

Bitter comments on mass media

Professor studies Canada's 'subtle racism'

By PAUL STUART

Atkinson College social work professor Wilson Head spread his lanky frame over a too-small swivel chair and began to talk about racism. His introduction to the subject came when he was a boy in Atlanta, Georgia.

"My first dramatic experience came when I was about nine or ten. I was walking down the street and a crippled white girl fell down so I went over to help her. As I was helping her up a crowd gathered.

"When I got home I told my uncle about it and when I mentioned the crowd he got concerned and said, 'Lemme tell you somethin' boy, if a white girl falls down and dies, don't you touch her.'

"That was my first experience with the depth of the gulf between the races. Of course, living in the south, that's an every day occurrence."

Head has lived in Canada since 1959, when he came to Windsor to work with disturbed children and their parents. His report for the Ontario Human Rights Commission, *A Study of Perception and the Practice of Discrimination Against Blacks in Metro Toronto*, has just been released. It's 250 pages long and packed with the experiences and impressions of 298 black adults, youths and community leaders.

"One Canadian employment agency is reported as actually noting on its files that the employer wants only 'peaches and cream' workers, a synonym for 'white only'."

Head, interviewed by Excalibur last Wednesday, explained his report's lengthy title.

"I'm sure if tested, some cases in the 59 per cent of the respondents reporting incidents of discrimination, would turn out not to be actual cases of discrimination. But we did a study of perception of discrimination as well as its practice. If people perceived a situation as one where they were discriminated against, we were interested in that too."

Head first had the idea for such a report in the autumn of 1973, when he became aware of the need of individuals and groups for documented evidence, which could be used to combat discrimination. Head and his research assistant set to work in January, 1974. The age, type of accommodation, occupation, educational achievement level and birthplace of respondents, were all taken into account.



Atkinson College social work professor Wilson Head.

"Respondents complained about the lack of teaching of black culture, black history and black contributions to the Canadian scene. As a result, black students are not aware of their own heritage and history. Considerable resentment is expressed about... biased materials in school text books."

The study found that West Indian blacks are more bitter about racism here, than are their Canadian-born counterparts. Head offered an interesting explanation for this.

"Canadian blacks are used to comparing their situation with what goes on in the United States. But West Indians come fresh to discrimination, not as close to what happens in the States, and it hits them harder."

Head investigated discrimination in education, housing, employment, immigration, mass-media and law enforcement. It is the last two areas, which blacks are most uptight about, he said.

"We got a lot of bitter comments on the mass media," he added.

"Harsh words are spoken in relation to black news coverage, particularly in the two morning newspapers in Metropolitan Toronto. One respondent indicates that 'Toronto newspapers never cover black news unless it's a crime. And they are always quick to identify a West Indian.'"

Perhaps the sorest spot blacks have in their perception of discrimination is their dislike of the Metro Police, said Head.

"The police get a lot of knocks in my report," he remarked, smiling grimly.

"It is going to be particularly difficult to curb police racism because the police deny that it exists. It will take a long time and we will have to document case after case."

With a view to stimulating greater communication among blacks and whites, Head has recently helped to found the Urban

Alliance on Race Relations. As a social worker whose interests have led him into the realm of sociology, he places a lot of emphasis on the need for meaningful communication between the races.

"Blacks are often stopped by police who are looking for illegal immigrants . . . and many blacks are alleged to have been stopped and hassled because they drive big cars. The police want to know 'where did they get the money to buy those big cars.' The assumption is that no black would drive a big car unless he is engaged in criminal activity."

A university professor who has been actively exploring and authoring reports on the outer community, Head now finds his interests in York reviving. He sees the university playing an important role in the process of communication he wants to generate, but he has no illusions.

"If there is real racism outside in the city, then there will be some in the students and faculty here too. But really, since I started to teach at Atkinson in 1966, I haven't paid much attention to the campus. Though it goes without saying that the university is more liberal."

An indication of how little attention Head has paid to York, can be gained from his surprise that there still exists a "black table" in the Central Square cafeteria. He has not had the pleasure of eating there in three years, he said, and assumed no large group of blacks ate separately any more.

Head plans on talking to more black students to gain an understanding of the situation.

Is he pessimistic about racism in Toronto?

His answer is a firm "no". He feels that his study reveals a general consensus among blacks that discrimination in housing and jobs is lessening. He sees no evidence that attacks on blacks by racist individuals and groups like the Western Guard, are part of a broad white trend.

So the black kid who grew up in the inhospitable old south is fighting back in Canada. But he is at times confronted by attempts to sidetrack him.

"I've had important job offers from government ministries which I know were attempts to buy me off. But these people aren't stupid; they'll make an offer and not say anything about it; but if something comes up they expect you to remember their favour."

Canadian bribery, like Canadian racism, is often very subtle. But racism is often blatant and brutal.

Letters To The Editor

All letters should be addressed to the Editor, c/o Excalibur, room 111 central square. They must be double-spaced, typed and limited to 250 words. Excalibur reserves the right to edit for length and grammar. Name and address must be included for legal purposes but the name will be withheld upon request. Deadline: Mon. 5 p.m.

Farr criticises "deliberate error" in student guide

I am writing to correct any faulty impression which may have been left with members of the York community as the result of a deliberate error in fact on page five of CYSF's Take-It.

The authors of an article entitled "Cutbacks" state that "President Ian Macdonald last year received a 30.2 per cent salary increase." That is not true. 1974-75 was President Macdonald's first year of employment at York; for 1975-76, this year, he received a salary increment of 4.56 per cent, by far the lowest salary increment received by any full-time faculty or staff employee at York.

If this were an honest error it would be bizarre enough, suggestive of the authors having

been blinded by ill-will and curious zeal; in the particular instance it is quite incomprehensible, since Mr. Ritch, at least, knows that it is not true. I assured Mr. Ritch in July that President Macdonald did not get an increment of 30.2 per cent. I went further, helping the difficult-to-help Mr. Ritch with his data, pointing out to him that the papers he had somehow come by were a collection of total office budgets, analyzed for their percentage change from fiscal 1973-74 year to 1974-75. I reminded the forgetful Mr. Ritch that the 1974-75 year was two months gone before President Macdonald even arrived at York.

For reasons best known to them-

selves — perhaps consistency of style and tone — the authors chose to ignore this information and printed their nonsense in the CYSF Handbook.

W. D. Farr,
Vice-President.

Buck passing

The idea of a boycott is a completely ludicrous one. Dale Ritch, as someone entrusted with the prestige and power at his disposal, should know better than to spring the idea into our faces and then step out into the sidelines and

"pass the buck" to the confused students. In addition, boycotting Central Square is "Mission: Impossible" as the main issues involved is the unnecessary expense to the residents. This means that boycotting Commercial Caterers would be more effective as a pressuring lobby by students if the target for action were Stong Cafeteria.

Furthermore, how can participation by York Students in any issue (let alone a boycott issue) be expected, when students fill only 19 of 50 positions on the faculty of Arts council? Student councillors serve as a balance of representation in the faculty of Arts decision-making process, dealing with all things conducive or in-

conductive to the learning process. For now, we are hopelessly outnumbered. If Dale Ritch can fill the gap, then I can respect his integrity in almost anything!

A handbook, such as this year's "Take-It", should serve to enable new and older students the ability to maneuver on campus. As such, it is only fair to make it as impartial as possible; not to be used as the CYSF President's "Mouthpiece on a Soapbox"! Furthermore, Ritch (and the CYSF) constantly harp on the lack of funds within the students' pocketbooks, yet "Take-It" is generously peppered with "con-advertisements"!

Harold A. Merten,
Chairman, Student Caucus,
Faculty of Arts