

Canadian content

## A search for ourselves

by Craig MacPhail  
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"Something that's Canadian is small potatoes, second rate almost by definition. I think that's rubbish! But that view is still prevalent amongst our senior administrators and scholars,"—Professor Thomas Symons speaking to the Ontario Arts Council, May 6, 1976.

"I have noted with wonder and horror how our own creative artists have been ignored by our own 'scholarly' institutions. They find it reasonable to study, analyze, annotate the work of contemporary American, English, French and Russian composers, but not our own. Is that being Canadian, or just foolish? Maybe our composers are not yet masters. Maybe they don't deserve to be iconized and turned into heroes. If so, let our university scholars be among those who tell us so. They study our music in Arkansas but not Ontario,"—a musician speaking to the Commission on Canadian Studies.

There is a lack of Canadian content in the courses offered in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Not simply a lack of in-depth study of the Canadian arts or society but a lack of course content concerning basic Canadian characteristics. More than any other developed country in the world Canada lacks Canadian content in its educational programs.

To attempt to answer this neglect of Canadian studies the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) set up the Commission on Canadian Studies in 1972. It was chaired by

Professor Thomas Symons, the founding president of Trent University in Peterborough. The commission worked with representatives from the AUCC's 65 member institutions with an advisory board and research assistants. The first two volumes of its report were released in March 1976 under the title *To Know Ourselves* and a condensed version was recently released in paperback as *The Symons Report*.

The commission worked in more than 40 communities and heard from more than 2,500 people, received more than 1000 briefs and met with about 200 academic, social and cultural agencies.

One dean of graduate studies at a major university reported that Canadian students have little or no knowledge of Canada and its institutions. He stated that it is difficult, even dangerous, for students to proceed further for academic or professional qualifications if they don't know the society in which they will use their specialized knowledge.

In nearly every discipline the commission found a lack of focus on its Canadian aspects. In many cases the commission found that students were more enthusiastic about Canadian studies than the instructors were.

In English literature courses the commission found a lack of courses offered in Canadian literature. From a survey that was conducted in 1972-73, 49 departments of English literature offered more than 1,400 undergraduate courses, only eight per cent of these courses dealt with Canadian

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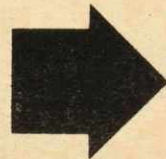
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