

Research falters

by Peter Birt
National Affairs Reporter
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Levels of funding for university research is not one of those topics of discussion, not something to put on the edge of your chair. But it is one of those things that explains why Canada is in the kind of research slump it is and why it should change.

In a report issued two years ago, the Royal Society of Canada warned Prime Minister Trudeau that "present government policies, if allowed to continue, will do damage to Canada's research and development capabilities that can only be reversed over a period of years." It continued by describing a situation that the people say is here already.

"An enfeebled R&D (Research and Development) will cause us to become more dependent on our powerful neighbours. We shall have to contend with the erosion of our markets, our standard of living and ultimately our sovereignty."

The government's most recent response to the continuing nagging by the university research community is to promise a 12 per cent funding increase to support research in universities and non-profit institutions. That will bring \$100 million to those institutions. On the face of it this increase of \$20 million would help to turn the tide of the declining research establishment in Canada.

But in fact it does not.

As an example, the medical research council, under its grants and scholarships program will also get a 12 per cent increase in funding over the 1977 level in the government estimates tabled for 1977-78. This \$56.7 million granted is up from \$50.8 million in 1976-77 and the \$47.4 million of 1975-

But according to recent testimony before the Senate's special committee on science policy, the latest funding announcement will give agencies less in real dollars, considering the official inflation factor, than they received some years ago. Here is an exchange recorded Feb. 9 between the committee's chairman, Senator Grosart and Dr. Malcolm Brown, chairman of the Medical Research Council.

Senator Grosart: So that even if we get a ten per cent over the period from 1973 onwards, your figure this year, instead of being \$50 million, should be \$55 million, just to keep you even in

terms of constant dollars?

Dr. D. Brown: Had it been ten per cent compounded, that is correct.

Senator Grosart: Your \$50 million budget this year is less than the constant dollar level of your grants going back over the years, is that correct?

Dr. Brown: That would be correct. The last year in which we were above the implicit price index of GNE was 1971-72. The following year it was 0.1, and since it has fallen.

Senator Grosart: Can we say, then, that the situation, going back to 1971-72 or 1972-73 to the present year, is that your absolute dollar resources have been less each year?

Dr. Brown: That is correct.

Senator Grosart: And the result is that you have had to cut back, in spite of the fact that there was an apparent increase in the funding?

Dr. Brown: In current dollars, that is correct.

And for whatever they are worth, literally, Dr. Brown will have to accept those current dollars that the government gives out. The dilemma that Brown faces, trying to convince the government that more isn't enough, and in fact can mean less, looked like it would be easier when a scientist joined the House of Commons in the form of Liberal Member Frank Maine. (A former head of research and development for Fiberglass Canada with chemistry degrees from Queen's and Cambridge, Main said, "We are on the right track again," when the government announced their grants for research funding. He said the grants money "will redress some of the inflation of the last year and tackle some of the losses due to previous years of inflation.") (Saying there was no one (in Parliament) to defend science while there was someone to argue all the other cases," Main suggests he finally will be able to represent the science community.

Main said that industry research (as compared to university and government research) "is the most important, economically speaking" because it affects directly the standard of living and the Gross National Product.

There was also a feeling that restricted university funding would lead to increased research by industry. That did not occur. Instead, university funding declined at a rate higher than that of government or industry.

The effect of that decline has been evident in Canada's history. Multi-

national companies who do their research at their head offices, outside Canada use the resources outside Canada and enjoy the financial and academic benefits from it while Canadian dollars continue to support, through the company's profits in its branch plant, that very research. It is often argued that in a time of rapid technological advancement the absence of a strong native research and development facility will hamper the growth potential of any country.

In the face of actual funding reductions for research, the universities have been forced whether they question the possible drawbacks or not to do increased contract research. This contract work from both governments and industry is usually mission oriented, that is, it is pointed toward whatever goal or objective the sponsor tells the researcher to consider. Its purpose is not researcher-initiated or necessarily educationally rewarding. But it does pay the bills. Some say the academic considerations are too high to do much of this kind of work, whether it is testing a new drug or analysing food substances.

The constant debate between applied and basic research has gone on forever within the research community but indications of further restrictions of the ability of Canadian scientists to do what they obviously prefer, basic research, is causing the debate to take on some more dramatic and urgent tones.

It was the plea of one researcher to the Lamontagne government committee on science policy that "the method of establishing a more suitable balance should have been to hold the present level of basic research in real terms and

increase the funds available for applied research by the private sector and by other appropriate research performers."

A bill now in Parliament will restructure the various granting agencies of the federal government but not many people expect to see a large change in the amount of money given to researchers. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) said they think this change under Bill C-26 will make more sense of the funding councils, but according to CAUT's Dr. Sim that doesn't seem to be the real point of the bill. It is their main concern too that the value of the increased government grants is declining, and while accepting the merit of contract or applied research there is a concern for the long term effect of a great increase in this kind of activity.

Claiming that "at long last the university scientists have come down out of their ivory tower labs and started to shout and scream and do things like any other sector of society and at last they've been heard." Maine reinforced the stereotyped myths about the inaccessibility and implied isolation of the university research establishment. With a background in large industry it is not surprising that he accepts the government policy on funding which others are much more critical towards. He clearly has no qualms about aiding industrial research at the expense of those in the "ivory towers."

The remaining question, above and beyond the constant need for the universities to explain their work to the public and government is in fact the priority the present government gives for this research work, which clearly does not have a short term gain, political or otherwise.

Student jobs drop

TORONTO (CJP) — An NDP member of parliament, John Rodriguez, has estimated that 15 per cent of the students, or more than 225,000 did not find any work at all last summer and hence did not return to classes this fall. Nobody knows precisely how many students are unemployed because Statistics Canada dropped its annual survey of student unemployment last year, as a cost-saving measure.

While few universities conduct formal surveys of job prospects of graduates' employment, several campus officials have provided *The Labour Gazette* with reports on their experiences with employers and 1976 graduates. One experience common almost everywhere is that graduates in education, nursing and several other health professions are having trouble finding professional openings because of government spending cutbacks in their fields.

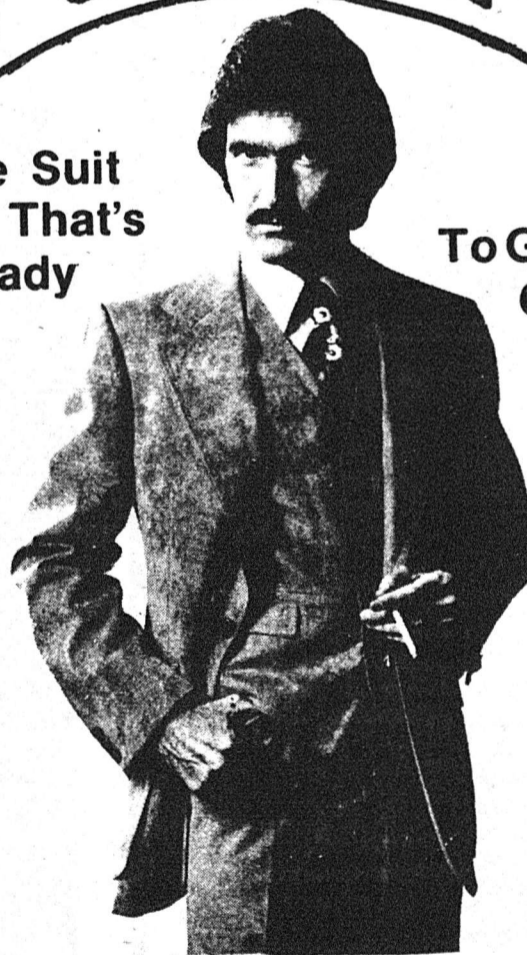
W.H. Thomas, branch manager of Canada Manpower Centre at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont., found a noticeable drop in the number of employers who were recruiting on campus in recent years. He attributed this not only to the current labour market but also to the fact that many employers are hiring business or technological graduates of community colleges "and using them in areas where previously university graduates were in fact underemployed."

At McMaster, as elsewhere, arts, health science and social work graduates were not doing as well as engineering, computer science, chemistry, commerce and business administration graduates. Chemistry graduates were in "average" demand, and the demand for biochemistry and biology graduates was only fair. Thomas also noted "very little demand" for graduates in physics, pure mathematics and geology—"a decline from other year."

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