

# The Unrealized Potential of Canada's Universities

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## The Unrealized Potential of Canada's Universities

THE MODERN CANADIAN UNIVERSITY underwent a significant transition during the fifteen years between 1960 and 1975. For the first time, Canada's universities were richly funded by federal and provincial governments and, as a result, were able to grow and develop to incorporate the demand of vast numbers of students who could now afford a university education. University expansion increased the need for freshly minted Ph.D.s and the demand for new faculty soon exceeded the supply in Canada. At the same time, faculty members were developing a new awareness of the professional importance of defining and defending academic freedom and tenure. Changes in university governance gave a much greater role to faculty and to students in formulating university policies and appeared to make self-governing collegiality possible as the goal of the academy. Within Canada, it was a time for the realignment of Canada's universities, when provincial universities, such as the University of New Brunswick under President Colin Mackay, redefined themselves as institutions with national and international teaching and research agendas. Serious research was no longer the prerogative and the preserve of Toronto, Queen's and McGill when universities across Canada, including many provincial universities, claimed new status as comprehensive teaching and research institutions. The future looked incredibly bright, with an exciting potential for Canada's universities.

Yet, by the first years of the 21st century, some of this potential has been achieved, while some has not, and, in many cases, parts of the achievement are under threat. Federal and provincial government funding for universities has been severely curtailed in recent years and universities have been forced to balance their budgets by cutting costs and programmes and by seeking other sources of funding. The federal government has sought to link university and corporate research and universities have been encouraged to enter partnerships with the private sector to capitalize on their knowledge-creation capability. Sustainability, more than expansion and innovation, has become the goal of the contemporary university. Federal funding of research and the encouragement of partnerships with multinational corporations have favoured economies of scale. As a result, efficient government funding of research tends to favour large research-intensive Canadian universities, many of them in Central Canada, while smaller comprehensive universities are now under threat of being reduced once again to provincial teaching institutions. With universities under pressure to cut their costs in the late 1970s and 1980s, faculty associations became trade unions, replacing the collegial discussion of the community of scholars with the labour-management model of the modern corporation. With the pressure of the corporate agenda inside the university, academic freedom itself has come under threat. No longer does the Canadian university appear to be free to serve as the disinterested observer and critic of society.

Three new books address these developments in the history of the Canadian university. In *Academic Freedom in Canada: A History* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999), Michiel Horn considers the issue of academic freedom from the 19th century until the mid 1960s, by which time the issue had taken on new urgency as a result of the 1958 Harry Crowe Affair at United College, Winnipeg. Historian

Kenneth McNaught was a participant in the Crowe Affair and, in his autobiography, *Conscience and History: A Memoir* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999), tells its story, setting it in the context of the life of one Canadian academic at mid-century. Neil Tudiver addresses developments in the latter part of the century in *Universities for Sale: Resisting Corporate Control over Canadian Higher Education* (Toronto, James Lorimer, Ltd., 1999) and seeks to explain the factors that brought Canada's universities under the thumb of the corporate sector by the end of the 20th century.

*Academic Freedom in Canada: A History*, by Horn, is designed as the first part of a two-volume study of the subject. It examines the period prior to 1965 and leaves a detailed study of the period after that date to a subsequent volume and another historian. Through examining the ideal of academic freedom in the university, Horn reviews the history of the Canadian university in the early 20th century. He defines academic freedom as "the freedom of professors to teach their subjects, carry out research, and publish its results, subject to professionally sanctioned limits", as well as "the freedom to participate in public life" and the freedom "to criticize the institutions in which professors work" (p. x).

The right of academics to teach and publish as they please has been well respected in Canada, he asserts, since it represents a principle previously established in the teaching of British universities and the research scholarship of German and American schools, all of which have had a direct influence on Canadian university practice. The more contentious issue in Canada has been the ability of professors to criticize their employing universities. Unlike European universities which are under academic control, North American schools have been controlled by lay boards of governors representing business and the professions, which have placed a high value on loyalty to the employer and have frequently been suspicious of outspoken professors.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was founded in the United States in 1915 in order to protect academic freedom and the concept of tenure, but Canadian academics, feeling less cause for concern, did not establish a parallel body, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), until 1951. Horn outlines a series of incidents on various campuses in the early 20th century which could have been viewed as challenges to academic freedom, yet the Canadian professoriate of the time said little. Their responses were always tempered by what was "socially, politically, and . . . academically acceptable" (p. 13). Interest in academic freedom remained low until the 1958 dismissal of historian Harry Crowe from United College, Winnipeg, made academic freedom a national issue.

Since Canadian academics were complacent about the issue of academic freedom in the first half of the 20th century, it was left to university presidents, many of whom were coming under pressure from government and business to control the teaching, publications and public utterances of faculty members, to make the case for academic freedom. Sir Robert Falconer of the University of Toronto took the lead by defining academic freedom in 1922 and, during that decade, principals and presidents found themselves defending members of their faculties against criticism from the wider community.

During the radical 1930s, some faculty were critical of the capitalist system, the imperial connection and British foreign policy and, as a result, elicited strong reactions from the general public. At the University of Toronto, Frank Underhill led

the way in opposing President Falconer's call for faculty restraint by promoting and practicing the principle of academic free speech. University presidents, constantly concerned about their sources of funding in the Depression, sought to balance the freedom of the academy against growing public criticism. Nevertheless, Horn argues that one should not exaggerate the radicalism of Canadian faculty members in the 1930s, since those who spoke out were an insignificant minority compared to their opponents, the defenders of the status quo, who had become almost pathological by that time (p. 125).

During the Second World War, as in the First, loyalty was at a premium and critical academics were not appreciated. Underhill's criticism of the British connection led to an unsuccessful attempt to remove him from the University of Toronto in 1940; yet, by this time, even Underhill was moderating his views. Academic supporters of the socialist Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party were kept under surveillance during the war. As in the First World War, the Canadian academic community accepted wartime restrictions and interference in the Second without complaint and saw no issue which challenged the ongoing welfare of the academy.

The absence of academic freedom as an issue in Canadian universities leads Horn sometimes to grasp at straws in trying to show that there were, indeed, violations of academic freedom in Canada prior to the late 1950s, even though few academics recognized them as such. He cites the examples of Glen Shortliffe at Queen's and Frank Scott at McGill during the early years of the Cold War. The pressure on Shortliffe to avoid embarrassing Queen's by promoting Canada-Soviet friendship and the reluctance of McGill to name the socialist Scott as dean of law could have been interpreted, according to Horn, as a restriction on their academic freedom. Judged by today's standards, their situations might be grievable but their contemporaries did not view the issues in the same light.

While Horn clearly regrets that early academics were not sensitive to these threats to their welfare, the explanation for this situation may lie in the deference to authority of the Canadian professoriate and in their belief that university presidents and principals were themselves effective defenders of academic freedom in the years before the emergence of CAUT. While Horn is overly generous to disaffected faculty, he appears to be reluctant to give university presidents their due in this regard.

Horn believes that the Crowe Affair at United College, Winnipeg, "significantly affected the self-image of the professoriate and the idea of academic freedom in Canada" (p. 220). This affair rose out of a private letter written by historian Harry Crowe which was critical of United College and its administration. The college principal took the letter to the board, which sought to put Crowe on a one-year terminal appointment. Since its founding in 1951, CAUT had concerned itself primarily with faculty salaries and benefits. When Crowe turned to CAUT for support in 1958, his was the first major case of academic freedom to be investigated by that body. CAUT and the United College Board could not agree on terms for investigating the matter, but CAUT eventually conducted its own investigation. The Crowe affair became a public *cause célèbre*, with 12 faculty members resigning in sympathy with Crowe before Crowe eventually resigned himself in 1959.

The Crowe Affair made CAUT, which thereafter established a permanent national office and began directing its attention to the definition and protection of academic freedom on Canadian campuses. In 1964, it named its first Committee on Academic

Freedom and Tenure to develop policy and to investigate violations of those policies. The issue of tenure was intended to secure the intellectual independence of scholars by ensuring that they could only be dismissed for cause. Tenure had originally been tested in the courts, where judges tended to support the position of university boards in dismissing faculty. With the Crowe Affair, tenure was seen to be a necessary adjunct and protector of academic freedom.

The role of CAUT as the voice of the Canadian professoriate expanded into many other areas in the 1960s. In 1964, it co-sponsored the Duff-Berdahl Commission on university governance with the Canadian Universities Foundation, resulting in recommendations that the academic community be more directly represented on governing boards. Other issues for CAUT at that time included the status of women on campus, paid leave for those running for political office, secularization of denominational universities and university funding.

Horn's study is somewhat unbalanced. The bulk of the book is taken up with narrating a series of crises in individual universities and then demonstrating that Canadian academics were not worried about these as threats to their academic freedom. Once the academics did start to pay attention as a result of the Crowe Affair, Horn ends the book with only a cursory look at the important developments of the 1960s. It is unfortunate that 1965 was the date he chose to divide the first from the second volume, coming as it does in the middle of major upheavals in the Canadian university community.

If most Canadian academics were reluctant to take public positions in defence of academic freedom, such could not be said of historian Kenneth McNaught, whose life and times are described in his posthumous memoir, *Conscience and History*. A long-time social democrat who is remembered as the embodiment of the traditions and style of the "old school" of Canadian academic life, McNaught resigned from United College, Winnipeg, in protest against the unjust treatment of his colleague Harry Crowe. In his eulogy at McNaught's 1997 funeral, Ramsay Cook spoke of McNaught's conviction that history was a moral discipline, requiring its students not only to understand, but also to be prepared to decide and commit to right action.

Born in 1918 to a family of middle-class leftists in Toronto, McNaught participated as a teenager in early meetings of Canadian socialism. Outside his family, his interest in public affairs was honed by his education at Upper Canada College and the University of Toronto. At the latter institution, he studied honours history under Chester Martin, Donald Creighton and, above all, Frank Underhill, whom he revered. He entered the graduate program at Toronto in 1945, taking a seminar with a more mellow Underhill, and completed his comprehensive exams by 1947. He had just started his thesis on J.S. Woodworth, the leader of the CCF, when he accepted a job at United College, and moved west in 1947 with his wife, Beverly, and infant son. He spent three years in Winnipeg. He was not comfortable with the conservative faculty of United College, and worked hard to complete his thesis in order to get back to central Canada.

The thesis was completed in 1950, but he failed to get a position at the University of Toronto and was forced to remain at United College. This time, however, he had a new and compatible colleague in Crowe, who was viewed askance from the beginning by the United old guard. Crowe, along with Stewart Reid and McNaught, made up the History Department at United. With good colleagues and friends, McNaught settled

into life in Winnipeg. The late 1950s were good years for him at United College, as he completed his biography of Woodsworth, *A Prophet in Politics*.<sup>1</sup> With Crowe and Reid, McNaught was instrumental in founding the United College Association (UCA) under CAUT in 1953.

McNaught looked on the Crowe Affair as a “tragi-comedy; tragic because of smashed friendships and subversion of self-evident truths; comic because of the convoluted machination of small minds seeking (to my mind) revenge and security” (p. 101). McNaught was president of the UCA during the Affair, which he felt resulted from the fierce personal antagonism between the old guard on the faculty and new members, such as Crowe, with Principal Lockhart being haplessly caught in the middle. Unfortunately, Lockhart chose to act on what he considered to be offensive passages in a piece of private correspondence from Crowe (then on leave at Queen’s University) to another member of faculty. CAUT investigated the Affair, but the UCA was seriously divided, and the old guard was clearly in the majority. Late in 1958, McNaught resigned from United, along with Reid and others, insisting on Crowe’s reinstatement. His resignation was accepted by the United board and Crowe also tendered his resignation some months later.

In 1959, McNaught was invited by Maurice Careless to fill a vacancy in the History Department at the University of Toronto. These were the good years at Toronto and McNaught appreciated the collegiality of the Toronto History Department, the excellent students and the opportunities which Toronto offered for public involvement through regular articles in *Saturday Night* magazine. During this period, McNaught took up a public cudgel against Canadian nuclear involvement, and questioned Canada’s role in NATO and its military response to the Soviet Union.

He was happiest at the university in the early 1960s, as well as in his active involvement with the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Anglican Church. As the decade wore on and student and faculty numbers increased, he felt that the University of Toronto was losing its early intimacy, and tended to restrict himself more to graduate teaching and supervision. He was also dismayed by the power of reactionary labour leaders in the NDP. While he had flirted with the New Left and opposed the war in Vietnam, he had little affinity for the destructive anarchy of the political radicals and, in 1970, supported Trudeau’s imposition of the War Measures Act.

It is fitting that McNaught’s memoirs should end in the early 1970s. His contribution to the definition and defence of academic freedom in the Canadian university was significant and, yet, no sooner was this principle established than the academy that he knew and loved was changing yet again into a harsher and less collegial institution.

Ken McNaught was a man of the Old Left, the Old School and the Old Canada. His memoirs reflect the self-satisfaction of the Torontonians who were forced to leave the centre of Canadian culture and civilization in order to endure the hopeless parochialism of Canadian provincial life. He was happiest when he could resume his life in Toronto, but by the 1970s that life too was changing. Neither the Canadian Left nor the University of Toronto were as he had known them, and Canada itself was moving from the primacy of the Central Canadian experience to discover new

1 Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto, 1959).



histories and new communities in the regions. McNaught sensed but did not attempt to explain the significance of the shift that had taken place in the world that he knew.

It is left to Neil Tudiver, a professor of social work at the University of Manitoba, to assess the change in Canada's universities from the 1970s, when they were well-funded by governments and thriving centres of "debate and critical inquiry", to the end of the century when, as a direct result of cut-backs in government funding, universities have been forced to turn to the private sector for support. As a result, Tudiver claims that entrepreneurship is now valued over scholarship; universities are run more as businesses than as institutions devoted to teaching, research and community service, and a conception of intellectual property is promoted by administrators which turns free ideas into marketable commodities. He believes that this commercialization "threatens the university's mission to engage in the broadest and deepest levels of research and to freely share knowledge with the wider community" (pp. xii-xiii). His book is both a history of the funding of Canada's universities in the latter part of the century and a plea to faculty members to seek public support for the restoration of public spending.

Government funding of Canada's universities began seriously in the Second World War, with funds being earmarked for the expansion of scientific research. After the war, the 1951 Massey Commission addressed the issue of continued funding and advocated direct federal funding of universities. Such funding proved problematic with the provinces which were jealous of their constitutional responsibility for education. The result was the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act of 1967, whereby the federal government increased its level of funding and provided money to the provinces to be spent on post-secondary education. This funding paid for the dramatic expansion and consolidation of universities in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the middle of the 1970s, faced by international stagflation, the federal government began to reduce its support for social programs, leading to cost-sharing with the provinces through the Established Programs Funding (EPF) of 1977. Available monies were reduced even further through the 1980s and into the 1990s, until the EPF was itself replaced by block grants in the mid 1990s. Decreasing federal funding shifted the onus to provincial treasuries, which could ill afford any additional costs, especially when they were trying themselves to eliminate budget deficits. Universities were forced to balance their own budgets by raising tuition fees, by fund-raising campaigns and by cutting costs. Retirees were not replaced, more teaching was done on stipend, classes got bigger and many universities introduced early retirement schemes to get rid of expensive senior members of faculty.

While the faculty had no control over the operation of universities in the 1950s, they did have their autonomy within the institution, since they were in total control of their teaching and their research. In spite of the new participation of faculty and students in university governance in the 1960s, Tudiver claims that this academic power was cosmetic, since real power remained in the hands of university administrators and boards whose members were external to the universities. Consequently, as soon as the faculty felt vulnerable in the late 1970s, they were forced to turn to unionization to protect their freedom and autonomy.

During the 1960s, CAUT concerned itself primarily with issues of academic freedom and tenure. Yet, after censuring a number of universities for their personnel practices in this period, it became apparent that censure lacked teeth and that faculty

members required stronger weapons. From 1973, CAUT began to assist faculty associations to secure union certification and to negotiate collective agreements and, by 1985, most university faculties had unionized. This system went into crisis in the late 1980s as less and less money was available to the universities and strikes became an accepted part of the negotiation process. The strikes, in turn, built the strength of the unions which, Tudiver claims, have helped to preserve academic freedom in the face of corporate pressures to commercialize and privatize.

Scientific research in the universities had been supported by government since the creation of the National Research Council (NRC) during the First World War and collaboration between science and industry had been encouraged in the Second World War. The approach of the NRC was, however, non-directive, leaving the initiative with independent researchers. Since Canadian business had a poor record of funding research, the Science Council of Canada, established in 1966, promoted an agenda of applied research in support of the needs of business, and, in the 1980s, called for a direct linkage of businesses with university research. The federal government thereupon sought to harness university research to business by encouraging partnerships between universities and industry. New programs for research funding were created, such as the Networks of Centres of Excellence, which required close partnerships between academics and the corporate sector.

Originally, universities had supported business by providing them with trained graduates, and business had, in turn, supported universities financially through corporate donations to fund-raising campaigns. New partnerships between universities and businesses emerged as business saw ways to use the universities and the results of university research to enhance their corporate profit. The focus in university research thereupon shifted, and universities became less able to set their own priorities, since they now had to direct their research away from teaching and professional development toward the needs of the market. The resulting privatization of the universities, Tudiver claims, made the profitable parts of the academy available for the benefit of private shareholders, while the public sector continued to support those parts of universities that business did not want.

Today's corporate university has adopted a profit-centre model and sees its mission as selling commodities. Knowledge, itself, has become intellectual property, a commodity to be bought and sold in order to produce a profit for the university. Students are also seen as a profit-centre, with marketing campaigns designed to sell university programs. While the curriculum is still controlled by the faculty, course delivery is costly and many universities are looking to cut these costs by offering distance education through internet-based courses. Fund raising is a growth industry in today's universities, but now corporate donors expect to have influence, if not profit, within the universities. In the corporate university the profit motive replaces the social goals of the university and less support is provided to those parts of the university which are of no interest to business or are critical of the corporate agenda. Above all, internal freedom is not part of the corporate agenda, and, according to Tudiver, this poses the greatest threat to the independence of Canada's academic community.

Commercialization threatens academic freedom, he concludes, especially in the contentious areas of biotechnology and pharmaceuticals where attempts have already been made to muzzle university researchers. Faculty unions need to be constantly wary of issues such as performance indicators, new technology for course delivery



and suggestions for sharing the profits of intellectual property. Only in this way can they hold the line and protect academic freedom. Ultimately, however, it is restored public funding which will preserve the independence of the universities and the goal for the future must be to convince governments to restore core financial support to the universities and to decrease the current emphasis on university privatization.

Between them, Horn, McNaught and Tudiver define the historical narrative of Canadian universities in the 20th century. They demonstrate a need for more research and, above all, more analysis of developments in this rich field of study. The area which deserves more attention and is substantially overlooked by all three authors is the period between 1960 and 1975, the "age of unlimited potential". Tudiver argues that the university community is today in danger of losing much that was gained in that period, but he does not explain why the potential was not achieved and why the academic community, which was so assertive in the 1960s, went so quickly on the defensive in the 1970s. Nor do we learn more about the dynamics of that period from the works of Horn and McNaught, neither of whom appear to have much understanding or sympathy for the chaotic eruptions after 1965. There remains a need to examine the complex internal dynamics of the Canadian university and their relationship to larger trends in Canadian society in order to explain the course taken by the academy in the latter third of the 20th century.

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