

FRONTIER COLLEGE

The Student As Teacher And Worker

Canadian University Press

In the spring of 1963, a CNR train lurched to a stop in the wilderness somewhere in northern Canada. A young man got off, and the train chugged off around the corner and out of sight.

It was cold, and checking his watch Vernon Eccles saw that he was early. It was 2:30 a.m.

Four railway cars stood on a siding, and Eccles looked for some form of life. Find-

The work was hard — railway "extra gangs" work from dawn to dusk. They replace old track. They ballast track by raising it out of the track bed where it has been pounded over the years by thousands of passing freights. And they work hard.

Extra gangs, as well as logging camps and mines, use a large amount of new immigrant labor. These immigrants — Italians, Portuguese, Poles, Slavs, — all need a basic knowledge of English if they are to find work in Canada's industrial society.



Frontier College labourer-teacher Andrew Bland (left) on CNR Extra Gang

ing none, he climbed into a car, stumbled around in the dark for a bit, and finally curled up on the floor to sleep.

A few hours later, he sensed he was being watched. He opened his eyes to find eight craggy, inquisitive faces looking down on him.

Eccles stared back, also confused.

Finally, he struggled to his feet, and introduced himself as the laborer-teacher from Frontier College.

Eccles, a West Indian studying at Montreal's Sir George Williams University, was to live, work, and play with these men for the next three months.

An economist for Canadian Industries Ltd. in Montreal, Eccles laughs ruefully about that early spring morning in 1963.

"I must have come as quite a shock to those men," he said, "particularly when the first time they saw me I was curled up under a table in the dining car."

Eccles was one of about 90 laborer-instructors working on railway "extra" gangs, in mines, and in logging camps that summer.

He worked along with the men by day, and in their spare time he taught school. His classroom was a boxcar, and his subject was mostly basic English, a special construction of English which depends on a core vocabulary of about 1,100 words and a handful of verbs to make it work.

He also taught Arithmetic, how to make out an income tax form, Canadian history, politics and institutions, and any other subject for which there was a demand.

No other organization reaches them, but Frontier College has been doing the job since 1901.

Frontier College annually tours Canada's campuses early in February to recruit laborer-teachers. They ask for men — not milk-sops. You've got to be able to win a man's respect by doing a day's work at his shoulder. Then, at day's end, you have to go to work again, this time on problems of English, or arithmetic, or geometry. And the men must feel they can come to you with some of their problems.

"Each week I send money back to Portugal for my wife," a man tells you. "But the government wants me to pay tax on that. Do I have to?"

You can find out.

"I want to go to Toronto to work. What's the pay there?" You've got to explain wages and costs of living in a city, and about the Canada Manpower program for finding jobs.

A worker wants to learn how to become an auto mechanic.

You can get information on courses, schools, and financial assistance.

If you run into a problem, don't worry. The head office of the College is 1,000 miles away in Toronto. They can advise you, but most problems have to be solved on the spot.

Looking for an interesting summer? Check the bulletin boards around school. Frontier College wants you. But remember, they only choose one tenth of the students they interview.

JELLYBEANS

by Tom Murphy

TRUMPETS AND TIE CLIPS

We kicked along the old dirt road together. Great day. Sun shining. Packs on backs. For some time we said nothing. Absorbing the springtime; hooks and line, a stream a mile or so. I breathed deeply knowing full well the answer. "I really don't know what I want to be," he said, "I don't know if I want to be anything. I just want to blow my trumpet."

Man, could he play that horn! When he practiced, he would swear every time he didn't get it just right. Real right. At middle-class night-clubs, the collages and the tie clips would feel the music. Real music. Tony and his tears, Tony and his smiles, Tony and his melancholia, all went with Tony and his horn. The collages and the tie clips would wriggle, would squirm with the soul, the inner-self. Because they felt something. More than music, more than Tony. Tony got through to them. The collage got sticky and the tie clip slipped.

"But," I said, "you can't make any money to speak of in those night-clubs."

"Oh Tom," he started in a disappointed tone, "money you know better than that. Money you can't talk with, you can't feel with; you can only buy with. Stuff like tie clips in department stores and collages in bargain-basement art galleries. But you can't buy music. And that's what counts."

"But that's not practical Tony. You've got to eat and sleep; you've got to wear clothes on your back. All that takes money. You can't live on music any more than you can live on faith."

Tony said nothing. He pulled another worm out of the can, and nailed it to the hook. Like Christ. It squirmed and wriggled. Section after section, he pierced the body of the worm, pushing it up on the hook. Madly, the worm's tail wagged. Madly, its quiet shrieking screams shook the leaves. Tony heard. He had screamed like that. His horn had screamed like that. Quiet screams that no one could hear. Only Tony and the worm. So as to soothe the wounds of the broken body, Tony lightly tossed the line into the cooling ripples of the water. The clouds darkened. Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.

TIE CLIP — What's on T.V. tonight?

COLLAGE — Don't know — the schedule is on top of the stereo. (TIE CLIP changes his mind, Helps COLLAGE get out of her gown. She puts cold cream on her face. Takes kleenex and wipes off make-up. Lets her hair down. TIE CLIP walks out of his suit and into his bathrobe.)

TIE CLIP — Susan, you look perfectly horrible.

SUSAN — And doth thou claim innocence, Gary dear?

GARY — Hardly! (They laugh.) Tell me, what did you think of the show tonight?

SUSAN — (looks thoughtfully to one side) The trumpet player, he sort of ah, ah — what would you call it?

GARY — I know what you mean, I think. Would you say that he sort of lived?

SUSAN — Yes, he lived. His music made him live. It's like people that say they live on faith. He lives on his music.

GARY — Surely we can't be that far off. We must have something to live for. I mean if he lives for music . . .

SUSAN — Perhaps we should . . . (She stopped, obviously feeling upset. They sat up most of the night talking it out. The first real talk said Gary. Susan agreed.)

On the way home, cool, chirping crickets, and some stars. Good catch. He got three; I got one. All over six inches from fins to lips. The dusk soon lost its battle with the night; darkness stormed the skies. Tony had a different sort of whistle; low pitched, but brilliantly clear and loud. Just like his trumpet. I was going to ask him what he wanted to be. But I knew that he already was something. For once you're alive, there is nothing else to be.