Universities for Sale: Resisting Corporate Control over Canadian Higher Education

Neil Tudiver, Toronto: James Lorimer, 1999, pp. 248

As an apt illustration of the contents, the cover art of Neil Tudiver's *Universities for Sale: Resisting Corporate Control over Canadian Higher Education* shows a large pinstriped arm manipulating a tiny smiling professor puppet. Tudiver is only marginally less graphic in his description of the increasingly close relationships between corporations and universities in the text of his book, which is co-published with the CAUT. Presenting a detailed and thought-provoking history of the structural changes in universities that have resulted in increasing corporate involvement in Canadian higher education, Tudiver advocates that professors should lead the general public in a resistance to corporatism and commercialization.

The book takes a chronological approach to presenting the argument that universities have, to their detriment, fallen under the influence of avaricious individual corporations, fueled by shrinking government funding and increased efforts by the corporate community to borrow - rather than internally cultivate - advanced knowledge. Lamenting the devaluing of liberal education and unfettered academic exploration, he chronicles the organization and subsequent unionization of university professors, attributing the need for organized labour to the increasing pressures on faculty to compromise their academic freedom, tenure and financial compensation as the result of external pressures. Universities, Tudiver argues, have to be above that. The point is well made, and well taken. Indeed, the labour struggles of many major Canadian universities over the last six years attest to the fact that professors are willing to "walk" over such issues. Unquestionably, the search for fundamental knowledge by free-thinking academics in an environment free from significant bias is the only foundation on which to build a university.

The protection of academic principles is critical to the very existence of universities, and the principles will continue to be challenged by new corporate alliances born partly from a need by administrators to find new ways to pay the bills. Canadian universities have struggled to redefine themselves in the face of horrendous cuts to government funding (almost twice as much as the cuts to health care in the last fifteen years). Tudiver provides a detailed analysis of the results of these cuts in the face of growing enrollment and escalating operating costs. University administrators have responded by adopting a business model for running universities. Arms-length charitable donations by industry have given way to public-private partnerships, and the dilemma faced by researchers and administrators is clear. Using his own university as an example, Tudiver discusses how Monsanto, the corporation best known for patenting various genetically altered foods, has funded the crop research centre at the University of Manitoba. He points out that while Monsanto does not control all the research undertaken there, it does partially fund it, and has some influence on its direction.

As a result, at the very least, potentially critical voices may be silenced by reticence to bite the hand that feeds them. The danger of this is not always immediately evident to professors who are not used to having their academic freedom bridled, and a convincing argument for maintaining researcher rights to all publication, dissemination and discussion of research findings is one of the strongest in the book.

Tudiver openly criticizes university administration, government, and by association, the university community, for allowing the out-and-out selling of universities to the highest bidder. Citing a series of soft drink endorsement deals by various campuses as an exploitation of students by granting a monopoly to a global corporation, he ignores the fact that universities always have both reflected and responded to sociocultural changes, including economics. Institutional food services have been largely given over to the private sector in state run hospitals, government offices, and even military installations. He questions the economics of privatization, weighing the cost of this sort of compromise against the perceived economic benefit. While there is a commercial tint to student centres in most Canadian universities, readers - and the university community - may well question whether or not this is indeed a change to be resisted. In our postmodern society, brands and labels are perceived as a means of identification, so assimilating these into our learning institutions is not so much selling out as buying in. It is certainly valid to question the degree to which this should happen, but not without a certain acceptance that, to some degree, it is bound to occur.

The culture and context of the Canadian social economy is such that it has contributed to the closer association of industry and education, a natural consequence of an ever increasing network of relationships that not only defines our national economy but our global identity. The knowledge-based economy has seen universities shift in function from depositories of knowledge to providers of knowledge, and this subtle but important shift explains why corporations are lining up to become partners, but also why, more than ever, adults return to universities time and time again as lifelong learners. Tudiver disapproves of treating the student as a customer, providing a challenge to a central tenet of adult education which espouses the notion that learners are central to the educative process and recognizes that adults want value for their time and money. By criticizing some of the approaches used to create this value, he distances himself somewhat from the teaching role, which, alongside research, is also at the core of a university's purpose. At this core should also be a commitment to providing opportunities for individuals in the university community - students, faculty, administrators and staff - to excel in the practice of their craft. Tudiver's criticism of the business orientation that university administrators have undertaken certainly has its merits, but the strategic evaluation and management of the performance of the university is not entirely misguided. It may not be well practised in all cases, but measuring performance can provide valuable tools to reshape inefficient processes as well as encourage and reward excellence in teaching and scholarly pursuits.

Despite the sometimes weak practical grounding of some of his arguments, *Universities for Sale* is a provocative and insightful book that challenges those involved in higher education - particularly professors - to choose academic freedom over corporate research funds, and advancement of pure knowledge over patents for new products. It does so with a sense of seriousness and urgency, and the author supports his main points with a peppering of anecdotal evidence that keeps the reader engaged throughout. While some may critically question where Tudiver might draw the line for appropriate corporate involvement, his call to action will invite the kind of critical reflection necessary to examine our priorities around this issue. Other strengths notwithstanding, Tudiver fuels this debate with both passionate conviction and robust information, making this book a must-read for anyone engaged in the process of advancing higher education in Canada.

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