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"Made in USA" research effect of education cutbacks

By PETER BIRT
National Affairs Reporter
Canadian University Press

Levels of funding for university research is not one of those topics of daily discussion, not something to put you 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 a year ago, the Royal Society of Canada warned Prime Minister Pierre 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 some people say is here already.

"An inflexible R&D (Research and Development) will cause us to become even 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 \$181 million to those institutions. On the surface this increase of \$20 million should 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 1976-77 level in the government estimates tabled for 1977-78. This \$56.7 million granted is up from \$50.8 million of 1976-77 and the \$47.4 million of 1975-76.

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 on February 9 between the com-

mittee's Senator Grosart and Dr. Malcolm Brown, the chairman of the Medical Research Council.

Senator Grosart: So that even if we took ten per cent over the period from 1972-73 onwards, you figure this year, instead of being \$50 million, should be \$66 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 GNP 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.

RIGHT TRACK

A former head of research and development for Fiberglass Canada with chemistry degrees from Queen's and Cambridge, Maine 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."

Maine 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 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."

SHOUT AND SCREAM

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 Teacher's (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 affect 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."

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.

BC students against fee hikes

VANCOUVER (CUP) — Nearly 1,000 students rallied in opposition to education cutbacks and tuition increases here on March 10 while others boycotted classes at most British Columbia post-secondary institutions.

Students from the Lower Mainland gathered in downtown Vancouver to listen to speeches by student leaders and members of the provincial opposition party concerned about the Social Credit government's education policies. The rally was organized by the BC Students' Federation (BCSF).

Class boycotts that accompanied the rally were "very successful," according to National Union of Students executive member Ross Powell. The provincial College Faculty Federation had given unanimous support to the student-sponsored tuition rally and directed its membership not to penalize students academically for boycotting classes.

At Simon Fraser University 75 per cent of the students boycotted their classes and most of the community colleges in the province were shut down. The University of British Columbia was the only campus not hit by the boycott. The student union there had avoided supporting actions and held their own rally and march earlier to coincide with a board of governors meeting.

At Capilano College most professors encouraged students to take part in the rally and to boycott classes but a few scheduled exams to keep students in school, ignoring the faculty federation's support of the actions.

High school students were granted leave by their schools and also joined the rally and class boycott.

At the rally, messages of support were read from the BC Federation of Labour and several other labor groups. At Simon Fraser, members of the trade unions stayed off the job to respect the half-day boycott of the university, losing a half-day's pay.

Students at the rally unanimously supported a motion condemning the government for making decisions that affect the lives of the people in the province without seeking their input.

Students also accepted an invitation from the provincial premier Bill Bennett to meet with him and discuss their concerns.

The students were protesting the provincial government's decisions to cutback on education spending. The University of British Columbia has already decided to increase tuition by 25 per cent for next September to make up for the revenue loss from the provincial government. Other universities will be similarly struck and community colleges will likely be hit with somewhat lower fee increases.