

Bovey on university restructuring

Excalibur's Graham Thompson interviewed Edmund Bovey, Chairman of the Commission on the Future Development of the Universities of Ontario, on July 27, 1984, at the Commission's headquarters on Bloor Street. Bovey's Commission has released a discussion paper entitled *Ontario Universities 1984: Issues and Alternatives*.

Q. *Bette Stephenson and yourself have both emphasized that the funds made "available to the new university structure will not differ substantially from that which would normally be allocated." You also have been precluded from considering the closure of any university. Yet you have asked the universities "which areas might be contracted or eliminated over the next decade?" Why?*

A. From an entirely different perspective than cost we're think more of a shift in emphasis towards retaining or maintaining excellence or quality. We're asking the universities to have a look at that and tell us if they see some faculties or departments that they think have become redundant or outdated rather than carrying on with the status quo. This is a good thing to do in business too. People who have departments in business tend to become entrenched, and the hardest thing for them to do is to say to themselves, 'Well, there's no demand for buggy whips anymore.' The guys that are in charge of a department are loathe to close it down and get on with something like high technology, or chips or something.

Q. *Your commission has stated that, "There is an imperative need for our universities to respond to the impact of a new economic order and its associated technological requirements." You also quoted Walter F. Light, Chairman of Northern Telecom, who stated that "unless our universities accept the challenge to create new generations of workers and managers who understand the use of the new technologies, our efforts to renew our economy will fail." You said you agreed with this statement in your July 18 address to the Third International Meeting of University Administrators. I take it this is one of the "areas of intellectual and social performance" you would like the universities to allocate more resources toward?*

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A. Yes, the terms of reference (of the commission) mention that too, but also, hopefully, that's a stimulative question. It may not be high technology in every instance. It may promote, for example, Lakehead University to come down with a very strong case for a department of forestry because they're right in the forest. The University of Sudbury, or Laurentian University rather, is already making a strong pitch for a school of mining. So high technology is very important, as Walter says, and we, and the Ministry say, but also I'd say it's a question directed at getting you and I to think a little bit more about alternatives.

Q. *You also spoke of a "need for much closer liaison between universities and the private sector so that improved support may come from industry in the long-range interest of all concerned." Might not the strings attached to private business funding reduce what autonomy the universities have left?*

A. No, I don't see why it should. You get good examples in the UK and in the United States of strong liaisons in certain colleges and schools without it affecting their autonomy. Now I know there is a view, and here's Eric Kierans warning about it. That is, the *Toronto Star* (July 21) says it is unlikely that Kierans will be able to reverse the trend. I just don't see that there's a problem there, because universities are strong—particularly Ontario universities. They are autonomous as you say. And industry is, or should be, and hopefully will, look even more towards the universities for their major research work, whether it's a contract or whether it's supporting a general, very high, very pure, research project.

Q. *Isn't there a danger of that happening here too?*

A. Well, I would think that if it is ever set up there would be some guidelines or some kind of restrictions on how it could be used.

Q. *Turning to funding. President H. Ian Macdonald of York University has said that because of the present funding formula "the more an institution has done to meet student demand for places, the less well it is funded. Thus . . . at a time of pronounced and dramatically increased demand for university places in this province, the institutions that have acted to meet the demand are being funded at a shamefully low fraction of the average per unit funding applicable in the system." Thus, York is receiving \$700 less funding per student than the provincial coverage. Is this inequity going to change?*

A. I can't say whether it's going to change or not. The whole matter of funding is one of the matters now under review and one of the items that we're asking for input for. We are developing some research in-house which hopefully will help us take a better look at this whole thing. Ian's comments—I've heard them before and I suppose in part because of the way the BIU (basic income unit) system works, at York you're bringing a lot of the lower BIU type of scholars, so that it averages it down as compared to some other university that is bringing in a lot of medical students, for example. The BIU for a medical scholar is \$7,000 and it's \$4,000 for lawyers or something. It just shows you how statistic can be used, in some ways, to not display the full situation.

Q. *In reference to liberal arts, would these "new areas" we talked about earlier also be in the liberal arts?*

A. Yes. I think generally we are agreed—and I think the hearings will support it—that there's great agreement across the system we must continue, at any of the universities, a strong liberal arts forum. And I think we agree with that.

Q. *Is there a danger that this sort of research will encourage activity in the university that's directed towards the business sector rather than the overall needs of society?*

A. I don't really believe so. You've got two components here of research funding. One is the federal funding—NSERC, SSMRC and NRC. And those grants are motivated by applications from the universities across Canada and by competition—by who can put up the best project. And those are highly oriented towards pure research, and they're going to continue—maybe even grow. I don't know what percentage industrial research grants make up of the total. I suspect it's relatively minor.

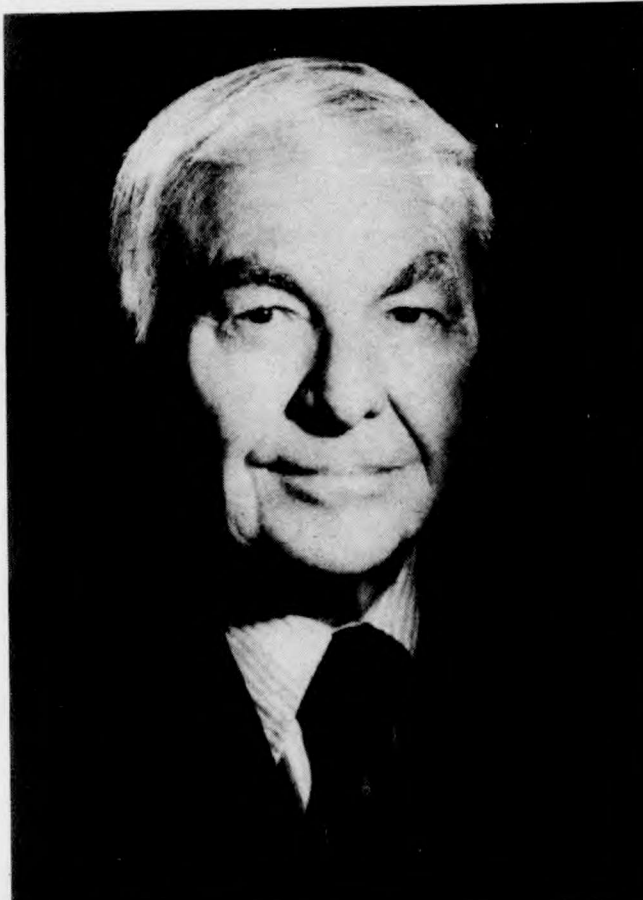
Q. *So you're trying to bring that up?*

A. Yes. Now, if that tends to run towards, as you say, the specific kind of research—say Inco wants some work done on nickel alloys, which is really for their benefit initially, it could be for a lot of people later. You're going to have an awful lot of that before it's going to in any way distort or bias the universities' attitudes towards pure research.

See, the federal authorities are granting around \$300 million a year (for research). Now that's only the direct cost; the indirect costs come from the university.

Q. *In your discussion paper you announced the possibility that there may be closures or major adjustments to the province's graduate programs and professional faculties such as Law, Engineering, Medicine and Dentistry. Are these projects prime areas you are seeking to contract or eliminate in order to free up resources for the new areas of academic priority?*

A. No, they're mentioned more as an example, and we're not specifically zeroing in on them. But, as an example, we do have six law schools in the province, and a number of dentistry schools, but again—and we hope the universities will give us their views on this—should there be more concentration of some of these faculties, and will that save any money, money which would be available for something else. Or would it create higher quality?



Edmund Bovey

Q. *When you say concentration do you mean, say, shifting Osgoode Law School to the U of T law school?*

A. That sort of thing. Now we don't have any fixed ideas on it, but we're hoping to get some input.

Q. *So then you have considered closing Osgoode Hall?*

A. No. No, we haven't at all.

Q. *Presently the University of Ottawa, Laurentian University and Glendon College all provide francophone studies. In your recent address you stated, "We have to look at whether policy should move towards the development of a full range of general and professional programs in French in one major institution rather than in a number of institutions." Might you consider closing Glendon College?*

A. Again, not necessarily. We're in favor of doing what seems to be the most effective thing from a quality point of view. It may frankly involve not closing any of them, but getting a better network between them or a more direct relationship. Early on we had Roger Gandon who was then Rector of the University of Ottawa. He was telling us the degree to which they've been cooperating and networking with Glendon, and with the University of Hurst. It's quite amazing what they're doing on their own initiative.

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Q. *In terms of faculty, you mentioned that you might be setting up an "adjustment fund" to ease out the older faculty who are not, perhaps, suited to these new areas that you're going into.*

A. Well, let's look at that one in the full context of a possible implementation of it. We don't know whether it will become in fact an adjustment fund. We're looking again for input from everybody.

But let's assume it is an adjustment fund. The university would decide, "We've got some very good people that are specialized in this area. We really think that we would like to close some down and replace them with another faculty, a different subject."

They would then be able to apply whoever who is administering the fund. They would make their own decision. They talk to their own faculty association, I presume, and they'd talk to their Deans and then said, "Okay, we're going to replace these two faculties with a school of Asian studies or something." So they would apply to whoever is administering the fund and say there are three or four faculty members who are prepared to retire and we need some funds to see that they retire with no penalty. And frankly there's just one or two that we just don't need. They've done a lot of service, but in fairness we need to give them two years salary or whatever.

The fund would be for that purpose, but the motivation is not going to come, in my view, from any overriding body. It's going to come from the grass roots. That is, the universities. Now some universities may say just, "Well, it's too difficult; we're going to stay the way we are," and they'll stay the way they are.

If some of the universities look at this pretty carefully and say, "Boy, this is an opportunity. We wouldn't have the funds otherwise. We know there's some people here that would like to take the opportunity to depart."

Q. *So would this be more like a voluntary retirement rather than a forced retirement?*

A. Yes. Voluntary at the university level. What would happen within the university is anybody's guess. It might not be voluntary to the individual in some instances, but in other cases it might be.

They did this in the United Kingdom, you know. I think they had a £2 million adjustment fund.

Q. *You commissioned some discussion papers to clarify some of the issues you are dealing with. One of these on university accessibility by David Stager of the U of T is, to say the least, provocative. For example, he states that, "There is no reason to expect that all groups in the population should be equally represented in the higher education system . . ." Where do you stand on this statement?*

A. I don't stand anywhere at the moment. It's a paper we've commissioned, but I actually haven't had a chance to read it completely. At this time we don't take a position on that, but we are concerned about the whole matter of accessibility, because we've been asked to be concerned about it.

Q. *Also, Stager wrote, "Financial factors have their influence mainly on the student who is at the margin of the group for university. If a student is not highly motivated and is unsettled about a post-secondary education program, the educational costs may be seen or used as a reason for not going." Then he quotes Selleck's report which says, "Increasing accessibility beyond this minimum probably involves increasing opportunities for prospective students who are ambivalent, poorly motivated, inadequately prepared, or misinformed about the value of post-secondary education." So he seems to be saying that people who are not going to university are not going through some fault of their own. Denying that there is any sort of impediment.*

A. Impediment to going, yes, I see what you mean. I've got to read it, like I say, so I'm not going to state my position. But, that does sound sort of conflicting.