

Military research — is it hazardous to York's health?



By MARILYN SMITH

Military research is now the hot topic in senate debate. Sparked by an anti-foreign military support motion made by mathematics professor Lee Lorch, the issue has monopolized discussion at the last two senate meetings. And debate continues in the next senate meeting March 30.

The most recent motion awaiting discussion is "that the senate committee on research will report in detail on the facts and implications of present or future research funds received from any branch of a foreign government having jurisdiction over any part of that government's military forces or secret intelligence services and that senate endorse the acceptance of such funds."

This proposal made by Atkinson professor Howard Adelman, is a watered down version of Lorch's proposal. Senate soundly defeated the Lorch proposal on the grounds that it was an infringement on academic freedom. Lorch had requested senate to establish a general policy of refusing research funds from military or para-military sources of any foreign power.

In his arguments, Lorch cited the Mansfield Amendment in American law which states that no funds be appropriated by the department of defence for projects or studies which do not have a potential relation to a military function or operation.

He went on to say that Canadian research linked in this way to foreign powers obligates the country to that foreign power. Lorch made his proposal as an amendment to the senate research committee's report on the subject of research fund sources. The committee had rejected the notion of compiling a list of unacceptable fund sources.

A matter of conscience

"The acceptability of grants to individuals is normally a matter for the conscience of the individual researcher — there should be no blanket rejection of fund sources or project areas..." the report states.

Provisions for senate review and enquiry on the acceptability of certain grants are provided for "research grants which raise serious issues of policy."

Senate passed a motion last June forbidding any secret or classified research at York and the research committee felt this proviso adequately covered the questions of war research on campus. Because war research is classified research, a motion insisting research supporters publish results effectively drove war research off the York campus. Military research, that is research sponsored by military sources, remains. The individual researcher has the choice of publishing or not publishing research results but the funding source cannot stipulate that research results remain unpublished.

Once research results are published, research committee chairman Kurt Danzinger stated that anyone has access to the information.

But the whole question of military research at York cannot be approached on the simplistic grounds of "ban war research." The issue extends beyond this to more involved questions of amount and degree of York-wide responsibility and involvement in research projects carried out by individuals or groups of individuals.

For the area of military research, the argument remains fairly unclouded. Countering arguments of infringement on academic freedom of individual researchers, various faculty members stated their case for banning military research.

New amendment

Atkinson Natural Science chairman Luigi Bianchi supported Lorch's motion. And when that was defeated, he made one of his own "that no new applications or applications for increased levels of support for present research projects be forwarded to any branch of a foreign government having jurisdiction over any part of that government's military forces or secret intelligence services."

Bianchi presented evidence that belied the individual researcher's supposedly total control over his work. Reading

from a December 1971 science journal, Bianchi outlined how an experiment at Stanford university, a research application to military sources on emotional variables in crowds was reworded to "disruptive behaviour patterns, a study invaluable for military intelligence. Or another example where a laser beam research application for medical and communications benefits was reworded by the military source receiving the application so that the emphasis was put on weaponry and the destructive elements of such a study.

"These projects were directly funded by the military and justified by them in other terms that were never intended by the researcher. Thus the researcher could be held responsible to the public for purposes never intended."

Laird's specifications

Bianchi continued his case with a March, 1970 statement by U.S. defence secretary Melvin Laird asking that the military not make the universities certify project applications in specific defence terms. This demand he said, given the anti-war sentiment was causing the Department of Defense to lose top university researchers. Instead he advocated defence doctrination centres where applications for research funds could be translated into language more suitable for defence.

Lorch rose to defend Bianchi's case and gave examples from his own experiences in the U.S. as a mathematician. Lorch said he was offered a position in the University of Wisconsin working for the U.S. army as a mathematics researcher.

"They told me they didn't want me to do specific research, that I could do any research I wanted. The army doesn't want everyone working on research, only to have something set up so that should the situation arise, they are able to ask for help, although the researcher is under no obligation to help."

Conceivably the psychological pressure would be on the researcher to make some return for past support of his work. Lorch described one meeting between U.S. mathematicians and U.S. granting agencies which he personally attended. The military officials made it clear that military research was not what they necessarily wanted, but that applications phrased with a military slant would convince U.S. admirals and generals to give support to their research projects.

What's wrong, says Sokoloff

But the most damning evidence came from physics professor Jack Sokoloff when he stood to speak out against the motion.

"I don't understand what is wrong with a doctrination group classifying material for its own use," he began with reference to Bianchi's remarks.

"I have done both classified and unclassified research for the Department of Defence, I did my Phd at the Oregon National Laboratory and I sleep nights. I can't understand the fears, I'm as opposed to war as anyone yet fine research has been done and will continue to be done under the auspices of the Pentagon."

"I can't understand these 'insidious' motives that are attributed to the military. The basic research done is probably not of use to the military. But they're interested in establishing good relationships with scientists so that if they're ever in a jam, people ordinarily not interested in doing work will take the time to do it. I hate to think where we'd be today if it wasn't for the Manhattan project. These moves to abandon defence are well-intentioned, but naive."

(The Manhattan project was the atomic bomb experiment that set the prototype for the bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.)

Many faculty members remained unmoved by the arguments for banning foreign military research support. They could always counter with the point that although the research was funded by military sources, it still was pure science, fundamental research extending the barriers of knowledge. Application of such pure research could be negative or positive. The criteria of open published research would, these proponents argued, preserve the freedom of the academic while at the same time refusing to give the military the advantages of secrecy in research.

Faculty feared that once begun lists of unacceptable sources



A motion passed by senate in June 1971 forbids secret or classified research at York.

could curtail basic research, the pursuit of which is the lifeblood of development and advancement in any society.

U.S. military needs

Lorch summed up the essence of the argument on the other side favoring no foreign military grants.

"The purpose of U.S. military in funding research is not so much to obtain specific useful results, but to establish relations, so that when the time comes and the military needs the sources, they feel free to call because they have already conferred an obligation."

"Canada and York should not acquire this obligation. Canadian universities should be responsible only to Canada. We should not acquire ongoing obligations to any country."

"Students are trained at the Canadian taxpayers' expense from kindergarten on. When the U.S. is interested in expanding, the Canadian student becomes a stockpile. What we're asking for is an indigenous independent and intelligent policy for this country, not tactics for the policies and needs of another country."

In Canadian universities grants do not cover the total costs of any research project. The individual universities provide the faculty researcher's salary and the overhead costs. The university's involvement is therefore deep enough to warrant policy decisions affecting every researcher working within that particular university. York recently decided to publish quarterly a list of all research projects, sources, grants and names of researchers.

But if developments in senate are any indication, York feels an increasing onus to partake actively in ethical decisions regarding research. Tellingly the final vote on Bianchi's motion was 19

against and 17 for, with two abstentions. Adelman's motion is yet to be discussed, but senate has not referred the report on sources of research funds back to committee.

They have a difficult job to do for as committee chairman Danzinger commented, "the utilization of research for military purposes can't be stopped because once published, the research is available to anyone. The only way to prevent research being used for military purposes is to put a moratorium on research or change the society."

Discussion continues as senate tries to pick a path somewhere in between.

Next week: Part two, Research and the Canadian scene, a look at York research structures and the Canadian research sponsors.

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