

University critical servant of the community

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Chairman, S.C.M.

During Varsity Guest Weekend it is particularly relevant to raise the long controversial question "what position should the University as an institution occupy in relation to the broader community?" Dr. Ken Strand, the president of Simon Fraser University has taken what he calls a "classical liberal position" on this question. In a paper delivered to a group of Vancouver businessmen in October of this year, Strand stated his position as follows, "the University should remain neutral on social questions of our time."

There are two levels on which I disagree with Strand's view:

(1) In the first place, it is a mistake to assume that the university as it presently exists is neutral. An institution which operates apologetically on the underlying assumptions of our society, to the definite advantage of the relatively small, affluent, controlling groups, thus denying the real needs of the larger community, the university contributes to the development of the "social questions" to which Strand alludes.

Several qualities of the university contribute to the perpetuation of the economic and power disparities in our society. As the education system is presently constituted, children of upper middle class families have a much greater chance of obtaining a post-secondary education than do lower class children. A survey conducted by the C.U.S. in 1965 substantiates this point. An examination of the socio-

economic backgrounds of a randomly selected sample showed that 25% of the students tested came from families whose income was greater than \$10,000 per annum. Only 6.1% of Canadian income earners are in this category. On the other hand, 28% of the students tested were from families whose annual income was less than \$5,000—54.1% of Canadian wage earners fall into this income bracket. In other words, the children of upper income families have about eight times more likelihood of attending university than do the children of low income families. The situation is even more desperate for Native People.

Thus by training the children of the already affluent and powerful in our society, for future positions of responsibility, power and status, the university serves as an active agent in the preservation of the status quo.

Although the access to post-secondary education is not universal, and hence the benefits are not shared equally; through government subsidization, everyone is forced to share the expense. University financing is thus clearly an example of the subsidization of the rich by the poor.



University promotes status quo . . . ?

In our highly technological society, the university serves the specific interests of the power holding minority in several other ways:

- it provides a source of trained technicians to complement the productive process.
- the university acts as a socialization centre in which students, through their curricula, are inculcated with the predominant values of society. No attempt is made in an economic class, for example, to determine if capitalism is the most just economic system or if it is capable of making the most beneficial contribution to the community's welfare.
- social scientists conduct apologetic studies on social problems. They regard phenomena such as poverty, racism, inequality before the law, and pollution as independent problems to be solved by separate solutions

within the context of the existing social framework. By failing to recognize that these problems are not independent from existing social relationships, but are rather, interrelated, intrinsic functions of these relationships, social scientists mystify issues and ensure that these problems will not be attributed to their real causes. Problems such as those mentioned above will not be resolved until these social relationships, which are manifestations of the existing economic system, are fundamentally changed.

(2) I am in complete disagreement with the intent of Strand's statement, that members of the University community should remain neutral on social issues. If anything, it would seem that the members of the University, because they have obtained unique and special abilities, have a substantial obligation to mobilize their skills and the resources of the university for the benefit of the entire community.

This demand that the university community take stands on social issues need not, however, be based only on an assertion of its moral and ethical obligations to society. For, in this age of problems so complex and interrelated that they affect all of us (pollution, poverty, racism for example) it is a matter of self-interest, of self-preservation, that each person take an active stance in relation to "social questions of our time."



Students promote change?

The nature of the university's involvement in the affairs of the community must be revised. Rather than carrying out research for corporations and foundations, the university should undertake research relevant to the entire community—for farmers' organizations, tenants' associations and labour unions, for example. Rather than simply reflecting the predominant values of society, the university should be acting as a critical servant of the community, examining the validity of the assumptions upon which the social system is based.

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Amazingly enough, we present to you the 1970 issue of the Varsity Guest Weekend supplement on time. Certainly in the building stages, with many mistakes by your very inexperienced editors, missed copy deadlines, and financial panic, the final outcome was never guaranteed. But, with ample assistance from the Gateway staff, in particular, the tremendous effort of Jim Carter, Gateway's Forum Five editor, we pulled it off!

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