

Introduction

New Perspectives on the Business University

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New Proposals Editorial Collective

While everybody knew that EMU's new Mission had something to do with making money and not much to do with education, the exact form of words for saying this without causing offence had not been found [...]. In the end, Callum Wormleighton had suggested what they'd all suspected from the beginning, that the meaningless challenge of framing EMU's Mission in a few choice and memorable words and then writing the text around it that rang with laudable hyperbole [...] was yet another task that might best be handed over to the V-C's favourite team of management consultants. (Oakley 1999:89-90)

In her satirical novel *Overheads*, Ann Oakley weaves a story about people caught up in the intensified corporatization of a British university in the 1990s. A novelist and sociologist with first-hand experience in academia on which to draw, Ann Oakley provides a cleverly executed critique of this process through the lens of fiction. The last few decades have generated a variety of other, mostly non-fiction, writings about how corporatization is being instituted in universities around the world, the intersections between changes in the organization of universities and other aspects of the workings of global capitalism, and resistance to both. In one section of his book *Universities for Sale*, Neil Tudiver defines "the corporate university" as a structure that "replaces the traditional learning centre concept of providing services with a profit centre model of selling commodities" (Tudiver 1999:155). On the same page, he reminds his readers that the struggle against

this process is not all that new, citing Harold Innis' 1946 statement that "the descent of the university into the market place reflects the lie in the soul of modern society" (Innis 1946:76). Andrea Levy also recently recalled E. P. Thompson's "The Business University" (Levy 2005:17) in which he addresses the question of conflict and student protest at the University of Warwick in 1970. Thompson notes that "it might be thought that we have here already, very nearly, the 'private university,' in symbiotic relationship with the aims and ethos of industrial capitalism, but built within a shell of public money and public legitimation" (Thompson 1970:304). He describes a 1968 contract to "a firm of industrial consultants" whose job it was "to carry out an investigation into the administrative structure at Warwick" (Thompson 1970:303). Among their observations was this conclusion:

Taken as a whole, the university is certainly inefficient by normal commercial or industrial standards [...]. Assuming for no stated reason that the university's policy demanded a rapid rate of expansion it cautiously recommended 'economies' to further this by means of an increase in the ratio of students to staff. [Thompson 1970:303]

All of this sounds very familiar in 2010. Thompson's eloquent description of the effect that this kind of assault on labour and education (under the guise of rhetoric such as 'improvements' and 'new policies') can have also reminds me of many informal descriptions I have heard of people's experiences of

the current period:

Until recently the system was so opaque that few can be accused of seeing it in more than an episodic way. The staff could only see its consequences—these rows, these frustrations, this or that administrative hang-up. Collectively, all of us—all we liberal academics—were struck with a paralysis of will as the system not only grew round us, but built us into its own body-walls. Once inside there it looked as if we were running our bit of the show: but the show itself was being directed towards other ends. [Thompson 1970:303]

Following Power (1994), Shore and Wright (2000) would say that another way of describing this process is that individuals and units have played an active role in making their institutions “into an auditable commodity” (Shore and Wright 2000:72). Many recent publications have examined the impact of specific pressures to shift the focus in universities from teaching, learning, and research to other priorities. These pressures have included an emphasis on: the commercialization of research, the search for corporate donations and private-public ‘partnerships’ to fund basic university infrastructure as well as specific programs and research projects, the expansion of tiers of insecurely-employed instructors and staff, the search for new ways of competing with other universities and units for student tuition money, and attempts to promote self-interested individualism and competition among workers. As Shore and Wright (2000) point out, we must look in part to the role played by individuals and units within universities as part of the structural transformation of the university. An example common on many North American university campuses is faculty members taking on simplistic and often flawed auditing practices as valid instruments for assessing merit and need. One particularly insidious instance of this kind of competition is faculty members’ attempts to manipulate the results of industrially-produced (and commoditized) course evaluation systems to make themselves look better than their colleagues. This is particularly insidious because of its potentially damaging impact on students as well as colleagues. It is discouraging that faculty members who were socialized (in some measure) to provide students with access to training in critical thinking and to promote collegiality

are colluding so thoroughly with universities’ structural push to maintain and increase tuition income partially through grade inflation and reduced standards. This collusion has been occurring even though academic labour unions have sought to protect workers from having to engage in it; for instance, many collective agreements have language that protects the standard of scholarly competence in teaching. Another example is when colleagues fall into university administrations’ attempts to ‘divide and rule’ units such as departments and faculties by encouraging a sometimes destructive competition for student enrollment, donations, contracts, and other ‘auditable’ measures (after Shore and Wright 2000:72) with the structural lure of potential resources.

Neil Tudiver (1999) and others have demonstrated how forms of corporatization are linked to reduced public funding for post-secondary institutions in many countries; they have also discussed the serious detrimental effects these forms have on those who labour and study in universities, and the importance of resistance. Opponents of corporatization in Canada and other countries have also closely scrutinized the sort of shifts that Thompson (1970), Oakley (1999), Shore and Wright (2000) and others traced for the case of British universities—the impact of corporatization on the way universities are reorganized internally (e.g. Whiteley, Aguiar, and Marten 2008).

In a recent issue of the mainstream Canadian news magazine *Maclean’s*, former university consultant W. D. Smith points to a recent study using Statistics Canada data on the budgets of 25 of the country’s universities with the highest enrollments which demonstrates a serious decline in the percentage of universities’ operating funds spent on “instruction and non-sponsored research” (Smith 2010:50). This figure has gone from 65 per cent of operating expenses in 1988 to 58 per cent in 2009 (2010:50). Smith indicates that the gap has likely been spent on the ballooning university bureaucracies found throughout the country, noting that this trend may parallel patterns elsewhere in the world and is tied to universities having “appointed highly driven executives who, in turn, have built burgeoning support teams” (Smith 2010:50).

This reorganization has led to the growing reli-

ance on “flexible” “contingent faculty” (e.g. Turk 2008: 299); shifts in the relationships between management, workers, and students; reduced roles for bodies such as university senates; and even destructive changes in the collegial relationships among education workers. This situation has led to increased labour and student militancy in some contexts.

In this issue of *New Proposals*, all of the contributors address both the institutionalization of corporatization and ways to resist it. The arresting poster represented on the front cover of this issue was generously provided to us by one of the participants in the student protest movement discussed by Eudurne Bagué, Núria Comerma, and Ignasi Terradas. In their proposal, they provide a compelling analysis of the impact of neoliberal reforms being instituted in European universities in the context of the demonstrations and occupation of the Chancellor’s Office at the University of Barcelona that occurred in late fall of 2008. The reforms being protested vehemently by these students are associated with “The Bologna Declaration” which was signed by 29 countries in 1999 with the broad goal of converging their education systems. The number of signatories grew to reach 49 countries by the spring of 2009. The implementation phase is known as the “Bologna process” and has generated strong resistance.¹ Drawing on theoretical concepts from Marx, Foucault, and de Tocqueville, the authors of this proposal demonstrate how current attempts to intensively restructure universities in Europe can be examined through concepts such as technologies, alienation, formal and real subsumption and democratic despotism. They argue that “we are now at a turning point in history” and that such

1 Another example is the series of protests throughout Austria in fall of 2009 which also culminated with occupations including the taking over of locations such as the largest lecture hall in the country, the Audimax at the University of Vienna in October (Salzmann and Stern 2009). Demonstrations and occupations against restructuring have also taken place during this same time period on other continents, such as those at the University of California, Santa Cruz and other campuses in the University of California system where students are protesting, among other things, a 32 per cent hike in their tuition fees. As in the situation at the University of Barcelona, police force has been used to confront protesters (Cohen 2009).

analysis is necessary to undo and resist the “increasing bias which conflates the right to study with the conjunctural needs of capital” (p. 10). In their Addendum, they report on the violent clashes with police that occurred on March 18, 2009.

Andrew J. Rihn’s original intervention into debates about corporatization is written from the perspective of an undergraduate student who acts in a peer tutoring capacity in his university. He argues that facilities such as the Writing Center he works in represent “borderlands” where he and his colleagues gain insight into “when students are served by their institution and when they are not” (p. 20). Moreover, because writing centers “can serve as safe places for students afflicted in the classroom,” he notes, “they can also serve as points of agitation to the system and, by their very nature, resist the corporate model” (p. 22). The examples he provides of resistance, including the distribution of condoms and fresh fruit and the initiation of conversations about racism and sexism on campus, along with advice about writing, demonstrate how individuals and units can help remake universities.

The inspired and insightful article by John F. Welsh, E. Wayne Ross, and Kevin D. Vinson builds on some of the theoretical work of Foucault and Debord to examine the restructuring of postsecondary education in American states such as Kentucky, Kansas, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Montana since the late 1990s. They argue that key elements of such restructuring were the institution of forms of increased surveillance and what they term “the spectacularization of reform” (p. 25). Moreover, “in the contemporary milieu of advanced capitalism, the fusion of surveillance and spectacle produces, maintains, and propagates controlling images” (p. 27). They explain, for example, that “performance indicators and categorical funding programs” became “hegemonic images” that are “celebrations of the domination of social life and the educational process by capital and the state” (p. 34). They then turn to Foucault’s and Debord’s ideas about resistance, such as the “logic of revolt,” *dérive* and *détournement* and how these might be applied in the context of postsecondary institutions.

In his essay, Charles R. Menzies uses critical

autoethnography to develop an analysis of the emergence and impact of the “university of excellence.” His chronologically-organized account helpfully tracks how specific structural shifts from the 1980s to the present paralleled his own historical movement from student to faculty activist. He provides a detailed analysis of how individuals’ class backgrounds and personal experiences with various forms of activism, as well as their structural positions within university institutions, affect their approaches to radical action and solidarity during specific moments. One of the detailed examples he recounts is the 1990 student strike and occupation at CUNY when he was a doctoral student. He discusses how his own engagement with working class and indigenous struggles from the time of his childhood and adolescence gave him and some of his classmates a different perspective on “radical democratic practice” and the importance of solidarity and concrete ties with other students, trade unions, and other local movements than those participants who practiced what he came to term “militant liberalism.”

This issue concludes with two book reviews which are linked to the overall focus. In the first review, I discuss Peter Worsley’s book about his life and work: *An Academic Skating on Thin Ice* (Berghahn Books, 2009). The second review by Dianne West addresses the contributions to a recent collection edited by Adrienne S. Chan and Donald Fisher entitled *The Exchange University: Corporatization of Academic Culture* (University of British Columbia Press, 2008).

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