

This attitude is based on mistrust

... hypocrisy disguised as professionalism

York is liberal in a very seductive sinister way

This is written by Ed Rothchild, a York sociology graduate now living in the United States.

As a former student, teaching assistant and part-time political activist within the York community, I feel a continuing responsibility to former friends, classmates, students and teachers to speak out on crucial issues which affect all our lives.

My conviction is that there is still a great deal to be said about how York is governed, about the implicit assumptions under which students, teachers and administrators labour and finally about what can be done to change the political structure in a democratic, non-violent, yet radical way.

The key to a meaningful life is personal involvement and public participation in the decisions which immediately affect one's life. Alienation, both personal and political, results when an individual is unable (because of his own personal hang-ups) to actively participate, or is prevented from participating fully and equally (by current institutional arrangements) within a free marketplace. Alienation is overcome when an individual has both authority and responsibility for his actions, thus holding him accountable for the consequences (social and personal).

York does not provide its students with full equality and responsibility in the decision-making process. There are no students sitting on the board of governors. There are 15 students on the faculty dominated senate (150). For every 26 faculty members sitting on the arts and sciences faculty council, there is one student representative. This is politically undemocratic, morally irresponsible and intellectually self-defeating. Thus, there is no way a student can get a fair hearing, because his peers have been purposefully prevented from voicing their views and voting on legislation. In order for York to become a worthwhile institution of higher learning, students must begin to take an active part in all phases of university life.

There has too long been the sacred assumption among scholars and administrators, who, frightened and insecure, maintain an inflexible world view at all costs — that students must learn the academic ropes, work under the established rules and regulations (both explicit and implicit), and, once these have been mastered and doctored, go on to perpetuate these very same rules and regulations having been co-opted in the process. In this arduous way students have become faculty and have earned the sacred right of equal participation.

This attitude is not only a rationalization for preventing students from engaging their teachers in political confrontations, but moreover it is sham and hypocrisy disguised as duty-bound professionalism. It is based on mistrust; a mistrust which not only cripples any kind of warm,

meaningful student-teacher relationship, but also threatens the life of the institution by denying a majority of its members full status. Students are defined as unlicensed children to be directed and ruled.

Many of you probably think that York is quite liberal. It is liberal, but in a very fuzzy, sinister, deceptive and seductive way. Students are not hassled by university authorities with regard to their personal lives. Students are allowed to drink, smoke hashish, drop acid, take speed and engage in pre-marital sexual intercourse and any of its variations without any interference from the university — in fact, with the university's latent consent.

As most of you know, grass and hashish is smoked openly (and illegally) during many of the movies shown at York. This non-harassment is seductive and evil. Students are led to believe they have a great deal of freedom, because they can behave almost any way they wish in their personal interactions, but what students don't realize is that the university is quite happy to let students have this kind of freedom, because it does not threaten the power structure of the university.

It is only a personal, self-destructive statement, made to gratify immediate needs in a privatized, senseless way. Students are thus seduced to participate in their own alienation. They, in fact, permit themselves to be disenfranchised. But, just let students begin a campaign for significant representation (a voting membership between one third and one half on the board of governors, the (faculty) senate, the faculty councils and departmental committees, and see how quickly they are listened to, how quickly the university will support their position.

This insidious and carefully planned arrangement is obviously given full support and approval by the president, the various deans, the departmental chairmen, college masters and faculty.

Last year there were three significant, student-led political events. The first involved an individual, Howard Halpern, and his fight for an un-letter-graded, but written-evaluated year. After months of endless debate and committee buck-passing, Halpern finally succeeded in setting a precedent (which some faculty members will quickly deny), namely, receiving permission to have his

teachers (all of whom supported his fight, especially Kathy Koenig) give him written evaluations instead of letter grades.

Secondly, a group (of which I was a founding member) calling itself The Committee For Liberated Learning tried with Virginia Rock, Master of Stong College (who ended up doing nothing but being co-opted by goals of the committee), to form an experimental program at Stong. For months the committee met with various members of the faculty and administration in an effort to persuade them to support our project. We, of course, received much verbal enthusiasm as is the want of those so used to lecturing and hearing their own voice, mouthing words which they themselves do not believe, trying to convince us of their sincerity.

President David Slater, deans John Saywell (arts), James Gillies (administrative studies), Michael Collie (graduate studies), Gerald LeDain (law), and Jules Heller (fine arts), and professors Harold Kaplan, John Yolton and John O'Neill are some of the most powerful men on campus who do not wish to see students participate fully with a voice and vote in all university affairs. They actively support and make legitimate the status quo. They are looked up to as voices of reason and intelligence, intellectually superior men, whose ethics are the vaulted ethics of a disinterested, objective search for truth. But, because of their positions and political affiliations, these men do not in any way represent students, but as is mostly the case, they represent themselves.

The third group of students were those from Social Science 177, who, because they were misinformed about a final examination by their teachers, were summarily punished by either having to take an exam or receive a lower grade in the course. Many of these students held a very successful boycott of the exam, preceded by a peaceful sit-in in Slater's office. As far as I know their protests, both legal and moral, were not supported by the majority of the faculty. In any case, what is important is the fact that they could organize around a critical issue affecting their public lives and try to make their voices heard. Some members of the faculty listened with sympathetic ears, others were openly

and disingenuously hostile, most were silent and with their silence permitted these students to experience a demoralizing, frustrating and unjust defeat.

Do you know what a conspiracy of silence is? It is not when people do not talk to you. It happens when people who talk to you lie. They are silent about (and afraid of) the truth. There is a German saying (Wahrheit macht frei), "the truth will set you free". The Nazis changed that to (Arbeit macht frei) "work will set you free" (a sign with this very inscription appeared above the entrance to Auschwitz).

Fascists repress the truth; fascists repress freedom. Fascists submit their individual wills to a group, a symbol, a faultless ritual, rule or leader. Thus, in order to be free, work according to the established and sacred rules and definitions, which you, of course, did not help create. After you have become a slave to symbol, ritual, rule or leader, so the theory goes, you will be free. This statement is a blatant lie. It is both mystifying and dishonest.

Students must not fall prey to or be taken in by this philosophy. They will, if they are only concerned with grades, dates, dope, clothes, sex, beer, graduate school, etc. and how these fine things can be had with the least amount of effort, time and skill. The power structure at York will remain and with it, the politically useless and meaningless lives of York students. Students must begin to assert their right to vote on the hiring and firing of faculty and administration, on tenure and promotions, on curriculum and methods of evaluation, and on finance and appropriations. Learning is a co-operative, shared, two-way experience, with teacher and student equal in political power (they are obviously unequal in experience, skill and knowledge).

John Dewey, that great 20th century educational philosopher said that individuals learn by doing. Students must learn democracy by doing it. Students can only abide by a majority decision, if they make up much of that majority. Students must have clear cut authority and responsibility, because they must learn what it means to face the consequences of actions which they helped initiate. This is quite a difficult task, but it is necessary if one is to participate in a free society. Finally, it is necessary in order to develop a more honest, decent and humane life both for oneself and within one's community.