

Reviews — Recensions

Joseph Ben-David, *Centres of Learning: Britain, France, Germany, United States*. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1977.

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education set Professor Ben-David no small task when it invited him to report on the comparative effectiveness of different national systems of higher education. His acceptance conjures up for this reviewer, the image of a confident experienced scholar intent on bringing order to a patchwork of ideas, traditions and institutions. His adoption, as a professional sociologist, of a historical-comparative approach reinforces the image. For, as Hugh Trevor-Roper has remarked, if the discipline of sociology can be compared to studying the working of an automobile engine, then the discipline of history is the study of the automobile in motion. Moreover, Ben-David not only looks at different models in four countries, he also presents us with a performance appraisal over time.

Given the complexity of historical-comparative studies of education, it is hardly surprising to find that the roster of modern scholars having successfully completed them is brief. Prior to the 1970's, Abraham Flexner, Nicholas Hans, Isaac Kandel, Robert Ulich and, more recently, Eric Ashby, George Bereday, Seymour Lipset and Raymond Poinant had made significant contributions. Yet, as they would be the first to point out, the underlying methodologies of their studies are signposts rather than precise sets of directions. Wisely, then, Ben-David has assumed the mantle of the essayist.

Professor Ben-David's aim is to throw light upon the current and future role of higher education by studying the past. He views the history of higher education as a continuing development and firmly rejects the notion that it consists of a series of ups and downs ending in an abrupt decline in the last quarter of the twentieth century. His organizational approach to the task is straightforward. Successive chapters examine the emergence and structure of higher education: education for the professions; general higher education; research and training for research; universities, politics and social criticism; social justice and equality; and the book closes with a brief look at contemporary problems and challenges.

Of more interest are the themes Professor Ben-David adopts. He argues persuasively that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the reforms of Western systems of higher education centered on efforts to break the monopoly on learning held by the ancient professions. These reforms, he notes, while they extended the prestige and benefits of higher education to the new professions, had surprisingly different results in France, Germany and England. In the nineteenth century, however, all three countries placed increasing emphasis on merit and the author perceptively explores the growing tension between classical and professional education. The result was that the "new higher education, he observes, was built on modern science and scholarship and not on classical erudition, and it conferred professional status on the basis of specific competence in given fields, rather than on the basis of examinations testing general educational accomplishment or on membership in privileged guilds." (p. 27)

What follows is a thought provoking, if not entirely convincing, argument that the idea that advanced education needed to be specialized, and that specialized study was necessary for a professional career, was adopted throughout the Western world. What carries greater weight is Ben-David's contention that the functions and scope of higher education in the twentieth century (as well as its deficiencies) went unchallenged until the onset of World War II. Several of these deficiencies are taken up and explored. Again, while the author's argument as to the unity of research and teaching in the German universities, and, its subsequent adoption of this model throughout Europe, is somewhat overdrawn (p. 59), he nevertheless makes an important point. The German model exemplified the view that professional training should consist primarily of study and research in the basic disciplines, and this stood in stark contrast with the more practical job-oriented approach to professional training.

The tension between the two approaches continues to exist to this day. Efforts to resolve it at, for example, Waterloo University (Engineering), McMaster University (Medicine), and The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Education) are illustrations not exemplars. Indeed, the tension may be said to be increasing. In Ontario, the bifurcation of higher education into universities and Colleges of Arts and Applied Technology is fraught with ambiguities and unresolved problems. Calls for a third option attract few adherents, as do suggestions of amalgamation and integration, and we have come up with precious few ideas for the resolution of a problem that Ben-David correctly identifies as a potent source of dissatisfaction in North American higher education.

A second major problem area to which Professor Ben-David draws attention is what he refers to as the abandonment of the general element in higher education. He argues it has been virtually eliminated in England while enjoying success in the United States only because the new graduate level of education was made accessible to undergraduates as well. Disappointingly, and somewhat surprisingly, no mention is made of the efforts of the secondary schools to grapple with concepts of general and specialized education; but here too developments have taken place with important implications for the general element in undergraduate education.

The most interesting and challenging chapter of all is titled "Research and Training for Research." Here, Ben-David informs us, the new higher education built on modern science and scholarship has not proved entirely satisfactory. By the end of the 19th century, research had become increasingly specialized and much of it was unconnected with either general education or professional practice. Some institutions, for example the leading British universities, enjoyed modest success in integrating research and teaching. Their counterparts in France and Germany were not so successful. According to Ben-David, it was the emergence of the American graduate school, with its emphasis on advanced professional work and operating within the framework of a market for professional research workers, that helped bridge the gap between research and teaching. The American graduate school model notwithstanding, Ben-David makes the point strongly, and provocatively, that research and teaching are not necessarily complementary. In fact, they can only be organized within a single framework under specific conditions. Part of the problem Ben-David argues, is the difficulty inherent in linking education, which he sees as being essentially the transmission of a tradition, with research whose basic purpose is the transformation of that tradition (p. 97). Not only do research and teaching have different

purposes, they also compete for time, require different approaches, different talents, and different facilities. Furthermore, the idea that research takes place within a theoretically organized, teachable body of knowledge, so that theory guides research, which then corrects or fills in the gaps of theory, is for Ben-David an ideal state which is only rarely approximated in practice (p. 102).

Since World War II, research that is not necessarily related to teaching, has become a recognized function of the American university and campuses are dotted with large research laboratories and institutes. To date, similar developments have not taken place to anything like the same extent in Canada. Things may well be changing, however. The role of the provincial and federal governments in sponsoring research within the universities is growing and this raises the question as to how the nature and scale of governmental support for research should be determined. Up to now training for research has not primarily been a function of the government's demand for certain types of research, but government sponsored research does raise the problem, which Ben-David considers chronic in the United States, of how to integrate research with the teaching and professional training functions of the university. Moreover, as Canadian universities in the face of declining enrolments and a reduced fiscal base apply their energies to the search for alternative revenue sources, the problem will be exacerbated. Serious efforts at restructuring and coordinating the relationship between research and teaching are urgently needed and as the Chairman of the Ontario Council on University Affairs, Dr. W. Winegard, has reminded us, such efforts must confront the needs of the general student as well as advanced research and training for research.

Mention of Canadian higher education leads one to remark that Professor Ben-David's thought-provoking and stimulating essay exhibits a distinct lack of knowledge in this area. For example, his rather bald statement that "Canadian provinces have distinct national characteristics" (p. 153) reveals a basic lack of understanding of the Canadian scene, and his assertion that quota systems have been introduced in Canadian higher education is simply incorrect (p. 156). On a more general plane, Ben-David appears to have over-estimated the more lasting effects of the politicization of the universities which took place in the 1960's and he appears not to have recognized the import of collective bargaining nor its potential for rewriting relationships within the modern university.

These points aside, there is far more to agree than disagree with in Professor Ben-David's analysis. The strength of the book resides, as was suggested earlier, in the significance of the major themes Ben-David has chosen to address. In Canadian universities, as elsewhere, there is a long overdue need to re-examine the relationships between general education, professional training, research and training for research. The growing public awareness of the importance of research suggests that in this area at least the prospects for higher education are not unfavourable. Within the universities, there is greater appreciation of the need to reformulate general education and this too can be seen as an encouraging sign. The potential for change in programs of professional education is perhaps more problematical. The development of new links between professional training and research may well provide some answers, however. Greater emphasis is being placed on the public utility of research, and policy-makers and practitioners alike are more vocal in their demands that research, and training in research, make a demonstrable difference. The complex problems

of integrating teaching, research and practice that face the modern universities will prove difficult to resolve but we can be grateful to Professor Ben-David for identifying their source, analyzing their development and charting their boundaries.

John R. Mallea
The Ontario Institute For
Studies in Education

Murray L. Barr, *A Century of Medicine at Western*. London, The University of Western Ontario, 1977.

John R. W. Gwynne-Timothy, *Western's First Century*. London, The University of Western Ontario, 1978.

Robert N. Sherville, ed., *They Passed This Way – A Selection of Citations*. London, The University of Western Ontario, 1978.

Hilda Neatby, *Queen's University, Volume I, 1841-1917*, edited by Frederick W. Gibson and Roger Graham. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978.

This review article deals with four recent publications in the field of university history, three of them emanating from the University of Western Ontario and the fourth from Queen's. Only passing reference will be made to one of the Western volumes, Robert N. Sherville, editor, *They Passed this Way – a Selection of Citations* (for honorary degrees) 1878-1978, 1978, a handsome coffee table book. The main emphasis will be on two works which can be described as official university histories, and the question I have in mind in discussing them is, How successful has the author been in presenting both the facts of the university's development and the role it has played in the intellectual life of the communities it serves, specifically the city, the province and the nation? These are John R.W. Gwynne-Timothy, *Western's First Century*, 1978 and Hilda Neatby, *Queen's University Volume I, 1841-1917*, edited by Frederick W. Gibson and Roger Graham, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978. The fourth book, Murray L. Barr, *A Century of Medicine at Western*, 1977 is a history of a single faculty, but here too the same basic question can be asked: Does the author succeed in clearly describing the development of the faculty and also relating this to the development of medicine in Western Ontario and in Canada? No such question can be asked of the Sherville book which makes no pretensions of being anything but a record of one aspect of life at the University, the convocation ceremony. This it does effectively. In addition to the citations, the text consists of brief but elegant essays on the procedures for selecting candidates and on the art of writing citations by D. Carleton Williams and on the trials, tribulations and triumphs of the organizers of such ceremonies by the editor, Robert Sherville.

The three Western volumes have been published in connection with the University's centenary, and all are available at \$15.00 from the University's Bookstore. This number of anniversary volumes is not unprecedented in Canada; Queen's produced three volumes at the time of its centenary in 1941, as did Saskatchewan for its semi-centenary in 1959.