

To whom it may concern:

Canadian prof resigns over discrimination, colonization

— Gwen Matheson

This is my resignation from the American Studies course (Humanities 173) at Atkinson College in which I was to have been a tutorial leader under an American director during this coming term.

Up until the completion last Spring of a three year period during which I was a part-time lecturer in the York English department and a part-time instructor in both the York Humanities department and Atkinson College, I have never complained about the courses to which I was assigned, including those in American Studies and those which included American material.

But I have finally reached a point where I am very disturbed about certain aspects of the York Humanities programme as well as all other programmes in both York and other Canadian universities. And therefore my resignation from Humanities 173 at Atkinson College is a protest. It is a protest for the following reason:

1) I wish to protest against the over-emphasis on American Studies of all kinds as well as American attitudes and methods at York University and throughout Canada, while Canadian Studies and interests are still relatively speaking in a state of gross neglect. Therefore, I do not want to take any further part in what I regard as a kind of brain-washing, the effects of which I have had the misfortune to observe in my students during three years in the York Humanities and English departments. It is this disproportion constituting a form of cultural imperialism that I object to and not American Studies per se.

Although the American course in which I was to have taught this year is designed largely as a radical critique of the American scene and includes some of the best American forms of protest, I still do not want to take part in it. I believe it is more important for Canadian students to learn about the ideas and writings of those who are making history and producing both literary and critical works in our own country than to concentrate the greater part of their attention on the intellectual climate and problems of the U.S.A. By this I am not implying that a knowledge of the latter is not also necessary and full of vital interest.

a matter of priorities

It is simply a matter of priorities. Canadian students should also be more knowledgeable about the problems of Quebec and of the Canadian Indians than about Viet Nam and U.S. racial strife.

2) Furthermore, I wish to protest against the fact that an excessive number of American and other non-Canadian academics are in positions of authority, such as those of course director, department head, and administrator when there is an increasing number of Canadians of equal academic qualifications (and often better qualifications with regard to their knowledge of the Canadian environment) who are at present either in part-time or junior positions if they are lucky or unable to find work at all if they are not.

At the same time I am not suggesting an attack on those Americans, British citizens, and others who have already established themselves in our system and who are sincerely concerned about Canada. Let them stay and join us in citizenship or in our struggles for independence. (The striking T.V. presentation "Count-down Canada" is a result of the latter type of decision.)

I am only pointing out the grim fact that the proliferation of American courses at the expense of Canadian courses coupled with American authority in our academic life could lead to a further influx from the U.S. to the neglect of Canadian training and talents.

3) I wish to protest against the fact that I was put into a position where I was being forced into teaching an American course if

I wanted to teach at York University at all (and not by the American director but by my own countrymen) even though I had more than once stated my strong interest in Canadian literature and Studies, my experience in this field, and my willingness either to conduct or to assist in a course of this nature. Last year I even submitted an outline of a course in Canadian Studies that I would like to teach, including names of other York teachers who had offered their assistance in this project.

americanization of students

When I finally reached the point about three weeks ago where I felt I could not stomach another year of collaborating in the Americanization of York students (even for the much needed salary). I thought I saw a way out being presented when a tutor in the single Canadian Studies course being offered in the General Education programme at Atkinson took pity on me and out of the kindness of her heart volunteered to trade places with me in the American course.

Further, since another tutor had switched from the Canadian to the American one it looked as if there could be no objection to my making a change also. I even assisted at the first meeting of the Canadian course in the event that a switch could be arranged and also because the Canadian director of the Canadian course was delayed in returning to Atkinson. But when I sent a written request for the change to the director of Humanities at Atkinson his answer was in the negative. Subsequent talks with both him and the Canadian course director revealed to me no valid reason for this refusal. The general impression was that I was simply not wanted in that course. And this fact was conveyed to me in what I considered to be a very emphatic manner.

4) In addition, I protest against what seems to me the rather cynical assumption that I would teach in the American course just because I am in financial need, even though it is against my principles and not presently part of my main intellectual interest. In doing such a thing I would not only have been unfair to myself but also to the students in the course as well as to the course director. I do not believe that anyone should teach just for money, although unfortunately the present exploitative nature of the university system often forces people, particularly women and those in junior positions (often synonymous), into this form of intellectual prostitution.

no full-time job

5) And more generally, I protest against the fact that during my three years of working part-time in both English and Humanities at York University I have been unable to obtain a full-time position although I have frequently made it known that I was available to teach in either or both of these fields at both York day school and Atkinson College, as well as at Glendon College. (I have, in fact, been applying to York University for the last five or six years.) The reasons given for these rejections have been, in my opinion, not satisfactory.

Furthermore, I received no offer of a renewal of my contract as a part-time lecturer in the York English department (chiefly in Canadian literature), and my request to continue as a part-time instructor in the York day school Humanities course in Canadian Culture and Society (378) was ignored by the course director with no reason given at all.

I feel that my Curriculum Vita (indicating degrees, experience and publications), which anyone is free to examine, should give me at least an equal chance with some others in the competition for positions. And I have received

constant assurances that there are no complaints about my over-all performance as a teacher, as well as some more positive comments.

I am not making any claims to being either a model of perfection as a university teacher or an "expert" as yet in my chosen field of Canadian literature (although I have taken a number of courses in the latter and taught it for three years).

All I wanted to do at York University was to make a more effective contribution with what training and knowledge I do have, and by so doing enlarge both.

In addition to applying for a full-time position at York last year I also applied to about twenty-eight other universities in North America, naming my chief interest as Canadian literature, although I also mentioned experience in other fields, such as American, Contemporary and Modern British, African and Commonwealth, General Survey courses, Humanities, etc. Although I would have preferred the position of assistant professor I was willing to settle for the junior position of lecturer. However, I received no offers from any of the universities applied to.

For those who might think that my experience in this regard was unique I would like to point out that it is happening all across Canada, as will be increasingly revealed when more investigation is done into the problem.

unemployed ph.d's

A Canadian woman of my acquaintance with a Ph.D., teaching experience, and publications, told me recently that she applied last year to sixty universities in both Canada and the USA with no success.

A friend of hers, a Canadian woman working towards her Ph.D. degree, couldn't get a job in Canada two years ago with the result that she took one that was offered at a well-known American university.

But although she is well liked there she expects to have to leave at the end of this year because of the two-year visa time limit. (Restrictions like this plus the fact that the American population is 200 million as compared to our 20 million serve to point up the incredible injustice of the whole situation.)

The president of the Women's Canadian Historical Society (from which I rent my flat) told me last month about the case of a Canadian Ph.D. in Anthropology who is now working in a shoe store.

6) Also at this point I do not think it irrelevant to protest against the complete male domination that exists both at York and all other universities, in forms that are both incredibly gross and extremely subtle and complex. This has been proved factually and statistically by Dr. Pauline Jewett and three other academic women in their 1969 Brief, which incidentally, was not accepted by CAUT. And it has been proved to me in my daily experience and observations.

The number of women in senior or authoritative positions at York is minimal compared with the number of men in these positions. And those who gleefully point to the occasional woman who has "made it" only further illustrate the situation. I feel that discrimination is particularly directed towards women who commit the intolerable sin of having strong opinions and expressing them, of having the unorthodox desire to be treated as people first and as females second, and of daring to stand up for their rights when they are being trampled on.

Personally, I would prefer to have a full-time position or to have an equal chance at promotion with a male colleague than to have that same male colleague rush "chivalrously" to open a door for me. I can open doors and light cigarettes for myself, but unfortunately I cannot eat without earning the money to buy food.

7) Finally, I wish to protest against what I regard as a central power structure at York University: based on American domination, the remnants of British imperialism, and the Canadian colonial mentality; dominated by male chauvinism; allied with big business and continentalist aims; presenting an impenetrable barrier to those with differing points of view; and exerting a subtle and sometimes not so subtle influence on students, faculty, course content, administration, and every aspect of university life.

no alternative

It was then against all of the above-mentioned factors that I was protesting when I dialed Atkinson College the other day and informed my American course director's secretary that I would not be in that evening or any other evening to teach the Humanities course in American Studies. This action was the final result of experiences that have been accumulating over the last few years. (I freely admit that the action was of course irregular and not strictly according to the "rules".)

At this point in the Canadian university situation and in the Canadian situation generally I saw no alternative to my decision. The straight facts are that I am not being allowed to teach in a regular Canadian course at York University (with the exception of my small elective classes), even though I have expressed the strong desire to do so, in the English department, in the York day school Humanities program, and at Atkinson college. Instead, the only course in which I am being allowed to teach is one in American Studies.

Perhaps some day if a truly adequate Canadian Studies Programme with room for a variety of approaches is developed at York and elsewhere there will be a place for the many Canadian academics who share my situation. Meanwhile, plans for more Canadian course content and a search for the best Canadian talent (both native and naturalised) should be priorities. (And non-Canadians are invited to assist.)

I do not accept the power structure's evaluation of myself, of other unemployed Canadian academics, or of the Canadian students who are apparently supposed to regard their Americanization as a form of enlightenment.

hope in students

My experiences with students over the last few years, however, make me feel that there is still much hope for York University. This is the main factor that has kept me from despair. Remedies must be sought by them as well as by all concerned Canadians, and those of any nationality who support Canada's struggle for independence.

What I have said in this letter has a much wider application than to my particular case. I am protesting not only for all Canadian academics and graduate students who have been unjustly discriminated against or overlooked in the job market, but also for all Canadians who desire the survival of their country, for all women all the time and everywhere, and for all people in the world who resist oppression and imperialism in every one of their many pernicious forms — cultural, political, economic, sexual, personal — and who merely want the right to fulfill their potential and to run their own lives in their own place.

Gwen Matheson,

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