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Higher Education and the New Men of Power in Society

It is to the place of higher education in our society that discussion in this paper is directed. The concern here, however, is not with the need of extending the benefits of a higher education, nor with the problem of securing the necessary financial support for such an extension. That need has been well demonstrated and that problem fully explored by the Commission on the Financing of Higher Education in Canada established by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.[1] What this paper is concerned with is the problem of the consequences for society when a large part, but by no means the whole, of our body of young people are provided with the benefits of a university education. It is about the young people left behind — those young people who, for one reason or another, fail to mount the educational ladder to success and whose position in society, as a consequence of the growing importance of higher education, worsens relatively rather than improves. Nothing that is said in this regard should be taken to suggest that we ought to slacken in any degree our efforts to extend the benefits of a higher education. If, underlying the discussion in this paper, there is implied an end to which we should strive it is that the whole of our population should eventually come to enjoy the benefits of such an education, whether secured in a university or some other type of institution. But the realization of such an end is not yet in sight, and in the meantime it is urgent to take account of the consequences for society of the very considerably increased importance which has been given to higher education.

What has happened in the past fifty years, and particularly in the years since the Second World War, is a development that can truly be described as a revolution in our society. Increasingly, in government, business, philanthropy, and in the management of community affairs, there has been a turning to the man with a university education. For many positions where once nothing more at most than a high school education was required, a bachelor of arts degree at least is now demanded. The vast extension in our society of the facilities for a higher education, and the greatly increased proportion of the population provided the benefits of

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[1] *Financing Higher Education in Canada,* Report of a Commission to the Association of Universities & Colleges of Canada (Toronto & Laval, 1965).

such an education, are a reflection of the changed character of the world of work in which we now live.

It is scarcely necessary to detail the beneficial consequences for society at large of the new role which has come to be played in it by higher education. Two of the most obvious, however, should be mentioned since they have relevance to what later this paper has to say.

The increased importance of higher education in our society is directly related to the much higher standard of living we have come to enjoy. The investment in higher education, as the report of the Commission on the Financing of Higher Education in Canada convincingly demonstrates, has proved a good investment. Society reaps the benefits in vastly more efficient forms of management and means of production, and these benefits have been spread out over the whole population. The rich may be becoming richer but so are the poor. Large segments of our population which a generation or two ago could not hope to aspire to anything more than a subsistence standard of living now enjoy the kind of amenities which once only the rich could afford. The automobile, the summer cottage, the outboard motor boat, indeed even the winter in Florida, are items of consumption of the carpenter and factory worker almost as much as of the surgeon or banker. If the chauffeur and butler have survived at all, they have only as an expression of taste of the eccentric rich. In style of life, we have gone a long way in closing the gaps between social classes.

Still more, the spread of the benefits of higher education in our society has done much to remove the social barriers which once existed to movement from one social class to another. Education is a social leveller. Whatever his social origins, the man educated and highly trained can command the leading positions in our society — in government, business, the church, and the community at large. The advantages are no longer with the man of good family, of aristocratic background; nor with the man who attains his position through wealth or demagogic appeal. The business executive, army general, or politician, in pressing the acceptance of his views, may sputter and fume, but he knows that in the end it is the judgment of the engineer, economist, accountant, scientist or such which must prevail, for only he possesses the knowledge that makes judgment possible.

In the long-run interests of society there can be little reason for deploring the importance now attached to a university education. It is a complex world in which people live and it is becoming more so. The time was when mistakes in the management of society's affairs had no serious consequences. People lived very much to themselves, and what happened in one small part of the world had little effect upon other parts. In the kind of world we live in today, however, mistakes on the part of men in charge of the conduct of affairs can bring disaster to great large areas of the world; indeed, to the world as a whole. Thus surrounding governments, businesses, armies, churches, social agencies and such, there must now be staffs of highly trained technical persons alive to the consequences of

every action that is taken. Even the most innocent appearing act, of a government or business corporation, may have repercussions of a sort which only a computer could predict.

Society is the richer by this vast extension of the body of human knowledge and by the development of means by which this knowledge can be preserved and transmitted. But the price paid by society, at least for some time to come, because of its increased dependence upon knowledge cannot be overlooked. Knowledge, in increasingly large areas, has ceased to be something shared in by the whole population, the man of knowledge being distinguished from the man without only by the amount of knowledge he possessed. Once every man could be something of an economist, physicist or military strategist, and self-education offered a means of climbing to the highest rungs of learning. Today, however, the laboratory of the scientist, or even of the economist or psychologist, represents a world of learning which can only be penetrated by those who have undergone the scholastically prescribed form of training. The air of mystery surrounding the ministrations of the medicine man of old was as nothing compared with the air of mystery surrounding the ministrations of the man of scientific training today.

The consequences of this change in the character of knowledge, and the increased dependence now placed upon the man of knowledge, has been to create new, sharp divisions in society.[2] While education has done much to narrow the gap between social classes, where the privileged social class owed its position to family background or wealth, and to make easier movement from one social class to another, it threatens, on the other side, to create a new set of social class divisions to take the place of the set it destroyed. The college man no longer stands out, as he once did, as one in a small group in society set apart to do only a very special kind of job: practice medicine or the law, teach in the university, serve in the priesthood or the ministry, or the like. Then he could be accorded respect — but not feared — because he commanded no great power, and his manner of life did not sharply separate him from the people he served. It was truly an elite, not a social class, to which he belonged.

The man of education, however, is no longer a member of a very small — and politically powerless — social elite. He commands the most important posts in government, industry, finance, mass communication and even entertainment, and because of the great power he wields he very much can be distrusted or even feared. Still more, his manner of life — the self-assurance he displays in mode of dress and speech, the easy informality which characterizes his social relations, his conversational skills — can arouse among persons deprived of his educational and social advantages strong feelings of envy and resentment. The strength of anti-intellectual forces in society today, and the widespread revolt of young

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[2]For a general discussion of the stratification system of Canadian society see John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto, 1965).

persons, in urban areas and in small town and rural communities, against what might be called middle class social values, are a consequence in very large part of the new social divisions which have been created by giving to education such an important place in society.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the strength in our society today of anti-intellectual forces; or the danger of such forces. The appeal made by Mr. Diefenbaker to the Canadian electorate in 1957-58 gained much of its strength from the attack made upon what was called the Liberal Establishment. It was the smart economists in Ottawa that people were made to fear. What was wrong with the government was not its mismanagement of affairs but its arrogance. Mr. Diefenbaker promised to return government to the people.

In the end, anti-intellectual forces are bound to blow themselves out. But the damage done by such anti-intellectual movements in the course of their development can nevertheless be very great. Scarcely more than a century ago western society faced the problem of attempting to achieve a condition of stability in a situation where a large part of the population was illiterate. Today western society faces the problem of attempting to achieve a condition of stability in a situation where a large part of the population is denied the advantages which come from a university education. The issues that arise are seldom defined in a way as to bring into the open such divisions in society. The social and political upheavals of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fastened attention upon very real economic grievances. So, as well, have those social and political upheavals which have occurred in recent years. But, if economic issues appeared to dominate, in the political and social upheavals of an earlier time, and the recent past, there was no hiding the underlying resentment and fear of the population subject to a leadership which had become separated from it by style of life and way of thinking.

From the ivory tower of the social scientist it is possible to describe as misguided that section of the population which lets itself become caught up in extremist movements of various sorts. In such a manner has been described the following of Mr. Diefenbaker in 1957-58. But for the kind of attack made upon it by Mr. Diefenbaker, the so-called Liberal Establishment in Ottawa must be held in part accountable. The man who knows the answers can too easily display an attitude of impatience towards the man who does not, in a way that assumes a character of arrogance. What, indeed, was wrong with the Liberal Government in Ottawa in 1957 was that it was too good a government. It was a government that knew the right things to do from the wrong. But, surrounded by a body of highly competent technical advisors, it had after long years in office grown weary of the task of trying to explain to the public in language that it understood what was being done. The arrogance of the Liberal Establishment came close to reflecting the arrogance of the university educated person to the person denied the advantages of a university education.

If it is not possible to exaggerate the strength of anti-intellectual forces in our society today — or the danger of such forces — neither is it possible to exaggerate the extent and seriousness of the revolt of young persons against the values and moral standards of our society. We need not turn only to the example of Negro youth in the United States, or of the youth gangs of New York City, to find evidence of an increase in forms of delinquent and lawless behaviour among large sections of our youthful population. In every city and in every small town, in this country and the United States, there is apparent among large numbers of young people a feeling of resentment and indeed hostility to persons in authority.

It is not suggested that all those young people denied the advantage of a university education become social delinquents. But it is suggested that delinquency is a manifestation of feelings of insecurity and resentment which develop among young persons who find themselves deprived of the kinds of material and social rewards which other young people enjoy, and that it has assumed urgency today because of the wide social gap that has developed between such persons and persons given the advantage of a university education. The swagger of the hoodlum — the type of jacket he wears, the way the cigarette is let droop from his mouth, the language used — is intended to convey an air of bravado but in reality it conceals a deep feeling of unease and, indeed, even fear. There are so many doors in our society closed to such a young person.

For the great bulk of the young people entering its halls, the chief function of a university is to make gentlemen of them. It has always been so. But a century ago it was a highly select group of young people, chosen largely in terms of wealth and family background, who went to university and were made by it into gentlemen. In the Britain of the nineteenth century, only a very few careers, such as those of the foreign service, the army and the church, required persons who possessed the kind of self-assurance, easy mode of speech and polished manners which a university training provided. Today, however, in almost all branches of the public service, in business, finance, insurance, and in many other areas, there is a demand for the sort of person a university produces. In university, the raw youngster of eighteen years, awkward in his manners of speech and behaviour, is turned into a man with considerable self-assurance, possessed of a facility for relating himself easily to other people, and persuading them of his views.

The consequence is a widening social gap between forms of employment requiring those personal qualities possessed by the university educated and those forms of employment which do not. This gap shows up, as a recent study by two Canadian sociologists clearly demonstrates, in the work world of the male.[3] Our high schools do a fairly successful job of turning awkward fourteen-year-old girls into poised ladies of eighteen.

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[3]Oswald Hall & Bruce McFarlane, *Transition from School to Work* (Ottawa, 1963).

The high school system is agreeable to the girl, but disagreeable to the boy. In high school, the girl is able to prepare herself for the demands of the adult world without having to rebel against the system, and, without necessarily being academically highly successful, she can move out of the high school at grades ten or eleven, secure training for such a vocation as secretarial work, nursing, school teaching and continue to dress, speak and behave in the manner of a young lady. In her way of life she is not set off from the girl who proceeds through high school on to university. Nylon stockings have been an important social leveller among the female sex.

The boy, in contrast, can survive the high school system only by gaining distinction in athletics or by becoming academically highly proficient. If he survives, he will, on the average, achieve greater success than the girl; there are few outstanding female lawyers, surgeons, scientists, or business executives. But if he fails to survive, there is no easy route marked out for the boy's entry into the work world. He may, if wisely guided, enter a trade school or undertake some form of apprenticeship. But the temptation is very strong to enter upon a form of employment that makes no demand of training — work in a service station, truck driving, factory labour and such. There were avenues of occupational advancement once open to boys which required no special training. The bank clerk who could aspire to becoming a bank president was a conspicuous example. But much of such work now at the lower levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy becomes defined as "women's work." "Man's work," for the boy entering employment at a level which demands no special training, tends to be associated with manners of dress, speech and behaviour which socially sharply differentiate him from the boy engaged in employment requiring such training. A consciousness of difference leads to a vigorous assertion of difference. The black leather jacket cannot be mistaken for the college jacket.

There are, of course, in the move of young people out of the school into the adult world and the world of work, casualties among the girls as well as among the boys. Every large city has its quota of female delinquents. But this is no new problem in society, and measured in terms of numbers is not of large proportions. The problem of delinquency as we know it today is a problem of our male youth. More than that, it is a problem of our male youth in particular sectors of our society. There is a very much higher incidence of juvenile delinquency among children of working class parents than among children of middle class.[4] If our school system favours girls over boys, among boys it favours those of middle class upbringing over those of working class. It is not only economic pressures which force the working class boy out of the school system into the world of work without adequate preparation. There is much about this school system that is repugnant to him. It is a conveyor of middle class social values.

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[4]Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys* (Glencoe, 1955).

Forced into revolt against the school system, the working class boy too often is forced into revolt against society. He finds himself left behind, deprived of the social regard accorded the boy who survived the school system, and, proceeding on to university, becomes successfully established in the adult world. Social class divisions prevailing in one generation, thus, shift their basis and become reinforced in the next.

The revolt of young people against middle class social values is a problem which has become much more apparent in the United States than in Canada. On the one side, the advantages of a university education have been extended to a much larger segment of the population. On the other side, with the gathering in the cities of great numbers of Negro youth, the social deprivations of the non-university educated show up in much more stark fashion. The young Negroes who ran wild in Watts County in the Spring of 1965 live in a vastly different world to that lived in by university educated young Americans, yet it is a world separated from the other by only a few city blocks.

We can applaud the achievement of the United States in making more available to its young people the advantages of a university education, but the consequences of such a development in creating new sharp divisions in the society must be recognized. Manifestations of widespread revolt among American youth, paradoxically, are not unrelated to the widening of opportunities in American society for a university education. Negro young people in the United States today are better off than they have ever been, but not only has their social position worsened in relative terms, it has been made very much more visible.

In Canada, on the one side, we have not created as large a socially advantaged class of university educated young people as has the United States, and, on the other side, there have not gathered in our cities as large and conspicuous a body of socially deprived young people. But we are moving rapidly in the direction of making a university education more widely available to our young people; and, in our cities, there is being produced a body of young people who, deprived of a university education, are becoming increasingly conscious of their socially disadvantaged position. To a very large extent, it is out of the poor farm areas of Canada that these socially disadvantaged young people are coming. A very great number of them are young people of French-Canadian origin.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the cities of North America grew by the recruiting of a population from overseas. In the literature of sociology there are a vast number of studies relating to the problems of the assimilation of the immigrant. For long, sociologists did not talk about social class divisions in American society. Attention was largely directed to ethnic divisions. There was, of course, a working class, but so closely identified was this class with the European immigrant that it largely became defined in ethnic terms. Thus in studies of the problems of young people of the urban community, emphasis tended to be placed

upon their immigrant heritage. The problems were rightly viewed as those of the second-generation immigrant.

Today, however, sociological literature has shifted away from a concern about ethnic divisions in society to a concern about social class divisions. We talk now a good deal about social class life styles, and, in dealing with the problem of young people in the urban community, tend largely to relate that problem to working-class parentage. It can be demonstrated that the rate of juvenile delinquency is much higher among children of working-class than among children of middle-class parents. What tends to get overlooked in the sociological literature, however, is the fact that a great part of the working-class population of the urban community today is as much a migrant population as was the working-class population a generation ago. The only difference is that this is a population that has moved into the urban community from rural areas within America rather than from outside. Thus, so often when we speak of urban young people of working-class parents, what we are really talking about are urban young people of parents of farm background.

In the shift from a dependence upon the recruitment of population from overseas to a dependence upon the recruitment of population from rural areas, the Canadian city, in its development, is about two decades behind the American. Canada has experienced a very large post-war immigration. Canadian sociologists thus tend still to think very much in terms of the ethnic problem. We have mounted in recent years a great number of studies of ethnic groups in Canada: Italians, Ukranians, Poles, Germans, and the like. But no study has been undertaken of the Canadian rural migrant. Yet in fact, in Canada, urban growth in the past twenty years is to be explained far more in terms of migration from rural areas than migration from Europe.

Where the migration was one out of prosperous farm areas no serious problem of adjustment resulted. The boy brought up on the farm who was educated in a way to meet the demands of the urban work world had no great difficulty in fitting himself into the society of which he became a part. In much of North America, differences between rural and urban have largely disappeared. The farmer, equipped with all the amenities of the city, has come to live, and think and behave, like a city man. He has come to have the same aspirations, the same driving ambition, not only to better his lot, but the lot of the offspring that he has reared. What has happened has been an extension of middle-class social values out of the city into the country. Where, under such circumstances, there results a movement of population out of the country into the city the problems of adjustment are little more than those associated with the occupational shift which so often occurs between one generation and the next.

But where farm settlement led to the occupation of land badly suited for farm purposes (whether because of soil, climate or distance from markets), there could occur no great extension of middle-class social values out of the city to the country. The conditions of life in the depressed

rural community offered little preparation to that element of the population which was forced out of the rural community into the urban. What resulted was a movement only part way into the urban society. It was the proximity of the urban community to depressed rural communities which made possible such a partial movement. The migrant from poor farm areas in Canada could for a very long time in effect camp on the edge of the urban society without becoming a part of it. It is from such areas that our urban communities have drawn heavily their population in recent years.

For long we have been committed to the view that the rural life is the good life. Until only a few years ago, as a consequence, public policy has been directed to the end of putting people on farms. Where this policy led to the settlement of such fertile areas as the Annapolis Valley, the St. Lawrence Valley, Western Ontario and much of the Western Provinces, there were created thriving agricultural communities. But colonization efforts were not limited to the settlement of people on good farm land. Wherever land was available on which some sort of agriculture could be carried forward, settlement was undertaken. In the province of Quebec, farm settlement of this sort assumed very considerable proportions.

Quebec was perhaps no more committed than the rest of Canada to the view that the rural life was the good life, but because of the resources at its command, particularly in the Catholic Church, it was much more successful in achieving the end of putting its people on the land. The contrast between Ontario and Quebec in this respect was striking. In the eighteen sixties, millions of dollars were spent by the Ontario Government in the effort to settle the pre-Cambrian shield, but all that resulted were a few scattered pockets of settlement. Similarly, the efforts to settle the Great Clay Belt of Northern Ontario proved largely a failure; indeed, they would have proved an almost complete failure had there not occured settlement in this area out of the province of Quebec. In contrast, within the province of Quebec, there is scarcely an area where a farm can be carved out and which can be reached by a road that has not been settled. Quebec sought vigorously to maintain its culture by extending ever further out the boundaries of its rural society.

Until 1940, or thereabouts, Quebec was highly successful in achieving the end of putting its people on the land and, indeed, in keeping them there. But even land that would support a subsistence agriculture ran out, and, with rising expectations of an acceptable standard of living, there has been occurring since about 1940 a large-scale migration of people out of rural areas in the province of Quebec into urban areas. The problem of French Canada today is the problem of transforming into an urban population a population that is highly rural.

Here the concern is not with those great masses of people drawn from the depressed rural areas of the Ottawa Valley, Lake St. John, Abitibi and Timiskaming, which have come to make up a very large part of the working-class population of the new industrial cities of Quebec and, indeed,

as well, of Ontario and New Brunswick. The concern is with the new generation of French Canadians growing up in these cities of parents of such rural background.[5] There is a mounting wave of delinquency and crime in the urban centres of the province of Quebec. Though we need to know more about what is happening, it would seem clear that these manifestations of social disorganization are closely related to the socially disadvantaged position so many young French Canadians find themselves in, growing up in an urban environment without the skills, aptitudes, social values, manners of speech and behaviour which make possible a successful adjustment to the urban world of work and social living.

The very rapid extension of the facilities of higher education by the province of Quebec within the last few years represents an effort to prepare its young people for life in an urban-industrial society. There has, indeed, been a quiet revolution going on in French Canada. A major break-through in education has occurred at all levels.

But if in Canada generally, and in the United States, the effect of the widening of the opportunities for a university education has been to accentuate the division in society between the socially advantaged and disadvantaged, that has been even more the case in French Canada. In political and religious structure, French Canada has always been a highly bureaucratic type of society. Today, with the effort to secure a greater degree of control over its own affairs, it is moving rapidly in the direction of becoming a highly bureaucratic type of society in economic structure as well. The young university-trained French Canadian is taking his rightful place in the economic life of his province by becoming a part of an economic order over which he has some control: Quebec Hydro offers an obvious example. But far from all young French Canadians are becoming university trained, and, with avenues of advancement increasingly determined within a bureaucratic economic, and political and ecclesiastical, order, the gap between the socially advantaged and the disadvantaged in the rapidly growing urban centres of French Canada is widening. Much has been heard in recent years from the new middle class of French Canada; the university campus, the coffee shop, the political arena provide an effective platform for the airing of grievances. But from those young French Canadians gathered in the cities who are not equipped to make their way in the new industrial-urban society in which they find themselves, nothing is heard, unless count is taken of acts of delinquency and crime.

It is not only in French Canada that are to be found great numbers of young people who are not equipped to make their way in the new industrial-urban society in which they find themselves. We might well be alarmed if we knew more about what is happening to those young people in the Canadian city from Northern Ontario, eastern Nova Scotia, New-

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[5]See Yves De Jocas & Guy Rocher, "Inter-Generation Occupational Mobility in the Province of Quebec," *Canadian Journal of Economics & Political Science* 33, (Feb. 1957), pp. 58-66.

foundland, or northern parts of the western prairies. We are today paying a heavy price for a public policy which permitted to develop and persist areas of rural settlement in which people could not make a decent living. The result is the gathering in our cities of great masses of young people who are yet far from ready to take advantage of whatever opportunities for a higher education may be offered them. We need certainly, in this country, to vastly expand the facilities for a higher education. We need more universities, and we need to make these universities better. There can be no compromise in the ends of a university education. Universities are not community colleges, developed to meet the immediate needs of the communities in which they are situated. But if this is so, it only gives emphasis to the importance of developing types of educational institutions which serve very different needs of our society. The high school drop-out is, indeed, a casualty of our educational system that we cannot afford to ignore.

One, indeed, can be hopeful about the future. But it is not to the future that this paper addresses itself. The young people of today will be the grown men of tomorrow, and whatever shape the education of the future may take, it will have nothing to offer those who, now reaching manhood, have failed to secure its benefits. We are passing today into a world that can only be manned by highly trained persons. It is a world in which the untrained are coming to fit badly. Power is shifting to new classes in society. There is being created today, as a result, a deep gulf in society between the people who are educated and people who are not; and, if history teaches anything it is the precariousness of the position of any group of people who are privileged if they seek to insulate themselves, whether socially or intellectually, from the non-privileged. The social-class system of England survived and was transformed because it provided against making arrogant the privileged class. On the Continent of Europe it was an arrogant upper class which invited its own ruin. The competence to perform the tasks they are called upon to undertake establishes the claim of the university educated in our society to a position of social privilege. But it is only a very narrow line indeed which separates a claim to competence from arrogance.