

INTELLECTUAL MONASTERY

"The university should be a place where you spend three or four years for no purpose at all, except for personal satisfaction."

"A university is a place for the few—the very few and most of you should not be here." Dr. Mewett accused his NFCUS seminar audience. "There should be no more than 10-12,000 true university students in all Canada."

Irritated by a previous speaker who urged universities to open their doors to everyone, Dr. Mewett described the open-door as "rubbish" and said universities just cannot allow "every Tom, Dick and Harry to come in." He accused previous speakers of "impertinence" in suggesting, among other things, a university education should be of practical value to the student.

"It's a pretty wishy-washy post-high-school kind of training you're getting," he told the student delegates. Part of the reason is that people are going to university to get something practical—a degree that brings high pay and prestige. Students who regard university as a practical dollars and cents invest-

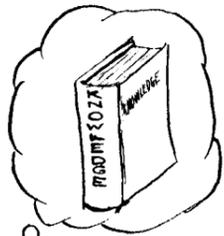
TRADE SCHOOLS

ment yielding a high-paying job and social prestige are breaking down the Canadian system of university education. He chose his figure of 10,000 on the assumption that more than 90 per cent of students now in colleges are there for "practical" purposes.

Unfortunately for Dr. Mewett's argument that the nature of his "intellectual monastery" would discourage excess enrollment and solve the problem of admittance regulations his student audience quite unanimously indicated their desire to sign up for the first term of this "knowledge for its own sake." To this Dr. Mewett replied, "I doubt if you'd be allowed in."

His reformed university system would not cancel educational advancement for the practical mind. Medical, law, engineering or other students who want "to do something" would be housed in enlarged trade schools and other professional institutions, apart from more thoughtful graduates.

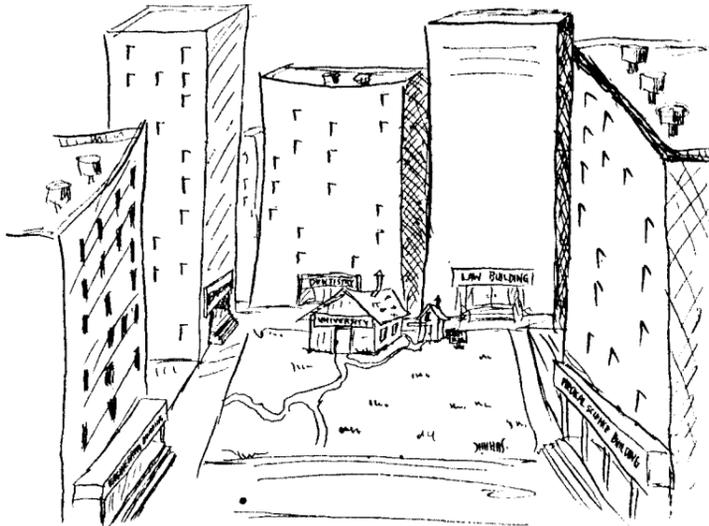
As it is now, Dr. Mewett seemed willing to conclude, we no longer have a "true university." And we must return to it.



During the 1962 national seminar of the National Federation of Canadian University Students (which by the way includes every Alberta student) at Carleton University in Ottawa, our university system was slammed as "a pretty wishy-washy post-high-school kind of training". Dr. Alan Mewett, the slammer, is a member of Queen's law faculty.

Dr. Mewett cries for return to the true university, to the "intellectual monastery" and for segregation of professional institutions.

Features asked Dr. R. D. McMaster to answer the eastern reformer. Himself a Torontonion by origin, Dr. McMaster is at present an associate professor of our English department. His specialty is prose literature of the Victorian period—a period which sponsored such reformers as Newman and Arnold.



'FIRST-RATE UNIVERSITY'

"Yes, we do still have true universities. I think we have a first-rate university," said Dr. R. D. McMaster in reply to questions on Dr. Mewett's charges. "Of old, the university could more easily live up to its name. A student could master the range of subjects as known in his time, science and literature. It is now impossible to master all the knowledge, and often we attempt compromises that are completely inadequate. Our first year students come out with no idea of the significance of science."

Describing a university, the Alberta professor defined it as essentially "a place where people study books and have the books to study. Therefore, the library would be the university's center."

Today our principal university problems are size and economics. Perhaps necessarily we are getting vast monolithic institutions. In such institutions, it is possible for the student to lose any sense of individual significance and come to feel merely an impersonal part of the whole mass. He may remain that way.

Dr. McMaster suggested the college system as one solution. It would be more costly and less administratively efficient, just educationally superior. Here, though, the student might feel education is of some importance, and that he has a place in it.

INDOCTRINATION

Lack of student-professor contact is a second problem arising from size. Where the size of classes vastly increases, the "best" instructors may eventually televise their lectures. Students would see only a screen and there would be no possible exchange of ideas between students and professors.

"At this stage, education ceases to be education and becomes only indoctrination." Dr. McMaster wondered if this is not seen even in our consolidated examinations for first year courses. Students cover the same material and write the same examination presumably on the as-

sumption that they will all have the same ideas.

"Our vast institutions are becoming organized like armies, or like business concerns with each department like part of a "team" cooperating for efficiency. Conflict between individuals and departments is unpleasant and troublesome. But once friction ceases, education ends and indoctrination begins. New ideas are characteristically upsetting: a

CRAVEN OR DEAD

university that is not upsetting someone profoundly is moribund: a university that hopes to serve its community without disturbing it is either craven or dead.

Who should go to university? This, found Dr. McMaster, is defined by our wants. Today, we want highly educated people to contribute to our culture. Getting these can in part be assured by giving stiff courses and demanding high standards. But the idea that a bright graduate will contribute more to our culture than a person not formally educated or a poor student is not necessarily true.

"Given the kind of university we are in danger of getting today, failure might be the sign of a student's success, showing his refusal to adjust."

Presently with the Leavis-Snow dispute, interest is lively in the relationship of the humanities and sciences. Dr. McMaster stresses awareness of both areas is necessary to the liberally educated man; awareness of the culture we have created. "We have some methods now for dealing with this problem—most are utter nonsense."

"The university as its name suggests is a mingling of different disciplines. Exchange of ideas, especially on the graduate level, is one way of learning the breadth and range of modern thought. And what goes on in the class is frequently least important in imparting this to the university students." This is where residence life is important.

"We attempt to give students an awareness of both science and humanities in the first common year, I should say, however that arts students coming out of first year know no more of modern science than they did when they entered. What they get is the technology of a dis-

NO INSIGHT

cipline. They get no insight into the relationship of scientific thought to culture and society in general. They get no idea of its impact on religious, political, social, philosophical or other fields. They get no sense of the real importance of science in the modern world.

Many get history courses and science courses but no course specifically and historically relating scientific ideas to western culture. There should be a history of scientific events as seen in relationship to the total framework of ideas and institutions in which they occurred.

Many people still have a conception of scientific laws and ideas that went out of date in the mid-nineteenth century. To understand the significance of science, our students should have a course that does what we really want to do, that is, make them aware of major scientific contributions and their effect on modern life. Discovery of a single scientific law can change or influence the whole thought of a generation of people. This kind of knowledge (as we see it for example in Hofstadter's "Social Darwinism in American Thought") is as important for the science as for the humanities student, and neither gets it."

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