

Americanization

A British professor speaks

By IAN BROOKES

In all likelihood I am not the only member of the York community to be sickened by the unadulterated tripe which Excalibur served up partly on behalf of the Council of the York Student Federation on Oct. 1, relating to the Americanization issue. I might, however, be the only one to take issue with it. The majority is, I suspect, yawning at the irrelevance and narrowness of the opinions expressed, or maybe so sick with them that it has difficulty in bringing pen to paper.

I commend your bringing to our notice the initially puzzling senate decision not to disclose the citizenship of faculty and graduate students. (Was that of undergrads not required, I wonder?). It occurred to me, however, that senate may have considered the information to be irrelevant to the main issues of education at York and over Canada as a whole, and I'd agree with them.

I also commend the moderation of CYSF's hysteria as compared to last year's: at least non-Canadians can now remain if they are teaching Canadian content or are willing to take "Canadianization courses for the underprivileged."

I take issue with two points, however, and feel confident (sorry about this) that any non-hysterical, educated person would too. Firstly, if I may continue on a personal level, I am a British citizen who came to Canada eight years ago to do graduate work at a Canadian university. Upon completion of residence requirements, I accepted an offer of a lectureship at York and moved to Toronto, which, as all good York students know, is the heart of the Canadian scene.

My research has taken me to Newfoundland for the past eight summers, and I consider it almost a second home (Ontario being my first in thought, strange though you may think this is). Eight years of acculturation through a variety of media (study, travel, personal relations, teaching, writing, voting, not to mention five years of tax-paying) have made me feel more Canadian than British.

I even take an evil delight in telling critical Brits to catch the next plane home if they don't like Canada, although I flinch when I remember the sad figure who stepped hesitantly from the plane at Dorval at 5:30 a.m. those eight centuries ago.

Why have I not become a Canadian citizen? I sincerely repent for not having thought of the question until recently. Not that I have staunchly retained my U.K. passport because I value it more than a Canadian one. But because I feel Canadian at practically all times. Crossing the U.S. border reminds me I'm not; people saying "gotten" reminds me that I'm not; a colleague of mine talking of the "Kraut line" reminds me that I saw my first hockey game only seven years ago.

So I think about the significance of citizenship. Can I get a government job more easily? Not in my line: these British friends of mine are working in it for the geological survey in Ottawa. Can I get Canadian research funds more easily? I am being well supported by Canadian agencies to work on Canadian research as it is. Could I escape the U.K. draft if "we" went to war? What if Canada went to war? Trapped? On this last point, citizenship is of the least

significance since, if I judged the U.K. to be morally wrong in warring with another nation I would not serve in its armed forces. Likewise, as a Canadian citizen, my moral judgment would determine my action.

Then what is citizenship? Of course, the sense and practise of "belonging." But, then, I thought I'd never swallow the lump in my throat in the final scene of the Bell Canada film at EXPO 67. I sat through the Ontario film four times straight, almost moved to tears of joy! That "Lighthouse" jam session at City Hall really was fantastic: there it was, Toronto the Truly Good. Every summer I go to a particular spot on a particular mountain in Newfoundland and look out over the Gulf and think "how did I get so lucky to be here?"

And yet, if I taught American history, American geography, Nepalese mythology, you would have me fired? Could I not be giving one of those "Canadianization courses" you recommend we foreigners take? Maybe as a non-Canadian I can add to Canada's experience of itself.

So please, I implore you, drop the citizenship issue! You could more profitably be engaged in an analysis of the research being done on Canadian topics by faculty and grad students here, whatever the color of their passports.

From citizenship to Canadian contents, and my second bone of contention. I feel embarrassed to say anything on this point, just as I would if I had to explain the timetable to a fourth-year student in a seminar. Many of my colleagues will be moved to exclaim: "Good grief. I have a colleague who is naive enough to think that the point has to be raised at all!" But, evidently, it does. Does CYSF in its statement "we should be taught and instructed in the ways of life in this country" imply that a School of Asian Studies, for instance, should never be established here? Should we have a School of American Studies?

I have a feeling that perhaps CYSF's "philosophy" on the curriculum might be displaying the attitude which I would

postulate was held during the growth of schools for the study of "areas" (e.g. the University of London School of African and Oriental Studies); the attitude that you should only have schools for the study of an area towards which you felt superior in culture.

Would we have to abandon plans for a School of American Studies, or strike all American-oriented courses from the curriculum, until we felt superior enough to study the history, geography, art, science, etc. of (whether you like it or not) one of the great world cultures?

Further, CYSF's "primary concern is with the future — the future of our country, the future of our university. Our goals are such that there is a place for everyone presently at York, Canadian or non-Canadian, who is willing to work with us in developing a Canadian university which seeks to critically analyze and find solutions to the major problems in Canada today."

I wonder about the job security of a colleague friend of mine who is spending this year in Kenya under the auspices of the Canadian International Development Agency, assisting in the preparation of a plan to develop the Kenyan economy.

Also, about another colleague who has recently produced a major work in the historical geography of the Soviet Union. Both are Canadians by birth and citizenship. I wonder about my work, as a non-Canadian; work which has involved elucidating the origin of landforms in Newfoundland. How major a problem is that in Canada today?

All of which I would have thought would be self-evident, hence my embarrassment at having to answer the points CYSF raises. Of course, the hysteria surrounding the Canadian content issue automatically dubs anyone in favour of non-Canadian studies as anti-Canadian, as in Excalibur's "Paranoia Translated" (page 6).

For example, a statement such as the third in that box: "Foreign scholars enrich Canadian society," cannot be translated as "Canadian scholars do not enrich Canadian society so we should turn control of our universities over to foreign scholars and allow Canadians to play a secondary role." Just who is paranoid?

Personally, I am for American studies, although I am repulsed by many American phenomena. But I am also for Canadian studies, British studies, Soviet studies, Central American studies, while being similarly repulsed by certain phenomena characteristic of the cultures of those areas. I am also for systematic courses which need not refer to a region. Would we abolish set theory if it became impossible to recruit a Canadian theoretician to teach and research the subject?

Finally, may I urge Excalibur and CYSF to open the debate on the question in a more rational and positive way by soliciting position papers on the Americanization issue (or the non-Canadian issue) from non-Canadians whom you may have "on your books," and Canadians, instead of packing your columns with puerile rhetoric, which can only alienate all who would otherwise demonstrate an active interest in the question.



... and a Canadian offers his view

By HOWARD ADELMAN

In the York University Senate meeting of Sept. 24 a long debate was held on the release of statistics on citizenship to the government and student body at large. Since I believed the onus of proof always rests on those who wish to keep information secret, I was prone to vote for a motion to release the information.

With some members of senate analogically alluding to the seekers of the information as racists, that proneness to support the release of information was reinforced. Further, when it was argued that truth was universal and independent of national origin, therefore problems of education were independent of national origin, the fallacious reasoning in identifying truth as equivalent to education fractured on my training in logic.

Further, my direct experience suggested there was some relationship between course content and country of origin. I found an excellent professor of American origin and education but similar political conviction teaching a humanities course with the same number and description, but on his course there were no Canadian texts whereas mine contained 11 out of 24 Canadian books.

Whereas one-quarter of his course dealt with the problem of racism, one-quarter of my course dwelt on the Canadian self-image as second-raters.

Clearly, not only does education not necessarily consist of universal verities but it may consist of themes and methods influenced by national biases.

This did not mean there was a necessary correlation or even an approximate one between citizenship and course content, but the revelation of some statistical correlation would at least dramatize the problem and perhaps point to the basis of the correlation. At worst, no correlation would be established and the investigation could be refocused.

The key argument which would have forced me to vote against the motion had I not left prior to the vote in order to teach a class, was the revelation of the possible inaccuracy of the statistics.

I have subsequently been able to glance at a sample sheet of the accumulated statistics with such information under citizenship as "born in Latvia" or "Scotland." The inaccuracy of the information I am sure forced numerous senators to vote against any release of the information.

But even if the statistics were accurate, I now wonder whether there was not some substance to the argument of those opposed to releasing the statistics.

For I am sure in the supine Germany of the late 1920s and early 1930s, a survey of German universities would have indicated a strong correlation between faculty members who were Jewish and faculty members who had an internationalist as opposed to a nationalist orientation. The problem is not the same of course.

Because Canada is not analogous to Germany, and Jews are not analogous to Americans. Our problem is of too little sense of our nation and of defending ourselves against an overwhelming expansionist cultural and economic presence. But self-protection necessitates that we ensure the relevant courses and programs have not simply sufficient but substantial Canadian content.

The fight over citizenship statistics helps to focus on the issue while also distracting people from the substance. To avoid distracting issues, each faculty should establish Canadian content committees and consider the knowledge and background of applicants for new positions putting a premium on Canadian experience.