

John Saywell:

Relevance to the Canadian fact should not be the chief criterion for judging Canadian schools

EXCALIBUR: In view of the recent book by Matthews and Steele and statistics from your own office which show that in arts and science, seven major divisions, departments have over 40 percent Americans while only three major Canadians and none of these three are in the politically sensitive social sciences, do you think that York could be described as a branch plant extension of U.S. scholarship?

SAYWELL: I wouldn't describe it as that, no.

EXCALIBUR: Then what would you describe it as?

SAYWELL: I would describe it as a fast growing Canadian university that like all other growing Canadian universities has found that the output of nationals to fill its positions is not up to the number of positions being offered.

EXCALIBUR: What's the answer?

SAYWELL: The answer is that there is a time lag between the growing university population and the number of people with advanced degrees that can fill the positions and, in some fields, a still inadequate capacity on the part of the universities to take as many graduate students as might be needed.

EXCALIBUR: Have you pushed, while dean of arts and science, for advertising of departments within Canada?

SAYWELL: Not pushed, every department may or may not advertise.

EXCALIBUR: Do you think they should?

SAYWELL: By and large, advertising is not a way of getting faculty. By and large the people who answer ads are the people who have very little success getting jobs.

EXCALIBUR: What happens when you have a situation such as you did in one of the social sciences where in the last two years you had a ratio of one Canadian for every seven Americans hired? The reason was that the chairman of this department just simply did not believe in Canadian scholars, did not advertise in Canada, but used his contacts in the States. I can cite you other examples of where Americans have been recruited simply because they knew someone on the faculty. This happens all the time, and I would like you to comment on that in view of advertising.

SAYWELL: The number of people graduating from Canadian universities in political science or sociology is hopelessly low and inadequate. They simply aren't being graduated. This means that you look for Canadians who have studied abroad or you hire people who are not Canadian nationals. The first PhD in Canada, I think, to be graduated in sociology was at the University of Toronto in '61 or '62.

We've been adding four or five sociologists every year and most other Canadian universities have been hiring four or five every year, and maybe one a year is being graduated in Canada. The people are simply not there.

EXCALIBUR: What about the sentiment which is expressed that unless a fellow is a graduate of an American, whether he received his first degree in Canada or not, unless he has graduated from one of the bigger schools in the States, he isn't really in the "Big Leagues" of the social sciences.

SAYWELL: Well, I don't believe that, and I am surprised that you can speak so strongly about it.

EXCALIBUR: Why are you surprised?

SAYWELL: Because you seem to take this as an absolutely undoubted fact. No one has ever come into this office and told me that you do not hire people who are not graduates of X American universities because they are not in the "Big Leagues".

EXCALIBUR: You've never heard the sentiment at all that someone who has got a degree in sociology at Berkeley, for example, has got a much better degree than someone from say, Toronto?

SAYWELL: Well, that's not putting it the same way. In many fields Berkeley is a better institution than Toronto, but in other fields it is not.

EXCALIBUR: Is there any Canadian institution which you would consider comparable to Berkeley?

SAYWELL: In sociology, no. The social sciences as a whole in Canada have not flourished. It is only really since the boom in the late 1950s that they have really got off the ground.

EXCALIBUR: Do you think that you are using American criteria to judge the worth of a graduate school. That is, the Americans might well perceive that a graduate school anywhere in Canada in sociology was by definition not going to be as good as any "good" graduate school in the States.

SAYWELL: I don't think that I am. I think I am using the criteria that I as a Canadian would set up for a good graduate school, which I did for example when I decided where I would do my graduate work.

EXCALIBUR: Don't you think that Canadian criteria must be "relevance to the Canadian fact" to the Canadian existence, to our life, that this must be the criterion for any sociology school, and if it is a political science school, it must be relevance to the Canadian political life?

SAYWELL: No, I am not prepared to agree with you that relevance is the chief criteria.

EXCALIBUR: I was speaking to a fellow this afternoon who is teaching a second year course and was shocked by the fact that some of the papers which have been handed into him were indistinguishable from papers which could have been handed in by students on the same level in the States, because they used purely American data and examples.

SAYWELL: What do you mean to say? That the Canadian students have to collect information from the United States to satisfy the professors' requirements, or, that they have been so brainwashed in one year that they think of themselves as Americans?

EXCALIBUR: No, but these students, for whatever reason you want to look on it do not view relevance to the Canadian fact to their own existence as the most important thing in a Canadian institution. That is the result of your kind of thinking.

That's the key point. When you are talking about political science or sociology or anything else and "good" and "well qualified", who is more qualified? Someone who has graduated from an American university in political science, and is very good in political theory and can quote 500 pages of Parsons or someone else, or a Canadian who has been involved in the political scene here, who has lived it, who has felt it and who knows what it is all about and who might have written four or five "intellectual works"? How do we start judging good?

SAYWELL: I accept this as being a very real problem, but what I disagreed with is that I would put some definition of Canadian relevance against the sort of intellectual standards and the rigor of scholarship that one graduate school has over another.

EXCALIBUR: But these are American standards?

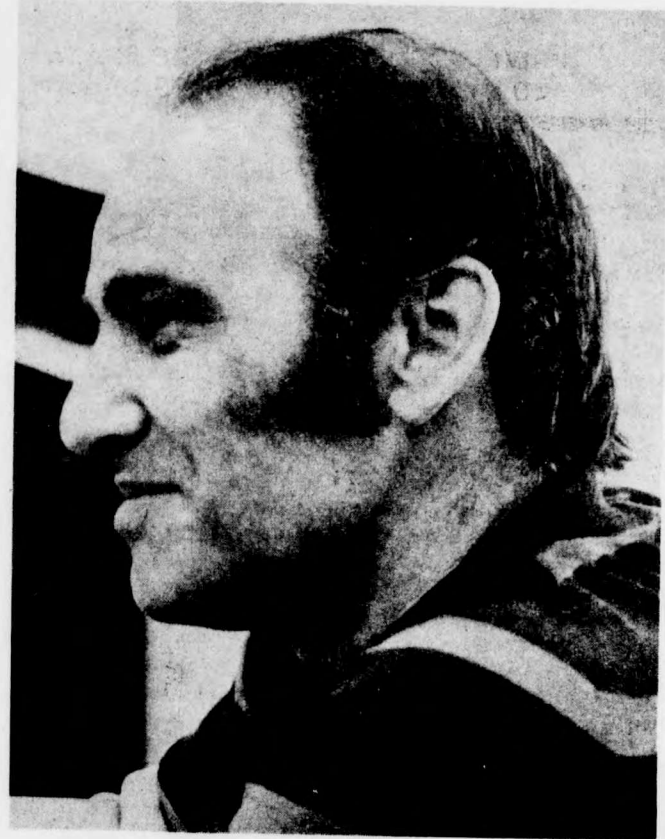
SAYWELL: Well, I tried to say that they were standards that I, as a Canadian, deciding where I was to do graduate work, set for myself.

EXCALIBUR: Then you think that American standards should be Canadian standards because that's the logical extension of what you are saying.

SAYWELL: No, you ask yourself what kind of a training, what kind of an opportunity, what kind of a library, what kind of professors do you feel you need to become a first rate historian.

EXCALIBUR: Do you ask which country?

SAYWELL: No.



*This 4-page feature
on York's Americanization
was prepared by
Glen S. Williams
a 1969 graduate
of this university*