

Free Speech

Canadian colleges face painful future

In the 1980s, Canadian universities face painful problems which could cause irreversible damage to the Canadian society as a whole if government and industry do not increase funds for academic research. In the very near future Canada will have to pay the price of any major disruption of the university system caused by lack of sufficient funding of research projects at various campuses.

These are the opinions of Mr. Claude Thibault, executive director of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, and Dr. Claude Fortier, chairman of the Science Council of Canada. University bosses have implemented the obvious economies, wherever possible, trying desperately to preserve the essence of the institutions. But the future is not encouraging if there will be no radical changes in the attitude of the federal and provincial governments.

The key to the problem is declining enrolment. Statistics Canada expects a substantial drop in enrolment at Canadian universities in the next few academic years. This trend might well continue into the 1990s due mostly to a low Canadian birth rate. Proposed increases in tuition fees — such as at the University of Toronto — are not the answer. Larger sums are required if Canada is not to become a banana republic in the academic field, because few or poorly trained researchers will definitely undermine the Canadian economic development based on high technology and scientific discoveries.

The fragmentation of the educational system

Since Canada does not have a federal Ministry of Education the universities in each province depend on the whim of each provincial minister responsible for the portfolio, and, therefore, each province has different fundings.

Due to huge oil profits, Alberta is better off than British Columbia, which in turn is better off than Saskatchewan, Manitoba and other provinces. Quebec — for political rather than educational purposes — under the Parti Quebecois is one of the biggest spenders on university education and research. Since Quebec's universities are the centres of the separatists' strength, Premier Levesque channels funds in order to keep his troops happy.

Academics in each province sometimes know more what's going on at American or British universities than at those of other Canadian provinces. In many instances fragmentation causes double or triple expenditures on identical projects or research plans, carried out in different places at various campuses by different scholars or scientists without any coordination whatsoever. Ottawa lacks the jurisdiction to provide the leadership, and the poor performance of the academic institutions, due to the lack of sufficient and permanent funds — is mostly the catalyst that counts in forming the public opinion against the universities.

Notwithstanding financial restraint universities must attract bright young people, provide them with a good education and assure some of them a role at the

universities commensurate with their professional training. But a close examination of the whole problem shows that it is just wishful thinking. Universities thrive on young blood and fresh ideas. However, there is no place for young and talented Canadian Ph.D.s, since Canadian academics work together and age together, and new hirings are almost nonexistent.



Ontario universities

In 1970 Ontario ranked third in per-student expenditure at the university level. Last year, however, it dropped to eight place, and had the dubious distinction to be above Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. Premier William Davis, largely responsible for the creation of the new universities in Ontario, has in the past years neglected them in such a way that all fifteen universities are in dire financial straits. Some smaller ones were operating in 1979 on deficit budgets, borrowing from financial institutions in order to meet payrolls, or taking out funds from their meagre endowments.

A study published by the Ontario Council of University Affairs estimated Ontario universities alone may be annually spending about \$20 million less than is needed merely to replace depreciated equipment.

What's worse, even the tenured staff is not secure anymore of their permanent positions. According to figures of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) of 1979 more than 2500 university professors will lose their jobs during the next five years. This is about 20 per cent of the 12,000 plus faculty members in Ontario. In other provinces the figures differ but all of them are on the minor side.

Alternatives

There are possibilities to avoid cutbacks: eliminating high cost programs; closing satellite campuses; enrolling more part-time students; combining courses and faculties from nearby universities, such as Toronto and York, Carleton and Ottawa and others; asking the private sector for more funds.

But the Canadian private sector is not known for its generosity. It's common knowledge that money invested in R & D (research and development) brings tangible rewards in the fields of medicine, industry and commerce; inventions, discoveries and new products create new jobs, cheaper goods for the consumer and other

benefits to society. In their recent submission to Heward Graffey, former Minister of State for Science and Technology, physicists and biologist scientists underline the gravity of the situation because of the constant and persistent neglect of Canada's R & D personnel.

Whereas in the USA, Japan, Britain, Germany, Sweden, and even in a small country like Israel, the R & D figures show growth of about 8 per cent annually, in Canada the rate — beginning from 1967 — is less than one per cent per annum.

The politicians in Ottawa, whether liberal or P.C., are busy being elected or clinging to power when already elected. They promise a lot before the elections trying to bribe the voters with their own money, but even they do not even mention the universities, simply because the academia has no voting power.

There is a real danger that Canada will — if it has not already — become an authentic satellite in all aspects of R & D. In a letter to the Globe and Mail (Aug. 9, 1976) the eminent University of Toronto's scientist, John Polanyi, wrote that the real spending by Ottawa on basic science in Canada has been decreasing "in an alarming fashion since 1969", and that "we are in the process of forcing mediocrity on our established researchers, while denying even that dubious privilege to our aspiring scientists. It is important that we reverse the trend." Unfortunately the problem is even worse in 1980 than in 1976 when Polanyi's letter was published in the Globe.

Canada has no serious private donors to speak of. Canada lacks the Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Ford and less known Foundations. Here are some figures which illustrate the point: some 500 U.S. colleges and universities have endowments exceeding \$3 million. Half of them have funds in excess of 10 million and over 40 have more than 100 million. Harvard and the Univ. of Texas have each more than a billion. In precise figures Harvard had at the beginning of 1979 \$1,392,636,862; the Univ. of Texas had \$1,043,000,000.

On the other hand the University of Toronto — the biggest academic institution in Canada — had in April of 1979 an endowment of \$79,300,000, and York University — one of the youngest universities in Canada — had last December \$7,387,000 in trust and endowment. Without the trust funds the endowment reached only \$944,000. Moreover, the University of Toronto has a student population at least three times bigger than that at Harvard.

These figures speak for themselves and need no commentary. Science is not a luxury. It is the basis of progress as it is known in the civilized world. Will somebody listen?

Isaac Bar-Lewaw

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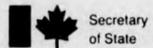
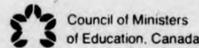
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