

## Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

---

Turk, J.L. (Ed.). (2000). *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers to Canada's Colleges and Universities*. Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Canadian Association of University Teachers, CAUT Series. Pages:223. Price: \$19.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by LeRoy E. Whitehead, Queen's University

On several levels, *The Corporate Campus* is a very political book. It calls for a political response. On the grounds that the personal is political, I will offer a very personal review.

The book deals with some very significant issues, such as the growing influence of corporations on both the teaching and research agendas of postsecondary institutions, the privatization of education, the commodification of education and the transfer of intellectual property rights from publicly funded postsecondary institutions to private corporations. It also deals with some relatively minor issues, such as the awarding of exclusive on-campus distribution rights to soft drink companies, and the hiring of private catering firms to manage and operate food services on campus, as two examples. The inclusion of these latter kinds of issues tends to have the effect of trivializing the more significant issues. In addition, and perhaps just as important, the book unwittingly illustrates some of the problems and tensions of the faculty union movement in Canada at the turn of the century and the millenium.

*The Corporate Campus* grew out of a conference organized by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) in October 1999.

The conference was titled, *Universities and Colleges in the Public Interest*, and had three stated purposes: (1) to draw attention to the extent and nature of commercialization in Canadian postsecondary institutions; (2) to examine the ways in which commercial pressures are changing those institutions and the implications for their ability to serve the public interest; and (3) to explore possible responses to commercialization (Preface, p. ix).

The papers from the conference have been edited and some have been revised, expanded or wholly rewritten by the presenters. There are fifteen papers divided into five sections, plus an introductory chapter written especially for the book by the editor. The five sections are titled: "What is at Stake?," "Privatizing Knowledge," "Teaching as a Commodity," "Corporate Management and Its Consequences," and "In the Public Interest: Reclaiming Our Purpose." The book was published in 2000 as the second title in the "CAUT Series." The first book in the series, *Universities for Sale* by Neil Tudiver (1999), dealt with the same general topic.

Both *The Corporate Campus* and the conference that preceded it are clearly faculty union set pieces. A review of the biographical notes for the sixteen authors in the book reveals a high proportion of people with very tight union connections. There are four presidents or past presidents of university faculty associations at the local or provincial levels, a president of a provincial college faculty association, and a president of a graduate students' organization who has been active in a unionization drive for graduate teaching assistants. Another is a director of CAUT, and the editor is the executive director of CAUT and former director of education for the Ontario Federation of Labour.

The result is that the book reads more like the proceedings of a union pep rally than the proceedings of a scholarly conference. All of the hallmarks of the union rally are present: the controlled agenda with apparently hand-picked speakers, the drawing of issues in stark black-and-white terms (none of the rich shades of gray and subtle nuances that one would expect from university professors), the false dichotomy, and the de-humanization (e.g., the reference to the faceless, nameless "employer" on p. 154) and demonization (e.g., the gratuitous reference

to “henchpeople” on p. 161) of management and/or government. One can get away with these things when one is preaching to the converted.

Unfortunately, the biographical notes illustrate something else as well. My personal experience as an officer of a university faculty association and as a director and officer of a provincial level faculty association has led me to conclude that the faculty union movement in Canada today systematically excludes or ignores many voices within the professorate. Of the sixteen authors contributing to this book, twelve are from disciplines in the arts and humanities. (I am including law in the humanities.), two are from health sciences, one is from agricultural science, and one is from a pure science discipline. Clearly, there are very large gaps in the list.

For example, there is no one from a faculty of business. It is easy to imagine that during conversations about the appropriateness of a market approach to education, the proper function of management in the university, or the proper function of public education as part of the economic system in a democracy, people from faculties of business might express opinions that are radically different from those expressed by their arts and humanities colleagues. All of these topics are important foci of the book, yet no voice from a faculty of business has been included.

Similarly, faculty members from engineering might express opinions that differ radically from those of their arts and humanities colleagues regarding the appropriateness of technology transfer from publicly funded postsecondary institutions to private, for-profit corporations. This is another important topic of the book, but there is no voice from engineering. Neither is there a voice from computer science or information technology, where a similar diversity of opinion might exist.

There is also the problem of the book’s blanket denunciation of distance education, with no one currently involved in distance education in Canada being included to respond. We do have a lot of distance education going on in this country, including at least one university dedicated entirely to distance education. It is not as though there was no one around to invite.

It is disingenuous, to say the least, for CAUT to organize a conference and publish the proceedings under its official imprimatur without

including the voices of its own constituents who might reasonably be expected to be in disagreement with the party line. It looks like an attempt to convey the impression that the Canadian professorate speaks with a unified voice on the issues at hand when, in fact, there is good reason to suspect that the professorate is not unified on them.

Another thing that is troubling about the book as a whole is the reference to colleges in the subtitle, as it raises expectations that are not met. Colleges are hardly mentioned in the book. There is one paper that includes a brief description of the College Institute Educators' Association of British Columbia, and a brief description of that province's college, university-college, institute and agency system. There are also a few other scattered uses of the word "college." Fundamentally, however, the book is about universities and it seems as though colleges were mentioned in the book's title only in hopes of selling a few more copies.

Canada's university system is relatively monolithic. That is, a university in British Columbia or Alberta is fairly similar to a university in Ontario or Nova Scotia. The same cannot be said of the colleges. A college of applied arts and technology in Ontario, for example, simply is not the same as a university-college in British Columbia and bears little similarity to a university in either province. While a university-college might offer degree programs in cooperation with a university, the Ontario colleges were originally set up for the purpose of job training (though limited degree granting powers are now being considered for them). Their main *raison d'être* was and still is to train people for employment in private corporations. Many of their founding presidents were hired from business and industry, not education, and for the professors, on-the-job experience was considered more important than advanced degrees. The result is an organizational climate and culture that are quite different from those of either universities or university-colleges. In short, to pretend that a discussion of the book's issues in the homogenous university context would be equally applicable or relevant to the much more heterogeneous context of the colleges simply doesn't wash. It would take a longer book and a serious discussion of the various college models to work the issues through as they relate to the colleges.

One of the false dichotomies underlying the book is the view that there is a fundamental antagonism between education (read traditional liberal arts and science education) and training (read job preparation and acquisition of job skills). Education is viewed as good, training as bad. This dichotomy is not well-articulated in the book, and is certainly not well-argued. Rather, it appears to be a pre-existing assumption that is shared by all of the contributors, and it runs as a sub-text through all of the papers. Only one author makes any real attempt to articulate the distinction. This unstated, but shared point of view helps to explain why the college system, which emphasizes job preparation and skills acquisition, is virtually off the radar screen as far as this book is concerned. What makes the dichotomy false is that in a well-functioning, “high-tech” society, both education and training are vitally necessary and most people will need some of each. As someone once said, both our theories and our pipes need to hold water.

One of the papers, “Private Interest and Public Peril at the Health Protection Branch,” contains startling allegations that, if true, are shocking indeed. This is important material and needs to be disseminated. However, it is off-topic for this book, as it is about the internal workings of a federal government department, not about either universities or colleges. It belongs in another book, but not in this one.

For me, the real disappointment is that *The Corporate Campus* is a lecture, not a dialogue. It presents a very one-sided view of the issues and silences other voices, even among the sponsor’s own constituents. It promotes subversion and resistance, rather than rational discussion and workable compromise. (The final paper did present a more reasonable voice than either of the other two in the concluding section.) I hope that CAUT will organize another conference and invite representatives from faculty, administration, government and business for the purposes of fostering a genuine dialogue about the issues and seeking mutually acceptable, workable solutions to some very complex problems. Neither of these purposes was met with this book.

