

Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Paul Axelrod, *Scholars and Dollars: Politics, Economics, and the Universities of Ontario 1945-1980*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982, 270 pp. ISBN 0-8020-5609-1 (bound); ISBN 0-8020-6492-2 (pbk.)

The topic of this book undoubtedly makes it one of the most important to appear in the study of Canadian higher education and required reading for anyone with an interest in the Ontario university system. For those who have been associated with Ontario universities for many years, Paul Axelrod's book will provide many reminders of the way things used to be and of the individuals involved. For those whose exposure to Ontario universities has been more limited, *Scholars and Dollars* will provide a useful summary of how things evolved to their present state of affairs. There are, however, several problems with this book which the prospective reader should be warned about in advance.

Paul Axelrod makes clear from the outset his intention not to write a complete history of Ontario universities. He describes the book as "a study in the political economy of higher education and as a chapter in the political culture of the province of Ontario" (p. 4). He also makes clear from the outset his affinity with some of the concerns and interests of Marxists or neo-Marxists. Unfortunately, he does not do this on the basis of a particularly rigorous discussion of Marxist ideology or how it might be applied to Canada, Ontario or to the universities. Instead, we are often treated to jargonistic or ideological statements presented with little or no background development. For example, referring to student assistance programs, Axelrod claims that "conceived and implemented within the context of a capitalist culture, the programs themselves reflected and reinforced the utilitarian objects and the ideological corollaries of a free-enterprise society" (p. 29). I am not certain that I know what this means and none of the surrounding discussion clarifies the situation very well.

Chapter one reviews aspects of the history of education in Ontario in terms of its contribution to the process of economic growth. Through the nineteenth century, two world wars and the cold war, education in general and university faculty and students in particular were viewed as necessary for the development of the country and, during wartime, its very survival. In peacetime, particularly during the 1930's, neglect of the universities reached serious proportions. In 1939, for example, the Liberal Premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn, "actually reduced the funding of the province's three non-denominational universities", Toronto, Queen's and Western Ontario (p. 14). Later on, accessibility of post-secondary education to students from low-income families became a major concern, as was the demand for increases in the sheer numbers of students. Both views pointed in the direction, at least in the 1950's and 1960's, of increased enrolments.

The next two chapters, both of which deal with the relationship between universities and private business, are by far the least satisfactory parts of the book. Chapter two discusses the level of financial support provided to universities by the private sector, particularly during the 1950's and 1960's. It concentrates on the efforts of the Industrial Foundation of Education, an organization begun in 1956 to increase the level of corporate contributions to universities. Chapter three concentrates on the role of local business elites in establishing the new universities of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Substantially more than half of this chapter deals with the experience at one institution, York University. Since Axelrod was a student and later a teacher at York, it is perhaps not surprising that he spends a great deal of time reviewing the history of this particular university. It is just unfortunate that he could not have done an equally thorough job for the other universities in the province since it is not established that York is particularly representative of the other institutions.

What is perhaps most unsatisfactory about these two chapters is Axelrod's continually restated faith in the importance of the corporate elite to the universities and his equally continual failure to *prove* it. He spends a great deal of time discussing the importance of corporate donations only to admit that "in 1958, only 2.8 per cent of all taxpaying corporations contributed anything to Canadian universities, a situation that evidently changed little over the next several years" (p. 52). He never really says if he was able to discover which particular firms were among that 2.8% and why they contributed funds when the others gave nothing. Instead, we are treated to long lists of individuals, usually from the corporate elite, who were members of governing bodies or committees which helped to found particular institutions. Little evidence is provided which actually shows that these individuals had any impact on the internal operations of the universities.

Equally unexplored is the role of the Conservative party in converting the attitudes of the business leaders into party and government policy toward higher education. Given that one political party was in office in Ontario during most of the time period covered by Axelrod's book, given that there has always existed a close affinity between that party and the corporate elite which the author was so keen to study, and given the close relationship between universities and both the present Premier and past holders of this office, it is somewhat strange that Axelrod shows little interest in the attitudes or activities of influential members of the Conservative party, convention or programme statements, debates in the provincial legislature, or any other ways that the corporate, political and educational elites might be shown to have interacted during the 40 years that the Conservative party has been in office in Ontario.

The next four chapters trace the relationship between universities and the provincial government between 1945 and 1980. Axelrod discusses the role of the small number of provincial officials involved in the 1940's and 1950's, culminating in the creation of the Advisory Committee on University Affairs (CUA) in 1958 – established to advise the Minister of Education on funding

matters. The importance of CUA is perhaps best demonstrated by the appointment, in 1961, of Leslie Frost — former Premier of Ontario — as one of its members. In 1962, CUA called a meeting of all Ontario university presidents, a meeting which led to the creation of the Committee of Presidents of the Provincially Assisted Universities of Ontario (CPUO). In 1964, the government established a Department of University Affairs. All three of these organizations are still in existence, although all three have been reorganized and renamed. The Ontario Council of University Affairs, the Council of Ontario Universities, and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities still dominate the Ontario university scene. Another major initiative of the 1960's, the Spinks Commission and its call for a province-wide University of Ontario, was far less successful. But it was followed by the establishment of a formula-financing system for the distribution of operating grants based on each university's enrolment. That system, which was first applied in 1967, is still intact today, although with many modifications.

In chapter five, Axelrod examines the development of Ontario universities — particularly their curricula — from what can best be termed a manpower planning model. It is a model which contains all of the benefits of hindsight which come from viewing the 1950's and 1960's from the perspective of the late 1970's. It looks at the rapid growth, laissez-faire attitude toward program offerings, lack of overall province-wide planning, and lack of adequate statistical data and concludes that this was "the system's fundamental weakness" (p. 140). The author seems not to have understood the severe shortages of skilled personnel then in existence. John Porter, writing in the early 1960's, estimated that *at least* 32 to 36 per cent of the increase in the number of professionals in Canada between 1951 and 1961 was made up of immigrants and that "during the 1950's the total number of immigrant professionals was equal to about one-half of the total supply from Canadian universities" (Porter, 1965). Put another way, Canadian universities could have increased their enrolments and the number of their graduates throughout the 1950's by approximately 50% and still not increased the supply of professionals in the job market. They would have displaced the teachers, doctors, engineers and members of many other professional occupations who immigrated in large numbers throughout the 1950's and 1960's.

More generally, it might be pointed out that Axelrod's faith in manpower planning seems a little misplaced. Even if the data available were highly reliable and even if governments and universities were dedicated to province-wide co-ordination of manpower supply, it is doubtful if the results would have been any more successful. Projecting supply and demand of manpower several years in advance with any degree of reliability is an almost impossible task.

Chapter six documents the end of the period of high rates of growth and high levels of funding for Ontario universities. Axelrod demonstrates that as early as 1968 the provincial government began to provide a smaller increase in the size of the Basic Income Unit than that recommended by CUA. In an attempt to obtain "more scholar for the dollar", the Ontario government simultaneously tried to hold down the level of financial support and increase their degree of control over

how that money was spent by the universities. By the beginning of the 1970's, it appeared as if Ontario universities were viewed by many as wasting the taxpayers' dollars by spending too much money and, in particular, by training excessive numbers of unemployable graduates.

Chapter seven documents the continual erosion of financial support for the universities between 1974 and 1980. Every year, universities obtained a smaller and smaller share of the provincial budget and, bit by bit, became more and more "underfunded". The universities' reactions to this, particularly the staff reaction in the form of unionization and collective bargaining, are fully documented. What is not documented is the reason for the particular vehemence with which Ontario cut back its support for universities. Clearly, the dramatic growth of the 1960's also ended elsewhere. But most other jurisdictions, at least in Canada, were nowhere near as draconian in their measures. The neighbouring province of Quebec, for example, provided far better support for its universities throughout the 1970's than did Ontario. Axelrod discusses the data which document these differences, but nowhere attempts to offer an explanation. Surely, given the author's ideological stance, if capitalism expects certain functions to be performed by the universities, as he argues, this is just as true in other provinces as in Ontario?

Axelrod's conclusion restates his faith in manpower planning and what he considers to be the Ontario universities' failures in this area, as well as deploring the Ontario universities' failure to maintain the intellectual vibrancy of the 1960's. Our conclusion about the book must be that, although it covers much interesting territory, it is a little disappointing. The author's faith in manpower planning has already been discussed in detail. The author's ideological simplicity has also been noted, particularly his treatment of the rôle of the private sector and his inability to provide conclusive evidence that corporate leaders made much of a difference to the internal workings of the universities. Finally, there is a general lack of comparative perspective throughout the book and a particular lack of reference to what was occurring in other Canadian provinces. Surely the Ontario experience was not so totally unique that it could not be compared with what was going on elsewhere?

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REFERENCE

- Porter, J. *The Vertical Mosaic*
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965, p. 46.