



THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

MONTHLY LETTER

VOL. 38, No. 9

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER, 1957

Higher Education in Canada

Mr. Muir, Chairman and President of The Royal Bank of Canada, who has been honoured by the conferring upon him of degrees by three Canadian universities, by his selection as a member of the investment committee of the Canada Council, and by citation of his bank's Monthly Letter for the President's Award of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, herein sums up his impression of the current needs of higher education in Canada.

NEVER before in Canada's history has there been so great interest displayed in problems associated with higher education.

We have found suddenly, in a rapidly expanding economy and a swelling population, that we need highly educated citizens, that they are not available, and that the universities to which we look for them are in serious financial need. The many-headed problem is one that concerns all of us.

Here are the elements of the problem in a nutshell. A flood of students, product of our greatly increased birth rate, is lapping at the doors of our universities and will reach full tide in the nineteen sixties. In 1956, compared with 1951, we had an increase of 409,000 in the age group 5 to 9 years, and the increase under 5 years was 261,000. The expected doubling of student enrolment will far exceed our university class-room facilities. The required army of new teachers is not yet in sight. The needed funds are not assured.

Is it any wonder that thinking people in all walks of life are feeling acute anxiety?

I believe that I stated the case moderately and accurately in my annual address to shareholders of this bank in January. Our educational crisis is primarily an economic one, and it is therefore an appropriate matter for public discussion.

Let us keep in mind that the material progress of Canada is the product of the imagination and spirit of her people. These can be stirred and made effective only through education. Only by education can our

young people be made ready to cope with the great tides of change that are sweeping over the world.

We as citizens must, through government, business and individual action, make sure that our schools and universities are provided with sources of funds sufficient to attract, to retain and to replenish the supply of qualified teachers that will make this education possible.

As I pointed out in January, the economic resources at the disposal of our schools and universities, and of many of our churches, are insufficient to maintain decent living standards for the devoted men and women whose life work it is to train the minds and develop the character of our young people.

It is a ridiculous situation, but by no means an uncommon one, to find that a new graduate receives a salary on his first job that approaches or even surpasses what his teachers, in school and church alike, receive as their material reward after a lifetime of service.

From where I sit it seems that business is reaching out more and more for people whose training is broad, deeply infused with the ideas that come from a sound liberal education programme, and ideals that arise out of association with great minds.

By education I do not mean learning for learning's sake, but education to train the mind to think, to reason, to explore, and above all to continue to educate itself so that there will be created a well of knowledge from which to draw not only inspiration but the technique of performance and production. Those who have been taught that one must think, read, and relentlessly pursue the quest of knowledge, and that knowledge is largely useless if not applied, are fortunate men and women.

But the years of youth allotted to a man are short. We need to fill them with the most wholesome and lasting experiences — and these can be provided only by capable, happy and devoted teachers. Who else can impart the qualities which, in Milton's words, "fit a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously

all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war”?

And so I believe that first of all — taking priority over other, though urgent, requirements — we need to recruit teachers and to see to it that the disparity between the salaries we pay them and the salaries we pay for comparable talent elsewhere, is wiped out.

What follows in this *Monthly Letter* is a summary of the facts presented and the opinions expressed on this and related problems in higher education by Canadian educationists and business men and others during the past year.

I wish to express my personal conviction in this way: we in Canada have the material and intellectual resources necessary to build a great fabric of education. We are limited only by our powers of conception and resolution. We can offer our young people the very best conditions for growth and achievement in every form of excellence.

I feel confident that, within the framework of economic and political freedom we have worked and fought so hard to establish, our decisions and actions will in their wisdom prove worthy of the spirit of our people and the generosity of Providence.



Chairman and President

What is the crisis?

THE ISSUES and problems confronting our institutions of higher learning are numerous and vexing.

A resolution of the 35-member National Conference of Canadian Universities last November summed up the situation in this way: “the representatives of the universities of Canada express their considered opinion that it is their urgent duty to warn the people of Canada that the problem of the universities has become an emergency of grave national concern, to the certain disadvantage of our progress and standing as a nation, and can only be solved by the energetic and immediate assistance and co-operation of all governments in Canada, of business and industry, and of private benefactors.” (*Canada’s Crisis in Higher Education* Edited by C. T. Bissell. University of Toronto Press, 1957.)

This resolution draws no lines between universities of various sorts, location, language or religion. The similarity of purpose of all Canadian universities is taken for granted. They are involved in a crisis that is national in scope and character.

These universities properly believe that if the values of civilized life are to endure they must be buttressed by education that will guard and shape our future, and give us the sense of perspective we need for broad and distant views.

We have not enough men and women trained to take advantage of the marvellous opportunities opened up by technology in nuclear energy, electronics, aviation, medicine, chemistry, industrial production and civil engineering. Apart from these “practical” shortages, we are suffering from poverty of preparation for the critical national and world duties which are falling upon us. Through a fantasy like George Orwell’s *1984* we catch a glimpse of what could happen if we were to permit destruction of the scholarly and scientific disciplines. Pasteur blamed the collapse of his country on the neglect of higher branches of culture, a neglect that left out the cement that would have made material advances more permanent.

Liberal education

A liberal education is not the mere ghostly shadow of things that some persons imagine it to be. It is real and substantial. No matter how glorified the science may be or how practical the technology, it needs an arterial connection with basic education if it is to live. A liberal education is practical, because it provides experience in formulating judgments about concrete contemporary problems.

It is not claimed that a liberal education will do a complete job of preparing a young man or a young woman for life, but it initiates the sort of personal growth that leads to maturity. It encourages wisdom, judgment and perspective — three qualities needed in facing the daily decisions of life.

Dr. James R. Killian, tenth president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said upon his induction to office that engineers, scientists and other technically trained men in this atomic age should have a solid grasp of the humanities, being well grounded in the liberal arts as well as in the techniques of their profession.

No matter how clever a scientist may be, he still must live with men, work with them, and participate in the responsibilities of community and nation. A liberal education seeks to instil a genuine concern for the human qualities of life, by providing the student with knowledge of himself and of others, of the physical and biological world, and of his own and other cultures. It gives him an historical view of man’s achievements and of his religious and philosophical heritage. It helps a person to keep his balance.

Utilitarian education

We are misguided if we think of one curriculum as being suitable to prepare men to be leaders, and of

another as being suitable for specialists in techniques who are to be the servants of the policy makers. Yet there are some who clamour for a public service sort of institution, poking into the whole range of practical activity, carrying out industrial research, turning out materialistic technicians, testing guided missiles and missing the guidance of intellectual development. To them the university degree is a sort of union card.

Experience in Canada disproves the efficiency of this view of higher education. The course of our technological development has been such that increasingly grave social responsibilities are falling upon the shoulders of technically trained men.

Dr. W. A. Mackintosh, vice-chancellor and principal of Queen's University, said in an address last spring that Canada's greatest need is for trained, educated persons of integrity. And Dr. E. W. R. Steacie, president of the National Research Council, told the National Conference of Canadian Universities: "there is every reason to discourage specialization which is merely designed to enable the student to take his place in a given industry with a minimum of delay." The necessary factual information can be picked up on the job; what is wanted from the university is training in basic principles.

The weight of authority, then, seems to say that there is no reason why the specialist should not be also an informed and cultivated citizen. Higher education will suffer an irreparable loss if it ceases to educate the whole man and not merely his fingers for handling gadgets and his eye for reading charts and his mental capacity for interpreting blue prints and slide rules.

How sad it is to see a technically-trained man come along in his vocation to the point where he is called upon to make plans, to direct the work of men, and to put into words the visions he sees of improvement and advancement in his craft — only to discover that he has not the background or facility. He cannot relate the past to the present, he cannot draw out the most in effort and interest of men, he cannot express in a constructive and telling way the great thoughts that are in him.

Canadian universities

Canada's universities are free institutions in that they affirm the worth and dignity of the individual — the fundamental concept of true democracy. A university in Canada is not a class-nursery, the paradise of the privileged, but the resort of young men and young women of all classes and creeds who seek what it has to give.

To the traditions of all the peoples of the ancient world, reaching back to the Greeks and Romans, Canada has added the cultural heritage of the British,

the French, and many other people. These rich experiences in the arts, and talents and science, have become part of the resources of our universities.

Our universities are not planted on the outskirts of life, but are pursuing broad and important objectives in everyday affairs. Higher education is part of our general culture, producing well-educated people who, in the words of Dr. Léon Lortie, director of extension of the University of Montreal, "whatever may be their language or their religion, will be excellent Canadian citizens."

But our universities cannot perform their high functions without help and support. The near balance of space and students that exists today is about to be shattered by an explosive increase in enrolment.

In 25 years, the Gordon Commission has concluded, our population will have increased by 65 per cent. Long before then the universities will be called upon to double their enrolment. Within ten years students will number 123,600; teaching staffs must be increased proportionately; operating costs will double; new buildings demand at least \$285 million. These are not alarmist estimates, but conservative figures prepared with great care last year. By June this year the estimated rate of increase had been far exceeded.

The financial problem

The problem, insofar as it is one of finding money, is on the doorstep of every government, organization, business firm and individual.

Just to point up the difference in our approach to two vital questions, consider higher education alongside defense: in the year 1954-55 our government expenditures for defense amounted to \$1,685 million while government support of universities totalled \$22,261,000. The whole income of universities in that year was \$53,082,000.

An element of realism is demanded, and what is realistic can be simply stated. We need higher education if we are to maintain our society in its present free state and on its present high level. We have young people this year, and in sight for many more years, who will seek this higher education. If we are in favour of providing what is called for, then we must face the need of providing adequate financial support.

As John W. Gardner put it in a report to the Carnegie Corporation: If we are unwilling to pay, or cannot afford to pay, "then it will not be an ignoble thing to face that fact honestly and spare our young people the deception involved in shoddy and superficial college experiences."

Dr. Sidney E. Smith, president of the University of Toronto, told the Universities Conference that the financial resources of Canadian universities, compared

with some of those in the United Kingdom and many of those in the United States, have been sparse indeed.

Dr. F. Cyril James, principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University, on another occasion outlined the possible sources from which the money to support universities must come: grants from the federal government, subventions from the provincial governments, grants from municipal governments, from business corporations and from private individuals. He said that in the United Kingdom 73.6 per cent of the total revenue of universities is derived from government grants; in the United States 58.6 per cent, and in Canada only 42 per cent. Tuition fees provide respectively 10.7 per cent, 21.4 per cent and 29.6 per cent.

Dr. Claude T. Bissell, president and vice-chancellor of Carleton University, told an audience last spring that the sums involved are so tremendous it would be fanciful to think that business and individuals could be expected to supply more than "a significant proportion." Governments, he said, must continue to shoulder the main burden, but contributions from business could mean the difference between adequate but undistinguished universities and universities that would be intellectual strong points in the new Canada.

Increasing support is being received in the United States from university graduates, whose giving has risen from \$10 million in 1945 to \$102 million last year. In Canada, said Dr. Bissell, very few universities could count on their alumni for more than a few thousand dollars each year.

The teaching staff

Talk of expenses and income in general terms has obscured a most perplexing aspect of the university problem: the provision of instructional staff.

The other professions are offering more and more competition for the services of our ablest citizens. The ratio of staff to students in our universities is even now lower than it should be to provide education of the highest quality.

The teacher, it should go without saying, is the central ingredient in any kind of education, and above all in higher liberal education. It is not the number of class-rooms that counts, but what goes on in them.

Make-shift devices to take the place of teachers, such as films and television, cannot strike sparks to set students' minds afire. We need teachers of intellectual and spiritual stature who will go beyond the mere imparting of facts to interpretations and conclusions of real human import.

One urgent need is to make the university teaching position competitive in salary with what is offered for similar qualities outside the university. There is something noble in the sacrifice of personal comfort, health

and pleasure to a dignified ideal, but by what right do we demand it of our teachers?

"Speaking broadly," wrote Watson Kirkconnell in *The Humanities in Canada*, "one may say that the scale of academic salaries in Canada is calamitous, considering the quality of service involved." He pointed out that gifted young men with from eighteen to twenty years of education are often paid less than the wages of an illiterate unskilled worker in industry.

As things were at the first of this year, university salaries in general were little more than half what they would have to be to permit universities to bid for qualified personnel.

It is heartening to learn from news reports that the inadequacy in university salaries is beginning to be rectified. Some universities, among them McGill and Toronto, have announced increases this year.

Winning public support

D. W. Ambridge, president of Abitibi Power and Paper Company Limited, told the National Conference on Engineering, Scientific and Technical Manpower: "A crying need, especially in this country, is for some organization which can regularly bring industry and the universities together to talk about the future . . . I seldom hear of any university, or what is going on in it, until they start a campaign for funds."

This feeling was confirmed by Msgr. H. J. Somers, president of St. Francis Xavier University, in an address to the National Conference of Canadian Universities. He said: "The public did not know the work of the universities unless they happened to be members of our governing bodies. Let us admit that our public relations, generally speaking, were deplorable with our own alumni, not to speak of industry or the public."

In solving their difficulties, the universities need the whole-hearted support of every Canadian. To obtain it, they must make themselves heard and state clearly and plainly what it is they are trying to do and what help they need. Perhaps they can use more than they do now the "open house" device so successful in industry. As things are, practically the only contact the parent of a student has with the university is to sit on the campus on graduation day.

If both those who seek the support and those who are solicited for their support will put forth the necessary effort at explanation and understanding in a "let's get together" spirit, we need not worry about the outcome. Foreseeing the deplorable consequences of apathy; being guided toward the most desirable course to follow; then, if we have even moderate courage and decision, we can solve our problem of higher education.