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How To Effect Social Change

Violence May Come, Warns Panelist

By MARY DAWSON

"Violence will become a very definite alternative of the native people in achieving their aims in the future," warned Harvey McCue, professor of native studies at Trent University during the February 6 panel discussion on "How To Affect Change" held in Richmond Hill United.

"In terms of the native population certain situations and circumstances which have occurred throughout history suggest that violence is going to be the means of achieving their aims," he said.

McCue recalled that recently about changes in the institutions of this country to the point where the native population will get the opportunity of a founding population to discuss change from their point of view. This would mean changing the government attitude, changing the educational system and more important, changing the attitude of educational authorities toward native people. This would encourage them to put into practice some of the ideological suggestions of the people themselves. In this day of rapid change there is a great deal in their own culture which is very important to them," he said.

"Is social change one and the same as political change?" asked the moderator.

"In the broadest sense I find it hard to differentiate," said Quiggan. "The work I do is an attempt to get wider distribution of power in areas where I work. The church must act as the conscience of humanity. It must speak out and act now. To have the rights of all individuals recognized the church has an important role to play."

"Does political change always follow social change?" asked Spraggett.

"I think it does," replied Danson. "Politicians cannot legislate ahead of society's willingness to accept that legislation. We as politicians, cannot move beyond where people want us to move."

"This is a common dilemma for people in political offices," said Mrs. Nelson. "You have a proxy from your constituents and they expect you to have some function of leadership. Achieving a balance is the problem."

"The politician has been elected to represent the people," added McCue, "and he has been given the right to govern and thereby to lead. Governments have to be prepared to give direction and to take initiative."

"Of course we must lead," agreed Danson. "But if it's a moral issue we would want to know the feelings of the people we represent. If the legislation deals with labor or the native people, I would want to learn a heck of a lot more than I already know about the subject and then make up my mind."

Mrs. Nelson advised the more than 200 people in the audience that if they were interested in effecting social change they should get active in politics.

Referring back to Mrs. Nelson's belief that the greatest hope for social change lies with the education of children, Spraggett asked, "Where does brain washing come in? To what extent does the teacher express her own values?"

"Everything you do sells your own values," Mrs. Nelson said. "A teacher's major role should be as an exemplar. We push our values without ever thinking about it. However, a teacher has to be honest. She has an absolute obligation to make all facts known to the children."

"What we need is some means by which a person who has the power of office can be kept honest," said Quiggan.

A member of the audience questioned the advisability of an "open" Sunday. "I know a number of people who have managed to conserve their religious life and they do this in the midst of a society which violates their Sabbath," said Mrs. Nelson.

"If your own beliefs are well founded you will be able to do

so, also. Do we need a special day for this idea of recreation by the family group? Maybe with an "open" Sunday we would get more use and more rational use of our recreational facilities," she said.

A show of hands indicated that most of those present were not in favor of an "open" commercial Sunday.

"I'm a Jew, but I find Sunday very convenient. It's an ordered way of life," declared Danson. "My instincts are for a closed Sunday as Saturday is closed for an orthodox Jew. However, I'm afraid it is a luxury we may not be able to afford for too long."

"Do we have a functioning democracy at the municipal, provincial and federal level?" was another question from the floor.

"Democracy is a very loose, imperfect and inefficient institution at present," Danson replied. "We are trying to find better ways. The elected representative is responsible not only to the people but to himself."

"Is a letter or a phone call going to do much?" asked Spraggett.

"Try it," was Danson's advice. "It works. Politicians are very sensitive, especially in election years."

Another member of the audience wanted to know, "Is there no room left for the individual to take action toward social change?"

"If you are a candidate in an election, you will find that it is the individuals who cast the votes," Mrs. Nelson replied. She also referred to the successful fight by individuals to have the Spadina Expressway abandoned.

"Social change has got to the point where it is occurring without anyone spurring it on. How can we retain our identity? How do I live with change, how do I adapt to it?" a member of the audience wanted to know.

"Change has accelerated and man hasn't been able to keep up. You have to have a community of interest, a group with which you can identify," advised Mrs. Nelson.

"The danger is that because of mobility people will be afraid of making a commitment to any relationship," warned Quiggan.

McCue said, "Once the individual and the community try to come to grips realistically with this problem of unregulated social change, it may be solved. We believe that the North American people have to return to a tribal society by trying to create an impression on factors and variables which act on us from outside."

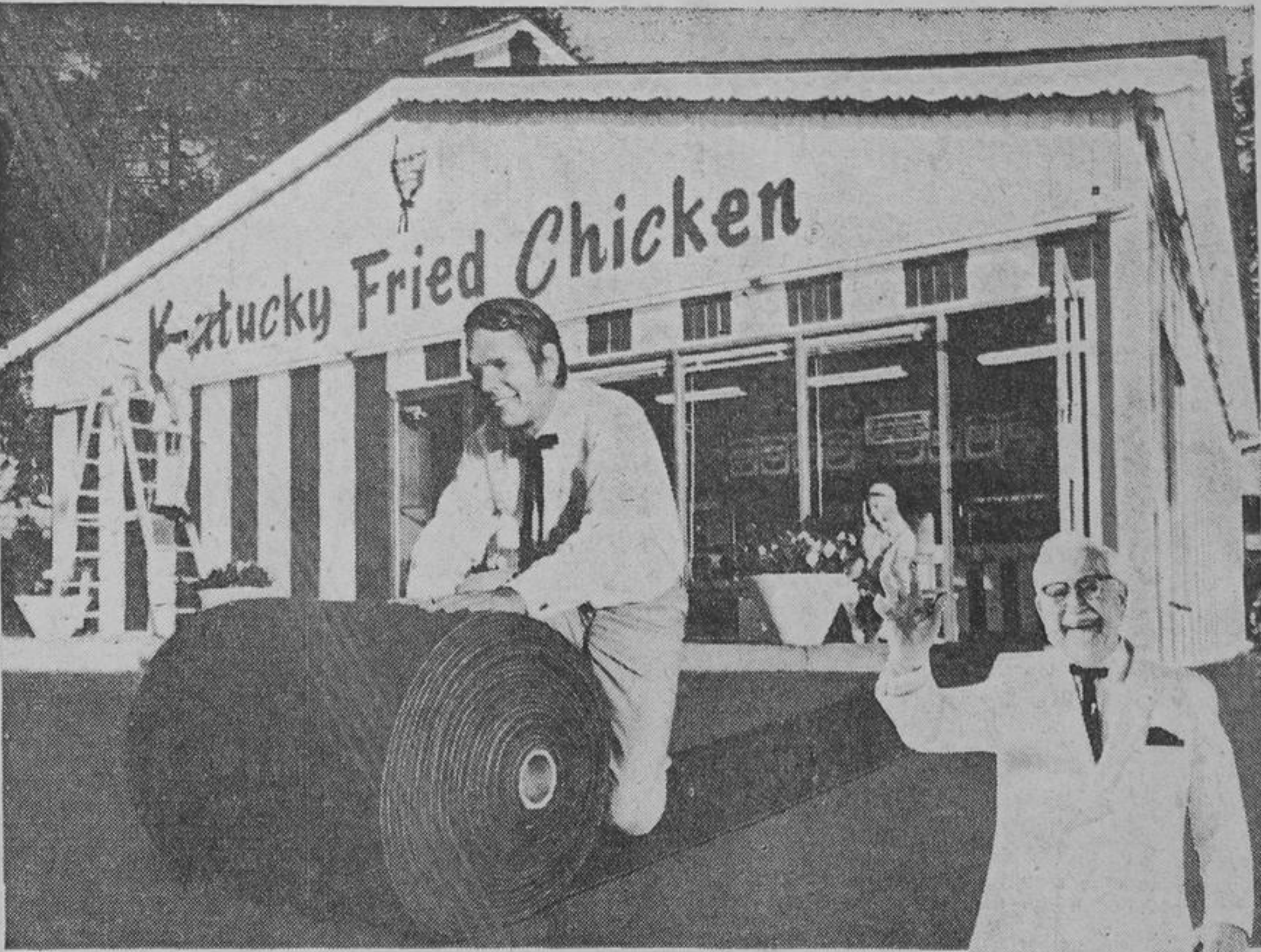
"What particular education, philosophical and progressive changes would you like to see?" asked another person from the floor.

"The realization that the responsibility of parents doesn't end with production of the child," replied Mrs. Nelson. "The educational system will have to involve the parents, their ideas, talents and time. It must teach children how to receive information to read, write and type and teach them the skills of social interaction in conversation and small group activity. Above all it must start being honest," she said.

Again speaking for the native people, McCue agreed that proper education will be the greatest agent of social change. "People telling us how to become educated, and for what, has faded dreadfully."

He shocked his audience by revealing that approximately 97% of Indian children are failing to get past grade 11. "And that is an improvement! We must examine the educational system in the light of the needs of the native population. The present system is not geared to the value structures and interests the native people retain in their own communities. The difficulties are not a social characteristic, but a conflict in values," he said.

The meeting adjourned to the church parlors for coffee and each panelist was surrounded by a group of people discussing further the questions raised during the formal session.



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