve people from one they see as serving only the interest of the ruling classes in our society.

Ross said in the speech that "those graduating today have talents and capacities that are possessed by only a small minority in society as a whole."

Is it that only a "small minority" possess these "talents and capacities" or is it that our society has been structured and is run in such a way that only the small minority of affluent students are in financial position to have their human talents and capacities developed?

In Canada over 54 per cent of Canadian families have an income of less than \$5,000, yet only 28 per cent of college students comes from that group.

On the other hand, about six per cent of Canadian families make over \$10,000 a year, yet their children make up over 25 per cent of the university student population.

These statistics indicate that a student with an income of \$10,000 or more, has eight times as much chance of getting into university as a child from a low income family.

Indeed, Dr. Ross, it is only "a small minority in society" that reaches university, but privilege, not talent, is presently major criterion for success.