

historical document, he has them again eagerly awaiting to read the story of the last 20 years.

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*To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies.* T.H.B. Symons. Vols. I and II. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1975.

By the time this review is published, the Symons Report will have been out for more than six months. Of an original printing of 4000 copies, a little over 1000 will have been distributed free and another 2500 or so sold at \$10 a copy. In the face of this spirited performance, remarkable indeed for a not exactly racy book of close to 300,000 words, a second printing will likely be on the way. I refer to the English-language edition. The French-language edition, turned back almost as soon as it was released for an overhaul because of bad translation and poor editing, may have yet to make an appearance.

For most anglophone academics at least, therefore, and I should think especially for readers of the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, the Symons Report will, by now, be familiar ground. The story-line is clear. Professor Symons was sent out to inquire into "the state of teaching and research in studies relating to Canada." He looked at university curricula and programmes of community colleges, at substance and methods in the sciences and social sciences, at education for the professions, at Canadian studies abroad. He came back to report disaster just about everywhere. He was away three years and the costs are reckoned at \$300,000, though I suspect they will end up much more than that. Well. The Report, like some loquacious stranger ushered into our midst, has had its say and fallen silent. Early reviews are in, but the real impact of the Report's findings on the university community awaits the opening of the Fall term. What may be said now, what to predict, in the quiet of this summer of '76?

Commission persons at Peterborough tell me that they've had a good press, and I don't doubt this is so, but I know from talk with others that there has also been a good deal of cavilling, even of viewing with alarm, and the fact is the Symons Report, if one has a mind to try, is not difficult to attack or at least disparage. It is less a report, we may feel, than a lament and an exhortation based on mere impressions and often dubious evidence. Conclusions, all pointing one way, infiltrate the opening paragraphs and are at work in almost every paragraph that follows. How magisterial the tone, we may say, as of some humourless father dispensing wisdom to erring children more in sorrow than in anger. How long the list of complaints and how repetitive, how earnest the admonitions. Heads wagging like some chorus-line of Diefenbakers, the Commission is forever "noting with regret," or, more deeply smitten, "dismayed to discover." Uplifted, on occasion, with the thought that "there are grounds for restrained optimism," it slumps soon into "Sometimes unfortunately. . ." and moves to the ritual ending of "A great deal remains to be done." And what a quantity of abstraction, indefiniteness and fuzz: "in certain cases," "few," "many," "frequently," "occasionally," "often," etc. Are young faculty denied advancement in their departments because they have chosen to specialize in Canadian studies? The Commission writes: "It

seems beyond reasonable doubt that there has been at least some foundation for such a fear in some instances.”

Then there are the recommendations. There are 275 of them, if my arithmetic is correct, but I may have missed some since they are numbered separately by sections. They are mainly brought forward from the text, where they have already surfaced in profusion. They overlap, they sprawl, they seem encyclopedic. It sounds as if we are being called to one big orgy of Canada first. We may feel annoyed or put upon.

It is easy to mock. I mock, however, for a purpose. I mock because that is what the hard-liners who have in one way or another impeded the development of Canadian studies in this country for the past several decades (the Commission, in one of its tougher passages, identifies the disease as “academic snobbery”) will, most of them, do when the Symons Report moves properly into the forums of the universities this Fall. And in doing so, they will think they have made a good case against it. They will have done nothing of the sort. It is a pity that the Report is vulnerable in some of the ways I have indicated. Yet, as anyone who has worked long in the field will testify, nothing of its unusual character can alter the fact that it is essentially right in its perceptions, right in spelling out with convincing candor a cultural and educational neglect that must make us the wonder of the western world, and right in suggesting a wide range of remedies to correct the situation. Should the Commission then have named offending universities or departments, pilloried them in charts and tables? Should it have set quotas for Canadian content? I do not think so. The style of the Report, so easy to criticise, may be just right for the purposes it must serve. It is a kind of poem, and the heart of its insistent message will not go away: there *is* an imbalance, and the tired argument that there will be a “natural” correction must be dismissed. How much is enough? Is 8 percent a reasonable representation for courses in English-Canadian literature amongst all the courses in literature given by forty-nine departments of English? The Commission clearly thinks it is not enough; but in the end leaves us to answer. This is their way. To departments and institutions of all kinds, with plenty of hard evidence mixed with soft, they say: “If the cap fits, wear it.”

What will the Report accomplish? Like many Commissions, this one has already accomplished a great deal through the very processes of its inquiry. A piece of our consciousness, which many might prefer to let sleep, is awakened. Questions are asked. People come out of the woodwork. I hear, from the grapevine, of curriculum changes favouring Canadian studies that were expedited in the aura of the Commission’s work, though in fact long before the Report was published. With the Report out, the leavening action should accelerate. One of the Commission’s recommendations, at the end of the section on “Curriculum”, is “that each university and college establish a committee of Senate or other senior academic body to review, and to propose action on, the findings and recommendations of this *Report* that are relevant to its situation.” That step has already been taken at my university, and I think it likely that it has been or will be taken elsewhere. There may be a certain amount of window-dressing in the response. In some quarters (“But I *am* holier than thou”) it will be said that the cap doesn’t fit; in others, that it is not a cap at all and fitting is irrelevant. But there will be a stirring up which will be of immense value, and above all a re-examination of priorities. The bill for all the action proposed by the Symons Report would be large indeed. Something else might have to suffer. We might just have to reduce somewhat the several

millions of dollars we put annually, through the Canada Council and other means, into the retrieval of English and European documents and texts, might have to modify a little our rapt concern for the geography and socio-political conditions of other countries at the expense of serious concern for the study of our own. Placed in this context, the Report must be seen as a land-mark of great importance in the development of Canadian studies.

On a more personal note, two closing thoughts. First, I am grateful for the encouragement which the Report will give to those who have worked long at a disadvantage to bring Canadian studies into the core of our academic disciplines. If they lacked confidence, they can have it now. Second, I await with some trepidation the next instalment of the Symons Report, which will address itself to problems of staffing and citizenship. These problems, foreshadowed by the many references in Volumes I and II to the less than benign effects of “foreign” predominance in our educational system, are truly difficult ones. To deal with them justly, and with dignity, will demand of us all that we have learned about understanding and tolerance in an up-tight world.

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Paul Thomas ed; *Universities and the Law*. Winnipeg: Legal Research Institute of the University of Manitoba, 1975. 116 pp.

There is a re-orientation in faculty attitudes towards universities in Canada at the present time, one manifestation of which is a desire to define the legal status of faculty members and to determine the legal rights and responsibilities of both faculty and universities. Two conferences have focused on this topic recently, the first, from which the above publication of papers resulted, at the University of Manitoba in May 1974, and the second at Dalhousie University in the spring of 1975.

The papers presented at the Manitoba conference were exploratory in nature. Professor G.H.L. Fridman, then Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta, delivered a paper, commented upon by Professor Janet Debicka of the University of Manitoba, in which he sought to define in law the nature of the contract between the university and a faculty member. He points out that generally there are a few clear, or even written, terms and much has to be implied from the law generally and from the specific regulations in force at each university concerned. At this point, however, the matter becomes exceedingly complex, for the Boards of Governors of many universities enact a host of rules and regulations which may or may not be intended to be binding and to affect the contractual relationship between the faculty member and the university.

In the past such a situation has been acquiesced in. As Professor Dale Gibson points out in a preface, faculty members “once were willing to leave the determination of their rights and responsibilities to administrative discretion, guided by unwritten customs and understandings.” Not so now, and it is this dissatisfaction that has given impetus to drives for collective bargaining by faculty on Canadian campuses. The moves in this direction are discussed by Professor Andre Côté of the University of Laval, in so far as they concern