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## OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN CANADA AND IN ENGLAND

PUT A CANADIAN and an English university teacher or administrator in the same room and the discussion will have reached fever-pitch before the kettle has had time to boil for coffee. Unfortunately, they will never reach agreement as to the "real" function of a university because they are arguing from different premises. The Canadian inclines to the view that he has as much right to a university education as to the other social amenities of his country. Because of Canada's ever-growing need of educated citizens to direct its vast program of construction and development, this claim happens to coincide with the national interest. It is in this sense that Canadian university education has been regarded as an instrument by which society can build its own future, and this implies a concern not just with one stratum of society, but with society as a whole. In England, on the other hand, as Mr. Bascom St. John recently pointed out, a university education has always been seen as something given only to a privileged *élite*, and this the Canadian must find very hard to understand. Sir Geoffrey Crowther, Chairman of the (British) Central Advisory Council for Education, has attempted to explain England's approach to education in historical terms. "We have never been", he says, "very conscious of the necessity to build a new society. At all relevant times, we have had a fully developed society already in being . . . . For most of the last 200 years, therefore, English education has been designed not so much for the construction as for the maintenance of society".

It will now be seen how radically opposed are the Canadian and English approaches to university education. The Canadians want as large a proportion of the population as possible to benefit from higher education, while the English see it only as the prerogative of an *élite* minority. A few figures will demonstrate this. A Dominion Bureau of Statistics Report indicates that in 1957-58 Canada had 86,000 full-time university students, as compared to England's 73,476 for the same year. This means that proportionately Canada had then, and still has, about four times as many full-time university students as England. Canada, furthermore, now has thirty-six

degree-granting institutions of higher learning, whereas England, with three times Canada's population, has only eighteen.

This is proof enough that in England a university education is still given only to a highly-selected minority; moreover, the proposed expansion programme will hardly be large enough to alter this traditional pattern. At present, English college students represent about 3% of each age group, and it is now proposed to raise this figure to 5% in order, mainly, to provide the country with an adequate supply of scientists and technologists. It is doubtful whether expansion (including the building of new universities) will go beyond this limit; indeed, anyone who suggested a further increase would meet with the strongest resistance. Even the expansion at present envisaged will not be countenanced if it leads to a lowering of academic standards. Many Canadians will doubtless be shocked at this limitation, imposed so arbitrarily, on English university enrolment.

How has it come about? Oxford and Cambridge were founded in the twelfth century to cater for the nation's need of leaders and, once this need was met, all other candidates, regardless of their ability, were denied admittance. Since the governing class did not materially alter in size for the next 700 years, it is hardly surprising that no new universities were built until the Industrial Revolution demanded more leaders, not so much in church and state as in industry.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fifteen new universities were founded in the new centres of industry and population. It is important to realize, however, that this expansion was not the fruit of democratic philanthropy, but was simply a reflection of the traditional need to provide an adequate supply of educated leaders. The Industrial Revolution did not change higher educational policy; it merely created a need for leaders in a new sphere, and the idea of an educational *élite* remained as strong as ever. Nor is this tradition weakened by plans for further university expansion to meet today's scientific challenge; it is merely that leaders are now needed in a fourth sphere. To church, state and industry is now added science. The mid-twentieth-century growth of English universities appears likely to prove exactly analogous to that occurring in the nineteenth and in the early part of this century; moreover, the arbitrary enrolment limit referred to above indicates that the idea of a privileged minority persists as strongly now as it did then.

Certainly the implementation of this idea has some advantages, of which perhaps the most important is the tutorial system of Oxford and Cambridge and the large measure of individual guidance in the "Redbrick" universities. The high proportion of staff to students (exactly double that of Canada) which facilitates such personal guidance is easier to achieve with a smaller body of students. A second

advantage of the arbitrary restriction on enrolment is the granting of financial aid to each undergraduate according to his need. In England, the state will pay tuition fees and living expenses not only during the session, but during the vacation as well, in order to give a student sufficient time and freedom from financial worry for personal reading and study, which is considered a vital part of his education.

Thus the Canadian view of the function of university education is radically different from the British, and historical factors largely account for this divergence. Before examining how far the British approach is justified, however, I wish to make it quite clear that I accept wholeheartedly the Canadian premise that all who can benefit from a university education should, ideally, do so, and that I think this is an ideal that we in England might take more to heart.

The ideal is a noble one, but I have serious misgivings as to how effectively it is being implemented in Canada today. I question whether the best way of achieving it is to open the universities to many who are manifestly incapable of benefiting from a university education in the highest sense, and I have serious doubts about a system that allows many gifted youngsters to remain outside the university purely for lack of financial aid. In England, on the other hand, it is the premise, not its application, that is wrong. To restrict a university education on principle to a small minority can also be very wasteful of talent. Is this the case in England? The apologist stoutly maintains that there is no talent wastage, because he feels that all rejected applicants are incapable, by definition, of benefiting from a university education. This view was recently voiced by an Englishman of great distinction who shall remain anonymous. "It is not", he says, "from lack of generosity or lack of means that we confine education after the middle teens to a (small) minority. It is because we sincerely believe that it is the right thing to do in the interests of the young people themselves". If the above statement were true, then the English policy of limiting university enrolment would be above reproach. Unfortunately, however, it is merely a poor rationalization of our traditional privileged *élite* policy. The statement is also equivocal. If English educators sincerely believe (as I fear they do) that their university system, even after completion of the scheduled expansion program, will cater for all available talent then they should know better.

It seems an extraordinary coincidence, for example, that in times of national need England has always managed, *without lowering academic standards*, to fill her new universities with talented youngsters who had previously been deemed unworthy of a university education. Did not her nineteenth-century need for an educated executive class in industry lead to the mushrooming of the "Redbrick" universities, and were these universities not filled with undergraduates who, but for the Indus-

trial Revolution, would not have "qualified" for a university education? And is not the same thing happening today? The mere fact that to meet the need for leaders in technology and science we can consider raising our undergraduate population from 100,000 to 170,000 by 1970 without lowering standards surely indicates a wealth of hitherto untapped talent. To believe that such talent happens to be on our doorstep just when we need it most and that, by necessary implication, it is not there when we don't need it, is to strain credulity too far. The only valid conclusion is that although England has the talent, much of it remains untapped except in times of need. From here it is but a short step to doubting whether the English university system, even in its expanded form, will cater for all available talent. The knowledge, moreover, that this expansion programme is centred round the national rather than the individual need merely serves to strengthen these suspicions.

They are further strengthened by the startling findings of the recently published Crowther Report. It was found that 42% of our National Servicemen in the top 10% of ability did not even enter the last grade of high school, and that half of those in the top 20% of ability grouping left school at fifteen. So far we have been discussing the rejection of *qualified* university applicants; yet here Crowther has discovered a large number of *unqualified*, though gifted, youngsters who have not sought admittance to a university not through lack of ability, but simply because they left school early.

Many Canadians will be shocked to learn that in England the legal school-leaving age of fifteen is also for most pupils the effective one. More than four children out of five leave school before they are sixteen. Moreover, of the sixteen-year-old age group, only 22% are at present in full-time education, and of the seventeen-year-old group the figure falls to 13% of the boys and 11% of the girls. Finally, of the eighteen-year-old age group, only 8% of the boys and 5.5% of the girls are still in full-time education. In short, those who stay on in school after the age of fifteen are in a small minority. What of the other 80% who leave at the age of fifteen?

Many of them, of course, would not benefit from staying on in school and it is right that they should leave early. But the Crowther survey shows this group to include half of those in the top 20% ability grouping. Had they been encouraged to remain on in school would they not have developed their potential far more, and would not at least some of them have become duly qualified applicants for a university place? It is thus hypocritical to turn the blind eye and say that we confine education after the middle teens to a small minority "because we sincerely believe that it is the right thing to do in the interests of the young people themselves".

To advocate that England should put the welfare of the individual first and be

prepared to grant higher education to *all those* who would genuinely benefit from the privilege of three or four years at a university is not to suggest the indiscriminate acceptance of all applicants with a high-school leaving certificate. There is ample scope in England for increasing the number of university students beyond the present expansion target without lowering standards. It might involve the doubling of our university population over the next decade. This done, we would still have only half as many undergraduates, in proportion, as Canada has at the moment. This, I think, would be the optimum number, since to open our university gates as wide as Canada proposes to open hers would lead in England to a sharp lowering of standards.

In a praiseworthy attempt to develop more than her available talent, Canada appears to be in danger of sliding towards the American extreme of universal higher education; and this is to be deplored even more than the British restriction of university education to a select few. When quality is sacrificed to quantity, the B.A. becomes little more than an inflationary cipher, the hard core of disciplined scholarship is gradually eaten away, and the product is a graduated dunce.

Certainly there is no fear of this happening in England. Perhaps, as I have attempted to show, we maintain academic standards too rigidly, but at least the English B.A. still means something. It means something because those who confer it intend that a candidate should read around in his subject during the vacation as well as during the session; that he should think and write critically about it, using his lecture notes merely as a *point de départ*; that, in a subject such as literature, he should read in detail not only various critical works but also the prescribed authors themselves; finally, that he should present in the examination his own, preferably original, opinions in an articulate and cogent manner.

Why do we demand all this from our undergraduates? Because we feel that to demand less would not be to educate them; merely to cram courses and assimilate synthesized lecture packages on a variety of unrelated subjects is to make a mockery of education, as the Americans are now painfully discovering. To us, education involves a slow development of the critical as opposed to the assimilative faculties, and this demands much time for individual thought and study. In order, therefore, to buy him the necessary leisure and freedom from financial worry, we deliberately give the needy undergraduate generous financial assistance.

Since the last war, financial assistance to university students has been greatly increased. In 1957-58, just over three-quarters of English undergraduates were assisted by scholarships or other awards from public or private funds, as compared with 40% in 1938-39. We are proud of the fact that today no able candidate in England is debarred from a university education for lack of means. In practice, this means

that any difference existing between his family's income and the cost of university tuition and living expenses is made up to him by some form of scholarship.

Thus, each year, the Ministry of Education in London offers over 2,000 scholarships tenable for university honour degree courses. These awards are based on the results of examinations held at the advanced level of the General Certificate of Education, usually taken at the age of eighteen. The Ministry also grants more than 1,000 new supplements annually to winners of special open scholarships awarded by the universities from their own funds. The local education authorities make a further 12,000 annual awards with maintenance grants on the basis of the same examinations. It is amazing that in Canada the local school boards and municipalities give little or no such aid to their local university entrants.

Perhaps this is because Canada is to all appearances opposed to the idea of giving financial assistance to students on any large scale. An exhaustive survey, conducted by the Industrial Foundation on Education, reveals, for instance, that in 1958 only 18% of all Canadian undergraduates received financial assistance, as compared to the English figure of 74% for the same year. It is of course true that student aid in Canada has been increased since 1958. Last year, for instance, Manitoba and Quebec each established a scholarship and bursary fund to help deserving undergraduates; other provinces, such as Alberta and British Columbia, have recently made substantial increases in their scholarship and student loan funds, but the newspapers have tended to exaggerate the effective value to students of such increases.

In 1959, the provincial government gave to the University of British Columbia a scholarship fund of \$300,000; it was decided to use this fund to pay half the tuition fees of first-class Arts students and one third of the fees of 2,000 second-class students. On the face of it, this sounds reasonably generous; since, however, the University increased its tuition fees in that year by \$100, the net value of the scholarships was only \$73 to the first-class and \$15 to the second-class students. The Industrial Foundation on Education has also calculated that in 1958-59 scholarships and loans formed a total of only 7.5% of the average student's income. Taking into account the increased cost of living, it is not likely that this figure will have materially altered since 1958, despite the various paper increases in financial assistance to students. Nor does there seem to be much prospect of any radical improvement at the federal level, since the Massey Commission recommendation for the financing by the Federal Government of a nation-wide program of scholarships and bursaries has not been implemented.

This reluctance to give large-scale financial support to needy students has been defended on two grounds. The first is that "it does a guy good to work his way

through college". I cannot share this point of view; after all, most young men get all the "field" experience they require under their future firm's traineeship program. My main criticism, however, is that the poor student misses the best of both worlds. He cannot get the full benefit from his university education; nor does he fully succeed in working his way through college, since summer savings average only about \$600, and a year at a university costs him an average of \$1350. Where does the other \$750 come from? Apart from the nominal help of scholarships, parental gifts and loans make up this difference. Loans seem to me a most unsatisfactory answer, since the student is then saddled with a debt at the outset of his professional (and probably marital) career.

To avoid being a burden to his parents, and at the same time to avoid getting into debt, the responsible student has no alternative but to take a part-time job during the session, thus effectively cutting out any prospect of participation in many of the university's extra-curricular activities. Sometimes he cannot even take part in the curricular activities, as I discovered to my horror when one of my students missed an important term test through having to take a part-time job off campus. Under such circumstances, there seems to be little virtue in "working one's way through college".

This leads to the second and equally dubious justification for withholding large-scale aid to students: "There is no reason why poverty as such need prevent anyone in Canada with moderate ability and a capacity for hard work from going to university". Technically, of course, this is quite true; but it is not true in practice, because it is known that many bright high-school graduates who would benefit from higher education do not, in fact, go on to college. Why is this? As a report by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics has indicated, it is due in many cases solely to financial hardship and to a not unnatural reluctance to rely on the generosity of parents and relatives, who themselves often find it hard to make ends meet.

Many students, of course, go on to college despite such qualms. Yet, in 1956-57, 15% delayed entrance for strictly financial reasons; 6% were obliged to withdraw from their courses; and a further 3% were obliged to attend only half-time. Thus, if by "working your way through college" is meant missing the best of both worlds, the less wealthy Canadian student certainly manages to do it. Much has happened, of course, since 1957 (the year to which the above figures refer) but, as has been pointed out, students are financially in much the same position today as they were then, despite the increases in aid.

It is a delightful paradox that Canada, which prides itself on being a democratic classless society, should give a university education in the fullest sense only to the very able (in Ontario, those with over 80% in the last grade of high school) and the better off; while England, traditionally a country with strong social barriers, now gives such an education to any successful university entrant, irrespective of his income.