

Job training accentuated; liberal arts discouraged

Lougheed's education policy — — pup

Manpower training

1974 saw the Progressive Conservative government in Alberta adopt a new policy in regards to training and developing an indigenous labour force that could supply the manpower needs of the Syncrude project. To this end the cabinet was shuffled and Dr. Bert Hohol was transferred from the portfolio of Labour and Manpower to that of Advanced Education. But more than just the minister was transferred, in an unprecedented move by a legislative body in Canada, the adjunct portfolio of 'Manpower' was attached to that of Advanced Education. This heterogenous combination of cabinet portfolio's was to become more than just housekeeping; it would have ramifications for the next six years on post-secondary education in the province.

The aim of the Lougheed 'Team' was not just one Syncrude, but '2-3-4 more' Syncrudes, over a ten year period. The success of the government in mobilizing itself around supplying capital and labour, as well as housing, social services, etc., to the oil companies involved in the Syncrude project would determine whether or not other tar sands projects could be feasibly carried out in the future.

No matter what the initial cost was, and it ran in the hundreds of millions, to develop the technology and equipment for such an innovative extraction process, the greater cost would be in providing the labour force necessary to construct and maintain the tar sands plant.

Tar Sands extraction is a highly specialized and expensive operation for producing crude oil. But the main drawback is the fact that it takes, to quote a government document: 'an educated, highly skilled work-force' which can handle advanced technology. Materials costs could be cut, fat could be trimmed on equipment (though it wasn't during the whole construction period of Syncrude) but what is needed to construct such plants are large numbers of skilled workers. You can't use unskilled workers except in the most minimal way, the days of coolies building railways as expendable labour are past. But the problem facing the Lougheed Team in 1974 was the fact that they had promised the oil company consortium that they could 'provide the necessary manpower' for the Syncrude project.

In order to solve this problem of 'technologically skilled labour,' the Tories had prepared a Manpower Policy Act in 1972. Waiting in the wings till the change in portfolio in 1974, the Manpower Policy aimed at being the paper solution to the government's labour shortage problem. With the shuffle of one of the policy advisors; Dr. Hohol and his Manpower portfolio into the waiting arms of the Department of Advanced Education, the Lougheed Team was on the road to the solution of one problem and the creation of another. The Manpower Policy meant the slow, methodical death of the concept of 'liberal arts' education.

"Manpower policy has definite implications for education policy. If a provincial objective is to enable people to be employable, then the first priority in education is to teach skills related to employability and the second priority is to give courses related to life enrichment." (Manpower Policy of the Province of Alberta, Objectives and Guidelines Nov. 1972. Peter Lougheed, address to Education Ministers Conference 1978, reiterating policy and its effect on post secondary education).

Since Alberta did not have the labour force necessary for the rapid shift in demand of labour, from agriculture to oil sands, a minor employment crisis was faced in 1971. Being somewhat farsighted, the Lougheed Team decided to take a two-pronged approach to implementing its Manpower Policy, and meeting the immediate needs for workers on the Syncrude site. The short term labour needs would be met by importing workers from outside the province and in some cases from outside the country. The long term labour needs of both the Syncrude project and several other possible tar-sands operations (eg. the upcoming Cold Lake project) was to be met by a major revamping of the province's apprenticeship program. These apprenticeship programs were loosely coordinated by the provincial government, employers and the vocational institutes; NAIT and SAIT, previous to the merger of Manpower and Advanced Education in 1974.

With the merger in 1974, came a revamping of the apprenticeship program, which included shortening of apprenticeship time in some areas, especially those related to heavy construction jobs that would be demanding workers for Syncrude in 1976. The apprenticeship board now moved into offices with the Department of Advanced Education, and that department became rapidly crowded out by civil servants and high level bureaucrats involved in developing a new expanded Manpower department. Not only were departmental resources, office space and personnel taken over by the Manpower components, but as well several programs and institutes under the direction of the Department of Advanced Education, now found themselves being directed by Assistant Deputy Ministers of Manpower. Suddenly there was boom in the creation of community colleges, and vocational schools were being upgraded. All for the purpose of giving 'Albertans employable skills and training' in order to meet the Tories commitment to provide skills labour for the Syncrude project.

"To ensure that people have the skills required to take advantage of available jobs, the Manpower Policy places great emphasis on preparing Albertans for employment. Appropriate education and training programs will continue to be available to all Albertans desiring them, and related career counselling services and



training allowances will be provided when and where required." (Earl Mansfield, Assistant Deputy Minister, Advanced Ed. & Manpower speech to Field Staff, Nov. 1978.)

The shift in emphasis from 'community' to 'vocational' in the colleges in Alberta was not apparent at first, nor was the renewed effort to develop a more flexible apprenticeship program tied into the post-secondary educational system, readily apparent between 1972 and 1974. But from 1974 till 1976 it became apparent that something had changed. Suddenly colleges providing vocational training were allowed their autonomy to meet the labour needs of their community. NAIT and SAIT were having increased enrollments and courses to aid apprenticeship students. Vocational schools which were on the verge of disappearing, had new life breathed into them as more training allowances and grants were available to apprentices and vocational programs geared to immediate job skills. It was boomtime in Alberta, there was money to be made, jobs to be had and education for all. But what kind of jobs and what kind of education?

In 1973 there were 9,068 apprentices registered in the province. After the implementation of the Manpower policy, and a heavy push for trades people 1975 saw 12,028 registered apprentices. 1976 this figure increased by another two thousand to 14,347. By 1977 there were 16,756 registered apprentices in the province. Of these 16,756 apprentices, 13,374 were attending college for formal training. In 1974 there were only 8,199 apprentices taking formal college courses in their trades. This was a 75% increase in apprentices in a four year span. By the end of 1977, the government would call this an 'all time high.' Obviously the Manpower Policy was working.

In 1970-1971, community colleges had an enrolment of 5,050 students, in seven colleges, attending full time. From 1971 til 1974 this full time enrolment increased by only 1,700 students. 1974 saw the granting of autonomy to several colleges, both regional and community, and an increased student enrolment to 7,447 full time. By 1975-1976, only six years later, student enrolment in colleges had doubled from 5000 students to 10,036. The colleges now have an enrolment that matches the enrolment at the University of Calgary.

Meanwhile NAIT and SAIT had a total combined full time enrolment of 8,900 students. Total enrolment, including part-time students and night classes, which is where the 13,000 apprentices take their training over the years, was 52,700 students for the two institutes. What was the purpose of this

boom, a total of 19,000 full time students going to colleges and two Technical institutes (the same size student population at the U of A for 1976)? To quote from a Department of Business Development and Tourism document; "These institutes prepare students for career oriented employment in industrial services and have a primary role in creating and maintaining an adequate supply of well trained manpower." (Industry and Resources, 78-79).

For the first time in Alberta's history post-secondary education no longer meant simply university education, nor even just degree granting institutions, it meant 'training for employable skills.' While the universities were fairly stable, and the Manpower Policy would not affect them so apparently at first, the planning and development of courses, directions, and implementation of a 'manpower training' program using post-secondary institutions; the colleges, training institutes and Vocational centres, meant that Manpower Policy and the ensuing rise of a Manpower bureaucracy would replace and reduce the effectiveness of the Department of Advanced Education. More than a Minister and a minor portfolio had been transferred, it became clear that Manpower was determining the future of Advanced Education in Alberta. For whose benefit?

Is Syncrude calling the shots?

"Education and training authorities receive valuable advice and assistance in both design and the development of numerous technological programmes through operational advisory committees comprised of members of the industrial community. This assistance indicates the concern of industrialists that relevant (sic) educational courses be offered, and educational administrators that skills and manpower development and requirements be co-ordinated." (Industry and Resources, 78-79, pg. 33.).

The three main growth areas in the Alberta economy in the past six years have been: manufacturing, construction and public and private administration. The amount of apprentices in the first two areas, indicate that Manpower policy was fulfilling its obligation of matching education and training to the needs of private business. In 1977 the most popular apprenticeships were carpenter, electrician, heavy duty mechanic, motor mechanic, plumbers

