

John F. Graham

University Funding and Academic Freedom

That university funding can have a great bearing on academic freedom is most easily seen when we take extreme cases.* In a totalitarian state, fascist or communist, or in a frantic period such as that of McCarthyism in the United States, university teachers are prohibited from speaking freely. The link between funding and academic freedom is direct and obvious. Funding is not forthcoming for those who do not acquiesce. There are, of course, other, more severe, sanctions in these instances besides withholding of funds, but it is the relation between funding and academic freedom that concerns us here.

Although Canadian universities have not been faced with such extreme situations, their own responses to funding arrangements in the last twenty years give cause for serious concern that academic freedom is in jeopardy. Recently, there have been direct threats to academic freedom from actual and proposed governmental funding measures.

I shall develop and illustrate these contentions by looking briefly at the history of Canadian universities since the end of the Second World War. In particular, I shall (1) consider the period of rapid expansion of the 1960s and early 1970s and the effect of this expansion, which was facilitated by generous public funding, on the character of the universities; (2) consider one of the effects of subsequent restrictions of funding; and (3) consider the likely effects of a system of funding directed at particular vocational programmes.

Academic freedom is generally conceived to include the freedom of professors and students to say and publish what they believe without fear of retaliation in such forms as lost opportunities for promotion, discharge from the university, or withdrawal of public or private support. Such freedom is essential for the free play of thought and inquiry that is a central feature of the higher intellectual study that is the main characteristic of a true university. Put in another way, academic freedom is the freedom to be an academic—to be one who

may with impunity question basic assumptions. Often the stress is put on "freedom" rather than "academic". The latter is the essence of the phrase. Having a muzzled faculty and student body would negate one of the university's major contributions to society, namely its responsibility to be a source of considered social and scientific criticism.¹ These elements of academic freedom would be empty if they were not accompanied by freedom to dissent from views believed to be wrong, by freedom from compulsory support of organizations or causes, and freedom of association and dissociation.

Seen in this way, academic freedom is an extension of individual freedom that should belong to *anyone* in a free democratic society. Universities have no monopoly rights to such freedom. The particular significance to *academic* freedom is its association with the ideal of the university as an institution whose members are dedicated to the uncompromising search for understanding, knowledge and truth—where majority rule and head counting should have no place in determining what is right and good, where it is recognized that the majority may well be wrong, where it is the weight of argument that matters. Political decisions as to the organization and programmes of a university may, of necessity, in many cases, have to be determined by majority votes, but where there is failure to recognize the place of minorities, including minorities of one, in matters of thought and conscience, the essence of academic freedom, indeed the essence of the university, is lost.

The substance of academic freedom is to be found in the often difficult theoretical and speculative investigation and thought in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The exercise of academic freedom therefore depends upon the extent and quality and depth of contemplative activity in these fundamental disciplines that are the heart of the university.

Since funding provisions may limit university autonomy, may they thereby affect academic freedom? University autonomy and academic freedom are not synonymous. A university must have a certain degree of autonomy in appointing faculty, in selecting students, and in determining the curriculum, academic standards, subjects of research and the balance between teaching and research, if academic freedom is to be maintained. But it does not necessarily follow that a university will use its autonomy to uphold academic freedom as defined in the previous section. A university could use its autonomy to suppress academic freedom. At the same time, certain restrictions that might be imposed on university autonomy, such as measures by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission to limit duplication of programmes in the interest of economy in the use of financial resources,

need not impair academic freedom. Nor does the requirement that universities be accountable for the use of public funds itself diminish academic freedom if accountability means that the universities are required to justify existing and projected programmes by explaining the contribution of these programmes to the achievement of the purposes of the universities as institutions of higher learning. Indeed, such accountability could even help to make academic freedom more secure by leading to a public awareness of what goes on within universities, provided that universities can stand such scrutiny.

In the end, the greatest safeguards of academic freedom come from the nurturing of it by faculty members' honouring it in their own actions towards one another and towards their fellow citizens outside the universities, by the vigilance of faculty, students, and academic administrators, and by a concern of the public for the maintenance of independent thought. It is not therefore simply a matter of whether the means of funding universities affect university autonomy, but whether they affect it in such a way as to impair academic freedom, that is pertinent to the subject of this paper. This issue needed some clarification because it has a bearing on the post-war experience to which I now turn.

Prior to the 1960s, our universities were seen as places for the education of a small and presumably select part of the youth in the liberal arts, social sciences and natural sciences, mainly at the undergraduate level, and for preparation in certain limited professions requiring rigorous study, particularly law, medicine and engineering.² They were also seen as places for study, reflection and research for the small number of scholars who made up the academic faculties. In short, they were places for higher intellectual studies for the relatively small numbers of students and scholars with the ability and interest to engage in such studies and the willingness to subject themselves to at least the minimum amount of discipline required. By and large, our universities were quite cohesive academic communities. While there was specialization of academic disciplines, there was at the same time some sense of unity of knowledge and of a common intellectual endeavour. The universities were starved for funds, but there was a common commitment to theoretical and contemplative study that gave significance to academic freedom and provided the milieu for it, in the way outlined at the beginning of this paper. Infringements, or attempted infringements, of academic freedom occurred, but these were not, in the main, related to funding.

In the 1960s, higher education came to be perceived by many in government, among the public, and within the universities themselves, as an investment that would pay high economic returns in contributing

to an ever-expanding gross national product that would in turn more fully permit the meeting of economic and social goals. University education was more accessible than before and was seen as a way of achieving equality of economic opportunity and thence to achieving greater economic equality itself. These perceptions were not altogether new, but they had not, hitherto, been so pervasive. Students were encouraged by universities, and by employers who accepted degrees as credentials for employment, to see universities principally as means to economic advancement. The universities, in turn, eagerly seized upon the opportunities afforded by generous public funding both to expand the traditional academic disciplines, with the increased specialization this expansion permitted, and to develop extensive graduate programmes aimed at providing more scope for research and, particularly, at providing the faculty required by the ever-increasing numbers of students. More than that, the universities added an array of vocationally oriented faculties, schools and programmes, all making equal claims to scholarship in the search for academic respectability.

A consequence of these developments was the fragmentation of universities into departmental empires and the weakening of a holistic view of the university as a community. A further consequence was the enhancement of professional attachments within disciplines, nationally and internationally, at the expense of institutional loyalty to one's university or to the university as an institution in general. Academic advancement came to be dependent upon research, and so research, often of an inconsequential nature, tended to be ground out as a technocratic, sometimes mindless, exercise, in large part to meet this requirement, rather than being a genuine outcome of unhurried scholarly reflection.

Underlying and facilitating the view of the university described above was the historical development of philosophy that led to a materialistic view of man and an empirical view of science. The very content of the curriculum—and it is the curriculum that defines a university—had undergone a fundamental change that sapped the university's moral force.

Our universities became institutions that tried to be virtually all things to all men. They in effect became a service industry, prepared to expand wherever there was believed to be a demand for a new product, often without questioning whether producing such products was a proper function of an institution of higher learning. A growth industry seemed the thing to be in our society and a system of funding based upon enrolment encouraged our universities to become one.

Now that growth has subsided through waning enrolment, disenchantment with the job-producing value of degrees, and hesitant public

support stemming from a questioning as to whether the vast resources required by our universities are well used, the error and consequences of the service industry attitude are becoming apparent. To the extent that universities are still believed to be of value to the public, their value appears to lie principally in meeting the demands of government and business for specific vocational training and specific research needs.

In embracing the "service industry" view of themselves, the universities have encouraged the public to see the universities as producing marketable products and to see them as places where anyone can come to get what he or she wants. As a consequence, the universities have ceased to stand for something special in the public's mind, or even in their own mind, that should be supported in its own right.

If this is the picture of themselves the universities want governments and the public to have, if this is the basis on which universities seek support, they can hardly complain if governments, the public, and students see them principally in that light. The universities can hardly complain either if governments and the public fail to understand their primary importance as places for higher intellectual study—for thought and reflection, for acquiring and extending an understanding of the world and of man within it—not for immediate practical ends, but for the enhancement of the intellectual life of the country and the pursuit of wisdom.

Having got themselves into this situation of producing products for the government and for the marketplace, the universities are in real danger of losing control of what they do and of simply responding to whatever they think governments want them to do and are prepared to give money for. This is not to say that scholars and students should not be concerned about the real world. That is exactly what they should be concerned about. Theory is of value if it is concerned with understanding the world. But the unique contribution of the universities lies in their careful examination of science and society and humanity from carefully considered principles, through continuous disciplined study. Only if the universities have the support they need for serious academic instruction, and for fundamental research and study, can they perform their essential academic functions. One then can they also make—but indirectly—their most effective contributions to public issues and to economic and social development. And, to come to the point, only then does academic freedom have significance and substance.

I am not arguing for the pre-1960s *status quo*, that is, against growth in universities. Certainly the exclusion of able people who cannot afford to go to universities is a matter of concern. Rather, I am questioning the form growth has taken in response to the increased

public funding, particularly in relation to the university ideal as reflected in the idea of academic freedom.

This is not to say that there is no truly contemplative work going on in our universities. Of course there is, and as long as this is so one can continue to be hopeful. But, more and more, such work tends to be carried on by rather isolated individuals in a predominantly technocratic and vocationally oriented milieu. Funding arrangements and attitudes engendered by them are at least partly responsible for the decline in the relative importance of the fundamental academic disciplines and in the kind of work in them that gives substance to academic freedom.

The previous section of this paper was concerned with the way in which the character of the universities has been affected by the expansive funding arrangements of the 1960s and early 1970s in a way that has weakened the basis of academic freedom. I now wish to consider a rather different development that I believe has also had serious consequences for academic freedom. This development, as opposed to the ones just described, was in response to the subsequent financial constraint, although some of the seeds for it were planted in the period of expansion.

In about the mid-1970's, the economic arguments in favour of higher education, so prevalent in the 1960's, and on which expanded funding was based, came into serious question. The large increases in education spending were not producing the expected economic returns to society—or to the recipients of degrees. Governments accordingly altered their spending priorities and universities began to experience financial constraint, or at least a slowing down in the rate of growth of public funding.

One of the responses to this financial constraint was a development that has dealt a grave blow to academic freedom. I refer to the unionization of many university faculties. There are other reasons that led to faculty unionization besides financial constraint, particularly the paternalistic and insensitive attitudes and practices of some university administrations; but there is little doubt that concern about financial status and job security engendered by actual or impending financial constraint was a principal cause. There are several ways in which faculty unionization impairs academic freedom. Fundamentally, certification as a trade union means surrender of the ideal of the university as a self-governing community of scholars by adopting a contractual employer-employee, "us-them" relationship under an external trade union act, designed for an industrial setting, and overruling the act under which the university was incorporated, an act that in most instances was designed to recognize the special character of universi-

ties. Moreover, taking this step of certification as a trade union means acceptance by faculty of the possibility of strikes. This element is completely inimical to the academic commitment and responsibility to engage unstintingly in teaching and research in the service of students and of our society. It is therefore a perversion—indeed a betrayal—of the ideal upon which the tradition of academic freedom rests, notwithstanding any words in the union contract that purport to provide for the maintenance of academic freedom. Furthermore, tenure, which was instituted and established only by fighting for it for centuries, first in Europe, then in Canada, in order to make academic freedom secure, no longer rests upon its being an established tradition and condition in the university community, but becomes a contractual condition that can only be secured for the duration of a particular contract. The crowning irony is that such contracts typically spell out conditions under which tenure can be abrogated.

Perhaps most destructive of all is the usual kind of clause that compels all members of the faculty bargaining unit, whether they favour the union or not, to pay dues to the union, that is, to support an organization even if they believe it to be inimical to the interests of the university and to their academic responsibility. In my own university, there is a clause that seems to permit members of the bargaining unit, by declaring a conscientious objection to paying dues to unions, thereby to pay the equivalent of dues to the University's scholarship fund instead of the union. But this is so only *provided* the objection is deemed by the Committee to Administer the Collective Agreement to be justified. A conscientious objection, that is, a matter of internal conviction, has to be considered justified by a committee—in a university! And some objections have been denied even when accompanied by affidavits sworn under oath. How much closer to having thought police is to possible to get? How much farther from the ideal of academic freedom? Faculty members are forced by their economic circumstances, or because they do not want to separate themselves from their university, to submit to this treatment, or to go through the hassle and expense of time and money to fight it, with no assurance of success.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is, quite rightly, assiduous in investigating alleged violations of academic freedom by university administrations, and in defending faculty members when it believes there has been a violation. Such activity is necessary if academic freedom is to be maintained. But the CAUT seems to have no concern about the interests of faculty members who are opposed to unionization or whose rights are infringed by faculty unions. It is time that the CAUT put its own house in order and gave similar protection

could well mean directing funds into programmes to train people with technical skills in areas in which technical manpower shortages are predicted otherwise to occur.

For example, the often cited report of the Labour Market Development Task Force states:

Grants could be designed to cover a greater fraction of fees in those disciplines in high market demand or in which there is a compelling national interest. (p. 158)

The Task Force also proposed:

A base capacity should be maintained in all disciplines so that enrollments can be expanded rapidly to meet changing labour market conditions. (p. 158)

In both instances, the emphasis is on the use of universities as vocational training institutions. In fairness, one should note that the Task Force does note:

In this section we talk of training and not education. This is intentional. Education is carried out for a variety of purposes which go well beyond the production of skills for the labour market. Our analysis applied to only one component of post-secondary education—that which is directed at producing skills for the labour market. The achievement of other special goals may well warrant a different allocation of resources to that post-secondary system than that required for training purposes, and our discussion must be read with this caveat in mind. (p. 153)

This caveat notwithstanding, the main thrust of the report is that expressed in the first two quotations; it is one that seems to have some support in the federal government, and in some of the provinces as well. Sadly, some universities themselves seem to be consenting to, or at least acquiescing in, this view.

Further evidence of this view is contained in the paper, "Economic Development for Canada in the 1980's," which accompanied the federal budget of November 1981. The following two quotations are particularly indicative:

Canada's economic development prospects in the 1980s, and more broadly our evolution as a society, will depend crucially on the educational, training and employment opportunities open to individual Canadians. In particular it requires the matching of their skills and capacities to the evolving requirements of the national economy.... employment opportunities will require higher levels of education and skills. (p. 21)

The Minister of Employment and Immigration is actively engaged in consultations with the private sector and the provinces concerning the

initiatives which must be undertaken in order to develop an integrated approach to education and training which will meet the needs of the 1980s. (p. 22)

At present, the funding of post-secondary education comes under the federal government's social affairs budgetary envelope, where the broader academic interests of the universities have at least some chance of being understood and considered. It appears that some serious thought is being given to transferring it into the economic affairs envelope where it can be integrated with considerations of manpower training, "human resource" considerations and general economic development policy.⁴ It is difficult to see how the universities could benefit from such a move with respect to maintaining their academic integrity.

Even from the usually enlightened Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission,⁵ we find these statements in its *Financial Plan, 1981-82*:

The Commission continues to urge the Maritime Provinces to develop research policies and programmes not only because of the apparent direct relationship to research funding levels but also in order to capitalize on the research and development resources at Maritime universities and to ensure a provincial influence on research directions priorities. (p.4, emphasis added)

and

The post-secondary education system should be expected to respond to relevant issues; however, the means and the effectiveness of the response will be strongly influenced by the priority assigned to post-secondary education by the region's governments. (p. 6)

This kind of thinking about university funding, if put into practice, would have serious consequences for academic freedom; for it would tend to turn members of university faculties into technocrats, even more than they already are. It would thereby weaken their performance of their essential university functions as scholars and researchers engaged in fundamental theoretical studies. These effects would be felt in the natural sciences and social sciences but would be particularly severe in the humanities. The kind of contemplative, independent, scholarship that gives substance to academic freedom could be seriously impaired.

Even narrowly technical considerations indicate that the adoption of a vocationally oriented view of the use of universities and the direction of students into particular programmes by financial incentives would be unwise. It is questionable that the predictability of

manpower requirements is a sufficiently accurate basis for such a policy. The irony of the situation is that, if the inaccuracy of past manpower predictions is any indication, there would likely be a host of disappointed students howling angrily at the federal government when the predicted jobs did not materialize when they graduated. It would be far better to provide students with the best information possible and leave them free to make their own choices.

There is some opposition in government and in universities and their associated agencies to this directive approach; but the universities have already gone so far along the service industry road since the 1960s, that the result might not be all that different without governmental direction. The point is that it would be harmful to the universities and the country to be forced even further in that direction. The fundamental questions about technology and progress could not then be asked. Academic freedom might remain in form but would be drained of substance.

This paper contends that funding arrangements for Canadian universities have had serious harmful consequences for academic freedom, mainly through their effect on the character of the universities. In particular, it contends that those functions of the universities that give substance to academic freedom have deteriorated as a result. The universities themselves must bear most of the responsibility for this deterioration; but, more and more, government itself seems to be posing a direct threat as well. If the universities do not wake up and rise to their responsibility to defend the academic interest, including meaningful academic freedom, no one else will.

NOTES

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the Conference on Academic Freedom, at Memorial University, 20 February 1982.

1. At the same time, there are difficulties with this position that are not easily resolved. Does academic freedom mean unbridled licence such as to use the classroom to propogate an ideology, to disrupt the teaching of colleagues? Is it acceptable for a university teacher to accept a salary from a university he or she is working to overthrow or undermine? Where should the line be drawn as to what is acceptable? Should it be drawn at all? These questions are raised, not to attempt to resolve them, but to underline that the interpretation of academic freedom is by no means cut and dried.
2. Some of the material in this section is from John F. Graham, "Perceptions of Canadian Universities in Relation to Funding: A Maritime Perspective," in *Financing Canadian Universities: For Whom and By Whom*, edited by David M. Nowland and Richard Ballaire (Toronto: OISE Press, 1981). This article is also published in *Policy Options*, September/October 1981, with the title, "Scholars in the Real World."
3. These revenue guarantees had given the provinces compensation for reductions in their revenues stemming from federal tax reforms in 1972 that had altered the base of the income

tax. Transfers under these guarantees would have totalled about \$915 million for all provinces and territories (about \$66 million for the Atlantic Provinces) in fiscal year 1982-83. Department of Finance, Canada, "Fiscal Arrangements in the Eighties—Proposals of the Government of Canada," November 1981, Table A-2, p. 55.

4. This information comes from informed sources which cannot be cited here.
5. The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission is responsible to the three governments of the Maritime Provinces through the Council of Maritime Premiers. The Commission is charged with recommending policies and levels of funding for institutions of higher education in the Maritime Provinces. All new programmes in these institutions must be approved by the Commission for them to be eligible for provincial funding. The Commission is also active in exploring possibilities for reducing unnecessary duplication of programmes. The members of the Commission are appointed by the Maritime Council of Premiers after nomination by the institutions of higher education.