

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Hosts Morning Forums

By Catherine SWEET

On Tuesday, March 4, a small cross-section of Prince Edward Islanders were asked to participate in a Dialogue on Foreign Policy in Charlottetown. Four UPEI students were included in the group of approximately thirty.

In a 1995 Parliamentary review, the Canadian Government divided the topic of foreign affairs into three "pillars." They are Prosperity, Security, and Values and Culture.

In an effort to include Canadians in creating goals for these pillars, dialogues are being held across the nation and three questions were posed to each of the groups. The ideas gathered from these open forums will be compiled and reviewed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We were divided into three groups of about twelve to tackle each of the pillars separately, and I participated in

the group to discuss Values and Culture. We had a diverse bunch, including ex-patriots of Iran and England, government workers, retired teachers and a high school student. We were all Canadian.

The first hour of our forum was used to attempt to define Canadian culture. We were asked how we best portrayed our values and culture abroad, and we had a difficult time deciding on a single image of a Canadian.

We're peace-keeping, proud and are lucky enough to feel a warmth from those abroad when we wear our flag on our back. We're more of a mosaic than a melting pot.

One of the group, Jean Tingley, discussed the fact that there was little flag-waving in Canada. Another member downplayed the importance of patriotism as modern tribalism – a chest-pounding battle cry.

We're peace-keeping, proud and are lucky enough to feel a warmth from those abroad when we wear our flag on our back. We're more of a mosaic than a melting pot. Those definitions came easily. But what is definingly *Canadian*?

After we all addressed the issue, Fouad Haddad wrapped up our collective sentiments when he said, "Our culture is a multi-culture. Period."

With that in mind, we set to work on our questions. They included promoting human rights, gender equality and

diversity and fostering intercultural and interfaith dialogues in other nations.

Overall, our group decided that fostering these sentiments should be strengthened at home before it is taught abroad. While we can be proud that Canadians are very diverse (especially in the larger centres), there is not a lot of intercultural and interfaith education in public schools. In fact, many Masters of Education programs do not even consider Religious Studies a "teachable" subject.

We submitted that instead of portraying a common-denominator, glossed-over "Canadianness" of all our citizens, we should learn about each piece of the puzzle individually and that would encourage more acceptance. The group unanimously abhorred the term "tolerance" when applied to a nation, and encouraged more of an educated understanding.

The group that was asked to focus on Prosperity addressed questions of our how our geographic position could be used to our advantage, trade partnerships, and

globalization. The Security forum explored Canada's priorities when it comes to its security, the importance of our military, and our involvement in security issues beyond our borders.

At the end of the meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bill Graham, thanked us before continuing on to UPEI's Duffy Amphitheatre for a town-hall style discussion of the three pillars system.

As Dr. Richard Kurial, the Dean of Arts at UPEI, pointed out, this morning forum was useful because the government can use this to feel out the sentiments of the nation, but it can also be used against Canadians and allow the officials to say, "well, we asked you in public forums!"

I can only hope that this cross-country tour for the Minister of Foreign Affairs is successful. As the Minister said in interviews, the timing of this tour could have been better, but it still should be done. With a possible war with America looming, it will be a tall order to keep people on task.



Fun & Games

Identify the songs these lyrics come from:

- 1) "People say I'm the life of the party, cause I tell a joke or two."
- 2) "I say my hell is the closet I'm stuck inside."

Movie Quotes (identify the film):

- 1) "It's funny, you look like a normal person, but really you are the angel of death."
- 2) "She was a thief. You got to believe. She stole my heart and my cat."

Trivia:

- 1) What creature has caused the most deaths worldwide?

- 2) How many National Parks are there on Prince Edward Island?

Answers from the last issue:

Lyrics:

- 1) "When Doves Cry," by Prince
- 2) "Roxanne," by The Police

Movie Quotes:

- 1) Empire Records
- 2) Fight Club

Trivia:

- 1) This is the year of the 75th Oscars.
- 2) The Nerds had their revenge at "Adam's College, home of the Atoms."

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