

"Proud of my class"

One student compares campus life in Canada and Scotland

BY ALEX BUTOS

GLASGOW, Scotland (CUP) -- Back in Scotland's largest city, student David Archibald -- fresh from a year-long stint in Canada -- ponders the question, "how am I different from Canadians?"

Archibald, an undergraduate student at the University of Glasgow, spent the last school year as an exchange student at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

Now, back in his small apartment in a working class Glasgow neighborhood, the social activist and left wing campaign organizer compares Canadian and Scottish student life.

"It's quite common for students in Scotland to define themselves as socialists, whatever their definition of socialist is," Archibald says while nursing a drink of scotch. "I didn't find that in Canada."

"I remember in Canada I would say 'I'm proud of being working class,' and people would say, 'Oh, don't put yourself down,'" Archibald says. "And I would say, 'I'm not putting myself down, I'm proud of my class.'"

Archibald's observations are informed by years of involvement in Scottish militant politics. In fact, the 33-year-old's background reads like a radical storybook.

At 18, he joined his first trade union. By 20, he became an active member in the Labor Party's youth wing and Scottish Militant, a radical Marxist group. (He was later expelled from the Labor Party for being involved in Scottish Militant). Then in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Archibald helped organize the anti-poll tax movement that swept Thatcher-era Britain.

Archibald recalls his initial surprise at seeing Nike ads declaring "Just Do It!" plastered on the walls of student dormitories at Queen's. This almost trivial observation made him think Canadians -- contrary to what they may say -- are strong individualists.

"It's a Canadian dream that people can [transcend their class] on an individual basis," the father of a six-year-old son argues. "[Because] people in Canada are much wealthier than in Britain . . . there's an enormous belief that the individual can crack their social status and be successful and that there's nothing to prevent an individual from achieving their goals. People in Scotland, on the other hand, have a perception of their class that you can't get around."

But there are also some parallels between life on both

sides of the Atlantic, Archibald says. "The similarities between Canada and Scotland are that there are a lot of people who are radical who are disenfranchised," he says. "They don't want to vote for a party that is capitalist."

Even at conservative-minded Queen's, he points out, students last year took to the streets to protest the policies of Ontario Premier Mike Harris.

Unfortunately, they and other people tired of the capitalist status quo don't have a real left-wing alternative to turn to.

All of the parties in Canada are -- if not in word but in deed -- devoted to capitalism," says Archibald. "But there's a lot of anti-capitalist, anti-system strain out there. [Unfortunately], there's not a lot of pro something."

There's also a lot of popular disenchantment in Scotland, Archibald says. One sign of this is the Scottish independence movement, which is supported by many youth.

"In Scotland, three-fourths of young people want independence," he says. "[In a July 1998 poll], three-fourths of people said they would vote for the [sovereignist] Scottish National Party. So that shows the level of dissatisfaction."

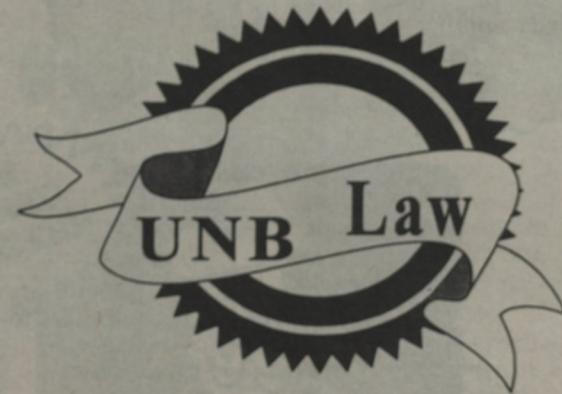
As Archibald finishes the last drops of Scotch in his glass, he adds a final thought on the role of students in the political process.

"I don't come from a tradition where students are on the vanguard," he says. "Students can't change very much because they don't have an [economic] power. However, they have the power to raise ideas."

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