

Cicero Versus Socrates: The Liberal Arts Debate in the 1960s at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus

James M. Pitsula

“The history of liberal education is the story of a debate between orators and philosophers.”¹

Thus begins Bruce Kimball’s discussion of the fundamental ideas underlying the purposes of liberal arts education from ancient times to the present. His interpretative framework is used here to throw light on the curricular debates that took place in the 1960s at the Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan. As Kimball points out, there has been for some time a great deal of confusion surrounding the term “liberal education.” Some writers choose an operational definition (“the kind of education which a liberal arts college provides”); others opt for a “basket” approach, collecting together in haphazard fashion all the “educational goods” that a liberal education is supposed to provide; and still others fasten upon a particular value, such as “the pursuit of truth for its own sake,” and assert that it must be at the core of liberal studies. Definitions are frequently bolstered by appeals to history, frequently to the words and methods of Socrates, but in many cases the historical references employed are tendentious, incomplete, or unbalanced.²

The value of Kimball’s work is that he has undertaken a thorough, systematic survey of how the term “liberal education” has been understood through the centuries, and, more than that, he has developed a typology which helps us sort out what people are talking about when they make various claims on the subject. He puts forward two distinct categories, the “oratorical” and the “philosophical,” each with an internal consistency of its own, but

1 Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), 2.

2 *Ibid.*, 4-5.

in a state of tension with the other. The first he identifies with Cicero, who set forth his ideas about education in *De Oratore* and in whose writings we find the first recorded use of the term *artes liberales*. The second he traces to Socrates, who represents what Kimball calls the “liberal-free” ideal. Each is an abstract, ideal type, and neither is to be understood as providing a literal or complete description of liberal education as manifested in a particular historical setting. Each type represents a general pattern, a cluster of ideas, a stream of thought. Although the framework does not explain everything, it proves very useful for analyzing the liberal arts discussions at Regina in the 1960s, which is best understood as a debate between “orators” and “philosophers.”

The oratorical tradition (also known as the *artes liberales* ideal) has as its primary goal the education of citizens of superior virtue “capable of addressing any topic and assuming any position of leadership in the state.” It originally referred to the training of an elite, but in a democracy it applies to the entire population, since all citizens have a share in ruling, at least to the extent of casting a vote. The oratorical tradition emphasizes general education as preparation for active citizenship. It assumes that truth can be known and expressed, and that classical texts provide insight into the nature of truth and goodness. The responsibility of the individual for the well-being of the community is emphasized over the freedom of the individual for self-fulfilment.³

The Socratic/philosophical or “liberal-free” ideal emphasizes the freedom to search for truth, an “endeavor that liberates the mind from the chains of its shadowy cave of ignorance.” It is characterized by critical scepticism, systematic doubt, tolerance of other viewpoints, and individual personal growth as against obligations owed to the community. The pursuit of truth is valued for its own sake; it is an eternal quest that never attains its goal. Kimball argues that the liberal-free ideal became increasingly prevalent in North America in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Specialized research came to dominate the university, and scientific techniques were applied to new areas of investigation, including the “social sciences.” Specialization led to the development of undergraduate “majors” and “minors” and the organization of

3 Ibid., 37-38.

faculty members into departments, each identified with a particular discipline. Another indication of the ascendancy of the liberal-free ideal was the movement in undergraduate programs away from compulsory to elective courses. The student was given more freedom to choose what he wanted to study, the implication being that one subject could not be judged intrinsically more important than another.⁴

The 1960s were a particularly turbulent period for higher education. The upheaval had many dimensions – increasing enrolments, rapid expansion, baby boomers coming of age, economic prosperity, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and student power – but there was also conflict over the nature of liberal education.⁵ Paul Axelrod, in his study of Ontario universities, finds that a greater variety of courses and programs were offered, and compulsory course requirements lifted. There was “increasing concern about overspecialization,” reflected, for example, in revisions to the curriculum at the University of Western Ontario in 1964, where the practice of providing separate courses for science and arts students was replaced by a new common first-year program. York University attempted to apply general education theories in a comprehensive and holistic fashion. To prevent “narrow specialization,” it required all first-year students to take interdisciplinary courses in social sciences, humanities, and natural science. Axelrod does not closely analyze the curricular debates in Ontario or delve deeply into why innovations took place, other than to highlight the significance of American influences on Canadian educational reforms. His account makes clear that it was a time of considerable ferment in the undergraduate curriculum.⁶

Patricia Jasen examines the issue from the perspective of leftist student activists who attacked liberal arts programs for their failure to communicate “human values.” They were geared instead to training students “for jobs they did not want” and indoctrinating them “to be passive workers and consumers instead of politically active citizens.” Activists demanded that the curriculum be “relevant,” that is, that it provide a suitable

4 Ibid., 119-22; 161-67.

5 The best treatment of the sixties in Canada is Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

6 Paul Axelrod, *Scholars and Dollars: Politics, Economics, and the Universities of Ontario, 1945-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 103-5.

preparation for “a life of effective social action.” They distrusted “disinterested scholarship” and claims based on “objective” or “value-free” social science. Since the university was already deeply implicated in supporting the capitalist order and the military-industrial complex, they believed that protestations to the contrary were either naïve or disingenuous. The student critics also wanted a broadening of the curriculum to include such neglected subjects as third-world problems, non-Western religions, radical political movements, working-class history, aboriginal issues, and women’s studies. They called for more Canadian content in the humanities and social sciences, which tended to be dominated by American theory and content. Finally, activists deplored the fragmentation of knowledge through the proliferation of disciplines and sub-disciplines. Over-specialization was viewed as serving the career interests of professors rather than the educational needs of students. Unless students were allowed to see the “big picture” and obtain knowledge about society as a whole, they would be unable to take effective political action. From the activists’ perspective, an interdisciplinary approach was essential for a “truly relevant program of study.”⁷

Jasen’s account of the 1960s critique of the liberal arts is thorough and compelling, but it leaves the impression that students led the attack while the faculty represented the status quo. Faculty members at Regina Campus were deeply involved on both sides of the debate. Indeed, the faculty initiated the discussion and led the movement for change, with student activists coming along later in a secondary role. Secondly, Jasen presents the debate as something specific to the conditions of the sixties, especially the rise of the student power movement and the New Left. My argument here is that while debate was shaped and influenced by the social, political, and cultural context of the sixties, it was also a revival in a new setting of a much older debate.

The Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan is a particularly good case study for this inquiry because, as one of the “instant” campuses of the 1960s, it deliberately set out to do something different in liberal education from what had been

7 Patricia Jasen, “‘In Pursuit of Human Values (or Laugh When You Say That)’: The Student Critique of the Arts Curriculum in the 1960s,” in *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education*, ed. Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid (Kingston/Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 254-62.

done at the parent campus in Saskatoon. The faculty in Regina tried to look at the curriculum with fresh eyes, questioning the basic assumptions underlying it, and articulating liberal arts policy in a new way. Because of this innovative, experimental spirit, everything was, at least for a brief interval, “up for grabs.” As one professor wrote, “the liberal arts was on the anvil.”⁸

The Campus traces its origins to Regina College, an institution established by the Methodist Church in 1911 to provide secondary schooling up to and including Grade 12 (Senior Matriculation).⁹ The college became affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan in 1925 and began to offer the first year of the three-year B.A. program. The university, which took complete control of the college in 1934, resisted all efforts to introduce a full degree course in Regina until 1959, when the pressure of baby-boom enrolments forced a change in policy. The second year was offered in 1961 and the third year in 1964, which meant that the first graduating class received their degrees in the spring of 1965.

A Joint Committee of the University Council, Senate, and Board of Governors recommended in 1961 that the general pattern and structure of courses at the Regina Campus should follow the Saskatoon model. Colleges and departments were to be organized along the same lines, except that in the interim period, until the number of professors in Regina was large enough to warrant the formation of departments, faculty members would be grouped in Divisions, one for each of the Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Fine Arts.¹⁰ The University Council Committee on Regina College Expansion – Course Content and Staff advised that “no radical experiments should be attempted in Arts and Science at Regina for the time being and that development there should be similar to that of Saskatoon.”¹¹

Meanwhile, the faculty in Regina seized the initiative to shape a distinct philosophy and program for the B.A. degree. A powerful stimulus to this development was the speech given by Premier Woodrow Lloyd on 26 September 1963 at the

8 University of Regina Archives (URA), President's Office, 78-3, 400.18, Report to Faculty submitted by the Special Committee on Divisional Organization, Apr. 1963.

9 The details of this history are recounted in James M. Pitsula, *An Act of Faith: The Early Years of Regina College* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1988).

10 URA, University of Saskatchewan, Senate Minutes, 11 May 1960.

11 URA, Principal's Papers, 75-7, 102.1-4, A.C. McEown, “Report on the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus,” Sept. 1961.

cornerstone-laying ceremony for the first buildings on the new campus. He said that if all that had been required were new classrooms and laboratories, they could have been built just as easily in Saskatoon: "But something different can be done here – different and worthwhile and needed. So let me express the hope that this will not be just a small-scale model of that which has been done on the Saskatoon Campus."¹² He went on to criticize "ivory towerism," by which he meant the idea that a university should be detached or isolated from the world around it. He believed that, on the contrary, the university had to be immersed in the lives of the general population, the people who made it possible. This implied academic concern for the processes and needs of government, the training of students in public administration, and involvement in applied research in public policy issues. The faculty, or at least those who wanted a change from the status quo, embraced the Premier's message as a confirmation of their own views as to the direction the new university should take.

The Division of Social Sciences in December 1961 presented a brief to the Faculty of Arts and Science making the case that the Divisional system should not be regarded merely as a short-term, administrative convenience, but rather as a permanent and distinctive feature of the liberal arts organization at Regina Campus. It argued that the Divisions served "as a means of avoiding an atomistic type of Arts course and of achieving an integrated general Arts course." The "extraordinary increase in knowledge," the brief continued, had led to a high degree of specialization and a tendency for each discipline to go its own way, "while failing to address itself to the general human problem."¹³ In Kimball's terms, this was the "orator" (well-rounded education for active citizenship) speaking against the "philosopher" (the pursuit of truth leading to specialized inquiry). The Faculty in April 1963 endorsed the Division system in principle, but did not spell out in detail how it would operate.

A key development in shaping the debate was the decision in March 1963 to hire Dallas W. Smythe as the Chairman of the Social Sciences Division. Though born in Regina, Smythe at an

12 URA, Office of the Principal/President, 80-38, 302.11-1, Address by Premier W.S. Lloyd, Laying of Cornerstone, 26 Sept. 1963.

13 URA, 78-3, 400.18, Report to Faculty submitted by the Special Committee on Divisional Organization, Apr. 1963.

early age had moved to California with his family. He attended the University of California, Berkeley, where he received an undergraduate degree and a Ph.D. in Economics in 1937. In that year he took up work in Washington, D.C. as Associate Economist with the Central Statistical Board. In off-hours he became involved with the American League for Peace and Democracy, a left-wing group engaged in a campaign to assist the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War. The House of Un-American Activities labeled it a “communist front” organization, and the F.B.I. placed it under surveillance. The outbreak of the Second World War led to the breakup of the ALPD, and the leftists split from the “rightist” social democrats to form the Washington Committee for Democratic Action. This organization, too, was tagged a “communist front.” It had a short life, but those who participated in it were branded as having “followed the Party Line.” Smythe was affiliated with the leftists, but when interrogated by the FBI in March 1941, he could honestly say that he had not been active in the Committee for Democratic Action, by virtue of the serendipitous fact that he entered hospital for a gall bladder operation just as the organization came together.¹⁴

Smythe secured work as the Chief Economist for the Federal Communications Commission from 1943 to 1948, but when Truman took over as President and instituted the “loyalty program,” Smythe feared that his days in government service were numbered. He maintained that while he had attended one or two public meetings sponsored by the Communist Party and had friends who were members, he had never joined the party. Nevertheless, his past associations and activities were such that he was at risk during the McCarthy-inspired witch-hunt. In 1948, he learned that the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana was establishing an Institute of Communications Research. The University offered him a professorship, but when the appointment came before the Board of Trustees, one of the trustees produced a letter from the House Committee on Un-American Activities denouncing him as a disloyal citizen. Only after more security checks, reaching as high as a phone call to the United States Attorney General, did the appointment go through.¹⁵ At Urbana, Smythe carried out innovative research in

14 Dallas Smythe, *Counterclockwise: Perspectives on Communication* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 16-25.

15 *Ibid.*, 35-42.

the field of broadcasting and taught one of the first courses given at any university in the political economy of mass communications. He and his wife Jenny were active in the peace movement, with the result that the FBI continued to monitor their activities. The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 caused the couple to rethink their situation: "If we and our two children were to die in a nuclear war, we didn't want to do it as Americans." On a hot, sunny day in late August 1963, they arrived to start a new life in Regina: "We had rejected the United States as a country to respect or to live in, and looked forward eagerly to a better life in Canada."¹⁶

When Smythe took up his duties as Chairman of the Social Sciences Division, he found a faculty lacking a clear sense of direction. It was recognized that the liberal arts were to be the heart of the new university,¹⁷ but there was no consensus on the specific aims of the program or the means of implementing them. Smythe suggested they invite Dr. Robert Hutchins to spend a weekend with the faculty planning group and act as a catalyst for the discussions.¹⁸ Hutchins, the President of the University of Chicago from 1929 to 1951, was well known for his unorthodox views. According to Kimball, he identified with the oratorical tradition, but made efforts to accommodate it to the liberal-free ideal.¹⁹

In *The Higher Learning in America*, first published in 1936 and re-issued in 1961, Hutchins criticized the curriculum of the modern university, which he said had become fragmented, overly specialized, and disordered. It was like an encyclopedia that contained many truths, but lacked coherence, other than that provided by alphabetical arrangement. The university had departments ranging from art to zoology, but neither professors nor students knew the relation of one department to another. There was no attempt to present a "hierarchy of truths" or to help students gain insight into the fundamental problems of life and

16 Ibid., 57.

17 URA, 78-3, 102.1-1, Forward Planning Committee, Minutes, 4 Feb. 1963.

18 URA, 78-3, 102.1-1, Planning Committee, Minutes, 10 Oct. 1963. The Smythe/Hutchins connection supports Kevin Brooks' suggestion that liberal education in the Canadian prairie provinces was influenced as much by midwestern American examples as it was by eastern Canadian university models. Kevin Brooks, "Liberal Education on the Great Plains: American Experiments, Canadian Flirtations, 1930-1950," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (Spring 1997): 103-17.

19 Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers*, 179-80.

society.²⁰ In 1930 Hutchins reorganized the academic departments at the University of Chicago into four Divisions: humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, and physical sciences. He also established a “college” that offered an integrated curriculum in the freshman and sophomore years. At the conclusion of their studies, students sat for five required comprehensive examinations, one for each of the Divisional fields and one in English composition. Hutchins was a proponent of the “Great Books” course, which he helped design and teach. Its purpose was to engage students in reading and discussing the classic texts of Western civilization and expose them to the “great conversation” about the nature of man and the meaning of life.²¹ He was convinced that the modern university had lost its way. It offered students a grab-bag of specialized and semi-professional courses to enable them to make a living, but it did not give them anything to help them learn how to live. The university had turned into a bureaucracy focused on technique, a place where the important questions were never asked.

After leaving the University of Chicago, Hutchins became President of the Fund for the Republic, which was founded by the Ford Foundation to support civil liberties and civil rights projects and programs. The Fund combated McCarthyism and worked to eliminate racial discrimination in voter registration, housing, education, and employment. Hutchins reorganized the Fund’s operations in 1959, transforming it from an agency that gave out grants to one that subsidized the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara, California. Hutchins became the President of the Center, which he envisioned as an alternative university where prominent thinkers could engage in dialogue to clarify the issues and problems of modern democracy. It held seminars on a wide variety of topics: the role of technology, the responsibility of the media, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, student unrest, world peace, and economic policy.²²

We find in Hutchins’ thought the key components of the oratorical tradition: belief in the necessity of relating intellectual

20 Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 95.

21 Mary Ann Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins: Portrait of an Educator* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 110-34.

22 *Ibid.*, 240, 260.

activity to active and responsible citizenship; the conviction that fundamental truth was knowable; the idea that wisdom can be discovered through study of classical texts; and the distrust of specialization and departmentalization. As Kimball points out, specialized scientific research springs from the search for knowledge characteristic of the liberal-free ideal, but the search leads inexorably to the development of technology for utilitarian purposes.²³ It leads also to the proliferation of technical, vocational, and professional training that is not liberal, in either the oratorical or philosophical sense. Hutchins firmly opposed these developments and spoke of banishing purely technical activity from the precincts of the intellectual community.²⁴

Although he declined Smythe's invitation to come to Regina, Hutchins suggested that the faculty come to California and spend some time at the Center. This caused the professors to "prick up their ears," but the trip proved too difficult to arrange.²⁵ The retreat was held, not in a marble-floored villa set in "sun-dappled, eucalyptus-covered hills, with a broad view of the Pacific,"²⁶ but in a freezing hotel at Regina Beach, about twenty miles north of Regina. The guest of honour was not Hutchins, but his associate, W.H. ("Ping") Ferry, who had worked with him for nine years, first as vice-president of the Fund for the Republic and then as a member of the core group at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. Ferry was, in the words of Victor Navasky, who profiled him in *The Atlantic Monthly*, a "happy heretic."²⁷ Among his gad-fly suggestions were proposals to convert the New York Stock Exchange into a gambling casino, restrict the military draft to old people "who had already had a chance to live," and impose a requirement on both the President of the United States and the Premier of the U.S.S.R. to personally shoot fifty children before pushing the button to start a nuclear war.²⁸ His unorthodox views notwithstanding, he had patrician connections. He was the son of the former chairman of the board of Packard Motor Company, taught at Choate (where John F. Kennedy was one of his students), and worked as speechwriter for Henry Ford II. His

23 Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers*, 181.

24 Hutchins, *The Higher Learning*, 116.

25 URA, 75-7, 102.1-10, Dallas Smythe to Robert Hutchins, 11 Oct. 1963.

26 Dzuback, *Hutchins*, 254.

27 Victor S. Navasky, "The Happy Heretic," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1966.

28 Frank K. Kelly, *Court of Reason: Robert Hutchins and the Fund for the Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 359.

employment history also included a stint as public relations officer for the Congress of Industrial Organizations – Political Action Committee and a partnership in Earl Newsom Associates, a PR firm whose clients included Ford, Standard Oil, Campbell Soup, and CBS.²⁹

Ferry presented his views on education in “Why the College is Failing,” a speech delivered to the American Association for Higher Education in July 1963. He stated that universities were failing to deal with the urgent problems facing society. Their graduates were “able perhaps to make a living, but unable to make a world.”³⁰ Ferry asserted that what he called the “Smithian formulation,” the notion that the pursuit of self-interest led in some miraculous fashion to the common good, was “absurd in the conditions of modern industrial life.” “Horatio Alger is dead, but he still controls the curriculum.” He thought that American universities evaded this basic truth because they were still traumatized by fear of being labelled “Communist.” McCarthyism was not dead; it had merely been “housebroken.” Universities were timid, docile, conformist, afraid to do anything to rock the boat or challenge the status quo. Students were trained for individual career success; they were taught little about injustice, war, poverty, pollution, and their responsibility to build a better world. Although Ferry was not a socialist, he believed that collectivist solutions were required, because the old approach based on individualism and the free market did not work any more. For him, the university was not just a place where students went for professional training or to engage in a random, open-ended search for truth. Like Hutchins, he believed in the existence of a “hierarchy of truth” in which students needed to be instructed so that they could function effectively as citizens in a democratic society.

Ferry elaborated upon these themes in his keynote speech at the Regina Beach retreat on 14 December 1963. He said that universities had fallen into the trap of equating technological change with progress, ignoring the fact that advances in technology had also brought a polluted environment, nuclear bombs, “cultural depravity and spiritual degeneration.” The job of educators was to strip away the illusions that concealed this reality and expose the viciousness of the economic and social

29 Navasky, “The Happy Heretic,” 54.

30 URA, 78-3, 102.7, W.H. Ferry, “Why the College is Failing,” Association for Higher Education, NEA, Detroit, Michigan, 1 July 1963.

system. This meant clearing away “the rubbish produced by the status quo and by its confederates in the mass media for their own protection and enrichment.” The goal of the liberal arts was to cultivate in the minds of students “critical intelligence” and “the political openness that permits the contemplation of all plans for human betterment, however radical or varnished over by epithets they may be.” The key question was whether mankind would bring its technical achievements under the control of a higher wisdom or whether technology would control mankind.³¹ In his keynote address, Ferry moved ambiguously between questioning the status quo and denouncing it, between allowing students to search for truth and preaching truth that was already known, between encouraging free inquiry and pushing a political agenda.

The appeal to “critical intelligence” suggests the liberal-free ideal, but the desire to subordinate scientific progress (which, according to Kimball’s interpretation, derives ultimately from the Socratic spirit of inquiry) to the collective wisdom of politically engaged citizens comes from the orators. The case can be made that if a community strays from its core values, the duty of the citizen is to speak out against established authority. Many of the student activists of the 1960s who opposed the Vietnam War said they did so because they did not want to be “good Germans”; they protested because they believed in democracy and wanted to fulfil their responsibility as citizens. Although the rejection of “the teachings of the elders” appears to run contrary to the oratorical ideal, it does not do so if the rejection is in the name of fundamental truth that supersedes the temporarily deranged conventional wisdom. Admittedly it is a murky area, but the issue resolves on this point. The “orator” acts as a citizen in accordance with knowable truth; the “philosopher” searches for truth that can never be fully known.

Dallas Smythe’s position paper for the Regina Beach retreat was along the same lines as Ferry’s. He began by describing the general “state of the world,” as he saw it. The pace of change was accelerating, science and technology were advancing rapidly, industry was being automated, and many new nations were emerging from colonial status and achieving independence. Most alarming of all, the threat of nuclear war loomed. If war

31 URA, 80-38, 600.1-1, W.H. Ferry, “Liberal Education: Reflections and Surmises,” 14 Dec. 1963.

was to be averted, “mankind will have to change its attitudes and institutions more in the next fifteen years than it did in the last 10,000 years.” Smythe situated his concept of liberal education in the context of this apocalyptic scenario. He said that the purpose of the university was to extend and to transmit knowledge, and the function of knowledge was to “provide ways of finding solutions to man’s problems.” The pursuit of truth for its own sake was not sufficient; the truth being sought had to have a social application. It had to be “relevant” to the social, political, and economic crises afflicting humankind. On the other hand, relevant information of a purely technical nature had no place in the community of scholars. Like Hutchins, Smythe wanted to remove from the university “all instruction in routine accountancy, in all marketing, in all advertising, in all management courses.” They were to be banished to “private schools or to industry to provide the on-the-job training where the ostensible purpose of such programs can be competently and relevantly achieved.” In addition, Smythe followed Hutchins in opposing a liberal arts curriculum that allowed students too much freedom to choose the courses they wanted to take (cafeteria-style education). In order for general education to be coherent, students needed some guidance as to the areas of knowledge they needed to know about and how they were related to each other.

Smythe’s insistence on “relevance” led him to attack “academic freedom,” which is sacred to the Socratic/liberal-free ideal. He argued that academic freedom was a luxury that the world in a state of crisis and under threat of nuclear annihilation could not afford.

Too often academic bureaucrats and professors act as though “academic freedom” is a sufficient shield to protect them in the enjoyment of sinecures in which petty academic busywork, laziness, and a “rear-view mirror view of the world” substitute for intellectual activity in either the pursuit or the application of knowledge. Unfortunately, it is a sufficient shield, unless revision of the curriculum is used to shake them loose from their socially-irrelevant stances.

He went on to expound on his definition of “relevance.” Echoing Ferry, he said that the “Smithian notion that an invisible hand would by some alchemy transform the results of individual selfishness into social welfare” had to be abandoned. Too much

attention was being given to the “individual as the object of education” and not enough to raising awareness that “institutions...must be brought within the critical function of the educational process.” The “crucial role of education in forming men’s attitudes toward the institutions which provide not only men’s consumer goods but his intake of cultural materials of all kinds” had to be fully recognized. He pointed out that Saskatchewan had a tradition of “institutional experimentalism,” that is, experiments with other than free-market solutions to social and economic problems, and he cited approvingly Premier Woodrow Lloyd’s comments on the occasion of the cornerstone-laying ceremony: “There may indeed be justification and need for some ivory towers, but not too many...”³² Interestingly, Woodrow Lloyd was invited to the Regina Beach retreat, but he could not attend.

In the opposite camp from Smythe was A.B. Van Cleave, the Chairman of the Natural Sciences Division. Van Cleave was a chemist who transferred in 1962 from the Department of Chemistry in Saskatoon to take up his post at the Regina Campus. The President of the University, J.W.T. Spinks, was also a chemist, and he generally disapproved of the curricular innovations occurring at Regina. He later said that the Regina Beach retreat had had a bad effect because it “supported the wooliness of some wooly thinkers [sic].”³³ Van Cleave was widely perceived as an intellectual ally of Spinks, and the paper he prepared for the retreat bears this out. He said that while it had been agreed that a strong liberal arts college would be developed at Regina before other colleges were added, it was unrealistic to think that the establishment of such colleges could be long delayed. “The majority of our students attend the university with the view of training themselves for entry into some profession. It is sheer ‘ivory towerism’ to think that they do not.” He believed that the addition of professional courses would not weaken or detract from the arts and sciences in any way. In his opinion, courses in Engineering Physics, Geological Engineering, or Chemical Engineering were as broad in basic science training as an honours course in pure science. Van Cleave’s vision of the future of Regina Campus differed

32 URA, 75-7, 102.1-12, Dallas Smythe, “A Few Comments on the Liberal Arts Situation at Regina.”

33 URA, President’s Office, 87-51, 400.13, J.W.T. Spinks to Lloyd Barber, 29 Sept. 1977.

significantly from those who saw the liberal arts as the centerpiece, the “jewel in the crown” of the new institution.

He was wary of radical changes to the curriculum, noting that extensive alterations could cause difficulties for students who wished to transfer from one campus of the University to the other. He warned against change for the sake of change: “we must be reasonably certain that the changes proposed have real merit.” Further, modifications to the curriculum should be made “in a spirit of cooperation with rather than of opposition to those who have designed the present requirements.” It was necessary for the new campus to establish as quickly as possible a reputation for high standards and academic excellence. This meant speedily developing honours science and graduate programs (he became the Director of the School of Graduate Studies in 1965 and the Dean in 1969), as well as acquiring “first rate up-to-date scientific equipment...so that a healthy spirit of investigation of the unexplored regions of science may be fostered.”³⁴ Van Cleave was not one to waste time speculating as to whether technology and scientific progress were “good” things. To his way of thinking, the benefits to humanity were obvious. It was time to get on with the job of turning Regina Campus into a modern research university.

It would be a mistake, however, to oversimplify Van Cleave’s views. He did not see the university merely as a research juggernaut cranking out new technology to solve practical problems or as a training institute for professionals. He had a concept of a more exalted role for the university in accordance with the “liberal-free” ideal. He wrote:

Although the University is a public institution it must be itself. It can do much for the province and the public and it is highly desirable that it do so. But it can’t be all things to all people and allow peripheral functions to displace main ones and still be a University. We must be allowed to play our own role first and well.³⁵

For Van Cleave, the distinctive mission of the university was the pursuit of truth, including the knowledge discovered through

34 URA, 78-3, 102.6-1, A.B. Van Cleave, “Some Thoughts, Problems, and Suggestions Regarding the Development of Regina Campus,” Nov. 1963.

35 URA, 78-3, 102.7, A. B. Van Cleave, “Professional Training in Relation to the Liberal Arts,” 15 Dec. 1963.

research in the pure and applied sciences. The “orators” doubted the validity of this proposition and wondered whether scientific “progress” was really progress at all. They asked questions about what the scientists were doing and whose interests they served; they wanted to subordinate scientific activities to the moral imperatives of the community.

These were some of the ideas floating in the air when about thirty faculty members gathered at Regina Beach on December 13-15, 1963. The discussions ranged far and wide, finally culminating in consensus around the “Educational Policy for the Liberal Arts,” also known as the Regina Beach statement. It began with a quotation attributed to Socrates – “the unexamined life is not worth living” – and was divided into five parts:

- I. The university has traditionally undertaken the role of preserving, transmitting, and increasing the intellectual heritage of man. We reaffirm our acceptance of this task.
- II. This affirmation cannot be taken to mean that a university is a mausoleum of possibly interesting but irrelevant and impractical ideas, a repository of the past. No. There must also be an affirmation that the university is an important part of the critical intelligence of society, examining institutions, seeking to penetrate the future, sensitive to change, aware of the past, and of the manifold problems and dangers of the present.
- III. Above all, the role of critic, of examiner of institutions and ideas, belongs to the modern university functioning as a community of scholars. Its criticism should be sustained by constant reference to essential human values, which demands a deliberate renewal of the study of the nature of love, of justice, freedom, beauty, science: in fact, all those values which give meaning and substance to life. This implies a de-emphasis of mere topicality in the subject matter of the liberal arts curriculum. Further, this examination requires that all liberal arts students should be involved with a wide range of subject matter, so presented that the student may be able to synthesize his total experience in the liberal arts college. Such a program will frequently call for a kind of intellectual slum-clearance, a breaking up of those conventional myths which are frequently identified with reality. This constant critique must be

applied first to the structure and function of the university itself.

- IV. The implication for educational philosophy is that above all the idea, the general context, the point of view is what should be transmitted to the student. The professor is charged with the responsibility of opening and of sustaining a dialogue with the student: the student must be encouraged to see that his relationship to the educational process, and to the dialogue, is not that of exposure merely, but of involvement. An exceedingly careful choice of basic material has to be made in order to achieve depth of appreciation in a given subject. Material will be continually re-assessed for its relevance and value. The development of critical intelligence in the student calls for considerable attention by the professor to the basic critical assumptions of his discipline. The “mindless counting” approach to knowledge finds scant welcome in the framework; and methodological hobby-horses and peculiarities become secondary.
- V. Professors and students must be free to express themselves on all issues, controversial or not, but are responsible to the academic community.³⁶

Parts I and V were fairly standard re-statements of the traditional goals of the university: the preservation, transmission, and expansion of knowledge; and respect for academic freedom. It is worth noting, however, that the reference to the latter pertained only to freedom of expression, not freedom of inquiry. Parts II, III, and IV related more specifically to the historical context of the 1960s and the concerns of the “orators.” The second section asserted the importance of “relevance.” The university was not “a mausoleum of possibly interesting but irrelevant and impractical ideas,” but rather an institution that was sensitive to “the manifold problems and dangers of the present.” Part III suggested that this “relevance” had a certain edge to it. The intent was not simply to observe the passing scene, but to act as the “critical intelligence” of society, examining ideas and institutions, including the university itself. This critical examination was to be based on “essential human

36 URA, University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus, *Calendar*, 1964.

values,” derived from “study of the nature of love, of justice, freedom, beauty, and science: in fact all those values which give meaning and substance to life.” It was implied that there are knowable truths about the fundamental questions facing humanity and that the search for meaning can reach a destination.

The ramifications of this idea were pursued in the remainder of Part III. Students needed to have a broad education so that they understood the connections among the branches of knowledge to which they were exposed. They were to be equipped to see the total context, assisted to form opinions about major issues, and empowered to strip away the conventional myths that disguise reality. Part IV dealt with methods of teaching, calling for “dialogue” between students and professors. “Involvement” (another sixties word) was essential for students not merely to “acquire” knowledge, but to develop a critical capacity, an intellectual ground to stand on and call their own. For this to occur, the professor had to focus on “the idea, the general context, the point of view” and “the basic critical assumptions” of his discipline. He must abandon “mindless counting” and “methodological hobby-horses.”

The Regina Beach statement was to some extent a compromise document, lumping together a host of ideas associated with liberal education. All the same, it had a distinctly sixties flavor and strong “oratorical” content. It emphasized the relationship between liberal education and active citizenship, proclaimed the importance of general education over specialized training, and affirmed the existence of a sure foundation of knowable truth (“essential human values...which give meaning and substance to life”) upon which judgements about ideas and institutions can be made. The statement was introduced by the Socratic “the unexamined life is not worth living,” but it pointedly did not say that the purpose of liberal education is the pursuit of truth for its own sake. The motive for pursuing truth is to find it and do something with it – and not just to make a living, but to make a better world.

The Regina Beach statement was the subject of discussion at a special faculty meeting held 10 and 11 February 1964. Classes were cancelled for two days so that all faculty members could participate. Jack Mitchell, the acting SRC President, asked whether four representatives of the Students’ Representative Council could attend. He said that the students were “very interested in future developments which would affect them and

we believe these representatives might be able to contribute something of value at the meeting.”³⁷ The four students were admitted to the sessions and given equal speaking privileges with faculty, but not the right to vote. An editorial in *The Carillon*, the student newspaper, expressed the hope that the inclusion of students would set a precedent for giving students “a permanent voice in the direction of university policy” and opening a breach “in the traditional wall opposed to a student voice in university government.”³⁸ The gesture gave some encouragement to the student movement, which was also gathering steam on its own.

The Faculty of Arts and Science conference approved the motion to adopt the Regina Beach statement, and it became official policy. Although it was a somewhat ambiguous document – a “basket formulation” – the “orators” on campus immediately seized upon it as their own. It was linked to the Division system, which was seen as its structural embodiment. By downgrading the authority of departments, the Divisional structure was supposed to foster integrated liberal education over narrow specialization in specific disciplines. As Smythe observed, those who favored the Division system also tended to support the Regina Beach statement and vice-versa. He went so far as to suggest that faculty members were under an obligation to work within the Division system and not try to overthrow it: “If you were hired to teach at ‘The College’ at the University of Chicago under Hutchins you expected to live with its policy and structure, and if you found it uncomfortable, you expected and were expected to depart gracefully.” For Smythe, criticism of the Division system was permissible only if based on agreement with its fundamental assumptions: “To criticize it from the conventional, atomistic, Adam Smithian point of view is idle speculation unless it is hoped to reverse the present educational policy.”³⁹

The Special Committee on Divisional Organization brought forward a report early in 1965 outlining administrative arrangements for the operation of the system. It recognized that a Divisional structure represented an experiment in university government, and, as such, was attended by a number of uncertainties. The report recommended that its proposals be

37 URA, 78-3, 102.7, Jack Mitchell to W.A. Riddell, 3 Feb. 1964.

38 Jack Mitchell, “Guest Editorial,” *The Carillon*, 13 Mar. 1964.

39 URA, 78-3, 605.1, Dallas Smythe to Division of Social Sciences Faculty, 17 Mar. 1964.

adopted for a trial period of three years beginning 1 April 1965, and that by the end of the period a re-evaluation be undertaken and completed. Each Division (Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Fine Arts) was to have a Chairman who was responsible for co-ordinating its resources “for the purpose of developing a well-integrated liberal arts program.”

The basic unit of intra-divisional organization was the “committee of instruction,” composed of all the faculty members belonging to a particular discipline (Economics, Psychology, History, etc.) The word “department” was not used, even though the “committees of instruction” performed some of the same functions as departments. Since the Division system was intended to be something new, and departments were not supposed to have much power, the conventional term was avoided. The executive officer of the committee of instruction was known as the Chairman. In the original draft of the Special Committee’s report, he was designated the “Secretary,” but this terminology was revised, possibly because of confusion with secretaries who did the clerical work. The Chairman supervised the administrative work of the instruction committee: preparation of an annual budget, assignment of teaching duties, co-ordination of library requisitions, etc. There was also in each Division an Executive Committee, made up of the Chairman of the Division and the Chairmen of all Divisional committees of instruction, the chief responsibility of which was academic program planning.⁴⁰

The Board of Governors approved the proposals for the organization of the Division system on 24 June 1965. Spinks, however, was not totally convinced it was a good idea. In remarks to the Regina Campus Council in October 1965, he said that the development of strong departments was a “must” for the development of research and scholarly activity in a given field. In his opinion there was nothing wrong with the interdisciplinary approach, but its effectiveness depended upon the “excellence of the interacting bodies.” “Putting the latter in mathematical terms,” as he was fond of doing, “the cross-product of two interacting terms is zero, if one of the terms is zero, no matter how high the multiplying factor.”⁴¹ The point that Spinks overlooked was that “the development of research and scholarly activity in a given field” was not the leading objective of the

40 URA, 78-3, 600.6, Report of the Committee on Divisional Organization (as amended 21 Jan. 1965); Regina Council, Minutes, 17 Feb. 1965.

41 URA, Regina Council, Minutes, 20 and 21 Oct. 1965.

Regina Beach statement. It aimed to provide something new and different, a liberal arts program that was more integrated, broad-based, conceptual, critical, relevant, and interactive than the Saskatoon model.

Parallel to the development of the Divisional structure, work proceeded on a new Bachelor of Arts curriculum. The most innovative feature was the first-year program. It consisted of eight classes, four taught in the first semester (September to December) and four in the second semester (January to April), each class meeting four hours per week. This contrasted with Saskatoon, where first-year students took the same five classes (three hours per week) from September to April. In Regina the eight classes had to meet the following requirements: one in Math or Logic; one in Literature; and one in each of six different disciplines, four of which had to be in different Divisions. A great deal of attention was paid to the nature and content of the first-year introductory courses. They were to be concerned with “the delineation of the *boundaries* of the *discipline*; with the fundamental propositions and statements of the *corpus*; and with the exposition of the *methods* of the given discipline [emphasis in original]. The introductory courses should be based on the broad, fundamental, organizing groups of ideas from which all special studies spring.”

Students were to take no more than ten introductory classes (a maximum of 40 credit hours out of a total of 96) toward the B.A. degree. At least 48 credit hours were taken in one division, referred to as the Major Division, a minimum of 32 hours outside the Major Division, and 16 hours were free electives. Each student selected a major, which could be one of four types: (1) a departmental major involving study in one discipline; (2) a Divisional major involving study in more than one discipline; (3) a group major involving study in more than one Division; and (4) an individual major involving a program of studies tailored to the needs and interests of the individual student. Each committee of instruction (i.e., department) was to have a core program, which consisted of four to six classes, which all majors in that discipline were required to take. In addition, each committee of instruction was limited to offering a maximum of fourteen different classes, excluding interdisciplinary classes.⁴²

42 URA, 78-3, 600.1, Summary of New Curriculum as Approved by Arts and Sciences Faculty, Sept. 1965.

The purpose of this regulation was to curb departmental empire-building and to prevent the proliferation of classes designed on the basis of the specialized research interests of the professor rather than the overall goals of the liberal arts curriculum. The new Bachelor of Arts program met some resistance in Saskatoon, but it was finally approved and implemented in the 1966 fall semester.

The Social Sciences Division was the most committed to the interdisciplinary objectives of the curriculum. It introduced three streams of classes (Social Theory, Social Structure, and Social Development) as vehicles for Divisional majors, and created a Social Studies Committee to offer centralized introductory classes in statistics and methodology for all students in the Division regardless of subject major, and to act as an incubator for classes of a cross-disciplinary character. A Sample Survey and Data Bank Unit was established to provide access to up-to-date techniques for data gathering, and a Canadian Plains Program of area studies (an inter-Divisional major for students) was set up in association with a Canadian Plains Research Center.

Dallas Smythe, the Chairman of the Social Sciences Division through this period, made an effort to recruit new faculty “whose interests lay more in relating knowledge to the problems of the real world in Saskatchewan and less in the varieties of possible ivory towers.” He admitted, that despite his best efforts, hiring of such people did not match in numbers the appointment of those he referred to as “conventional academic types” – especially in History, Economics, and Geography. But compared to the other Divisions, the Social Sciences did have some success in finding faculty who were sympathetic to the Regina Beach policy. In the Humanities and Fine Arts, no particular attention was given to this consideration, and, as a result, some faculty members were in harmony with it but others were not. In the Division of Natural Sciences, virtually everyone hired was of the “conventional type” and hostile to the policy.

The meetings of the Faculty of Arts and Science were, in the years 1964-68, the theatre for the struggle between the two forces. According to Smythe, the battle to achieve satisfactory introductory 100-level courses was soon lost. “The Natural Science faculty simply could not or would not teach them in the way the policy required.” The advocates of the new liberal arts policy also failed to enroll large numbers of students as Division majors, a failure Smythe attributed to the absence of “an even-

handed counseling system, which would inform students effectively of their options.” The fourteen-class limit on departments was eroded, as first one and then another department pleaded for and gained exceptional allowances of eighteen or twenty or even more classes.⁴³

In April 1967 the Natural Sciences Division launched a frontal attack against the Division system and the Regina Beach policy by requesting the creation of a separate Faculty of Science and Mathematics. The scientists said they could accomplish more if allowed to develop freely without interference or obstruction from the Social Sciences. This would allow them to enhance the reputation of the university for scientific achievement, thereby demonstrating to the public the concrete benefits of having a campus in their midst. It would also enable the scientists to do a better job of training students “to aid in the conversion of new knowledge into the technology which improves the human lot.” Van Cleave said that the split in opinion along Divisional lines in meetings of the Faculty of Arts and Science had been very marked, with the scientists often being over-ruled by their colleagues in other Divisions. The not-so-veiled implication was that the connection with the non-scientists dragged down the Natural Sciences and slowed the march of progress.⁴⁴

The main argument against the breakup of Faculty was the defeat it represented for the liberal arts policy. From the perspective of educational philosophy based on fostering “critical intelligence,” “essential human values,” and a broad understanding of the issues confronting humankind, it was a mistake to allow scientists to march off in their own direction, eyes firmly fixed on converting “new knowledge into the technology which improves the human lot.” The defenders of Regina Beach said that the “scientists should not contract out of the debate on the problems technology creates for human society nor surrender their detachment as scholars to groups who call the tune in technology.” Dallas Smythe argued that it was a fundamental error to “identify the university with the short-term interests of the technological order.” It exposed the university to more pressure from outside groups, who wanted to harness the

43 URA, 80-38, 302.11-8, Hall Commission, Statement of Dallas Smythe, 2 Aug. 1973.

44 URA, 78-3, 400.18, “Analysis of the Briefs Received by the Task Force Enquiring into the Desirability of Establishing a Faculty of Science and Mathematics”; A.B. Van Cleave, “Re: Proposed Faculty of Science and Mathematics,” 30 Jan. 1968.

work of scientists to serve their own purposes. According to Smythe, if this was the real agenda, the divorce did not go far enough. It would be more efficient to locate scientific research in a laboratory “attached to some industrial base,” rather than placing it in an academic environment. “But if encounter in a free and open dialogue is the object of the university, the proposed half-way station towards a technical institute or industrial laboratory is incompatible with the nature of the university itself.”⁴⁵

Smythe also objected to the triumph of departmentalization implicit in the Natural Sciences proposal. “If there was one feature of this Regina campus university which distinguished it from the routine and dreary second-class institutions of higher learning in North America, it was the prospect and limited realization of the reduction of the rigidities imposed on the dialogue process by the familiar departmental feudalism which characterizes the latter.” The Campus had striven to offer something better than a smorgasbord of bits of information and specific skills, namely, a coherent framework to assist the student to understand the world and his responsibilities to the community. In Smythe’s view, specialization and the narrowly defined research program of the scientists were destroying the vision of liberal arts rooted in the “oratorical” tradition.

The Task Force appointed to study the creation of a Faculty of Science completed its work in April 1968. The majority report concluded that the breakup of the Faculty of Arts and Science would not be in the best interests of the University, but physicist J.L. Wolfson submitted a minority report recommending divorce. “It must be written somewhere,” Wolfson warned, “that those who refuse to face facts eventually face disaster.”⁴⁶ To mollify the scientists a Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, chaired by Dallas Smythe, proposed three major changes to the Division system. First, Divisions were allowed more flexibility with respect to their internal operations. They were free to determine whether they wanted to have highly autonomous departments or whether they preferred to operate in a more close-knit fashion. To this end, the term “department” now came into official use. The second

45 URA, 78-3, 400.18, Dallas Smythe to the Faculty of the Division of Social Sciences, Draft brief to Senior Academic Committee, 26 Jan. 1968.

46 URA, 85-54, 102.1, J.L. Wolfson, “Concerning the Proposal to form a Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics: A Minority Report.”

change was to give more power to each Division as against the authority of the Faculty of Arts and Science. Within a broad policy framework, each Division was permitted “to develop its own classes and courses of study, and develop and administer its own budget and recruiting activities” without having to bring these matters to plenary meetings of the Faculty. Indicative of this shift in responsibility was a change in nomenclature. Division Chairmen were now known as Associate Deans. Thirdly, the co-ordinating capacity of the Dean’s office was strengthened through the appointment of Associate Deans to serve on the Dean’s Executive Committee. It was hoped that this Committee would be able to resolve many problems before they came to the full meeting of the Faculty, thereby saving time and eliminating the frustrations attendant upon dealing with detailed issues in a large group. The changes were approved on 9 July 1968.⁴⁷ The unity of the Faculty had been preserved, but at the cost of dealing the Division system a severe blow.

In the meantime, student activists took an increasing interest in the liberal arts debate. *The Carillon* on 20 September 1965 printed the full text of the Regina Beach statement, and an accompanying editorial invited students to read the document carefully and think about whether it reflected what was happening in their classrooms. The paper contended that, since the administration and faculty had so obviously failed to make the Regina Beach ideals a reality, it was incumbent upon the students to show some leadership. In order to do this, they needed to have some say in the running of the University. Thus, the Regina Beach statement was transformed into a prop for the student power movement.⁴⁸

The Carillon reprinted the statement again in September 1966, and made it a platform from which to denounce the treatment of the student as “a commodity to be serviced and processed...dehumanized by a mechanical educational process interested only in shepherding his passage through a series of compartmentalized ‘courses’ towards an accreditation (his degree) as a participant in polite corporate society.”⁴⁹ An article, written just before end-of-semester final examinations, pronounced the “Liberal Arts Dead at Regina.” It maintained

47 URA, Faculty of Arts and Science, Minutes, 9 July 1968.

48 “The Role of the University,” *The Carillon*, 20 Sept. 1965; “The New Student,” *The Carillon*, 20 Sept. 1965.

49 Dave Orr, “The Student as Instrument,” *The Carillon*, 12 Sept. 1966.

that examinations and grades were incompatible with a liberal education: "Socrates did not give examinations or grades. So our professors think they are better than the great teachers of history?" The grading system was not designed to produce educated people, but rather "people who are constantly producing A's and B's for some overlord."⁵⁰ The Regina Beach statement was an inexhaustible well from which critics of the education system could draw inspiration.

Despite support from student activists, Regina Beach was a dying cause. The scientists continued their campaign for separation. They voted 52 to 8 in April 1973 for the creation of a Faculty of Science and finally achieved their goal the following year.⁵¹ The "orators" suffered other defeats. The Faculty of Arts voted 78 to 20 in 1975 to abolish the Division system and replace it with a Departmental organization, each Department reporting directly to the Dean through the Department head.⁵² To add insult to injury, the Regina Beach statement was dropped from the Calendar in 1972 and replaced with a bland, platitudinous declaration. The reference to teaching "the idea, the general context, the point of view" was deleted, as was mention of the "essential human values" of love, justice, freedom, beauty, and science.⁵³ A physics professor wrote, "It seems to me to be necessary either to define exactly what has to be understood under the nature of love, justice, freedom, and beauty (as I see it, there exist only different opinions on those concepts, but no way at all to find out what is their nature) or to omit those unscientific terms."⁵⁴

Thus the liberal arts debate at Regina Campus came to a close. It had flourished briefly in an era of upheaval and protest. The arrival of the baby boomers at the doors of the university, the rise of student power, and the political and social conditions of the sixties (civil rights, nuclear disarmament, Vietnam War, Quiet Revolution, counterculture) caused instability and generated a widespread feeling that change was possible, even inevitable. There was a good deal of rhetoric about

50 "Liberal Arts Dead at Regina," *The Carillon*, 2 Dec. 1966

51 URA, 85-54, 304, J.L. Wolfson to all faculty, Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, 12 Apr. 1973.

52 URA, 85-54, 104, R.R. Robinson to all members of the Faculty of Arts, 27 May 1975.

53 URA, 85-54, 104.18, G. Edgar Vaughan to Mrs. D. Pogany, "Arts and Science Education Policy," 4 Jan. 1972.

54 URA, 85-54, 104.18, J. Pachner to M. Scholar, 29 Sept. 1971.

“participatory democracy,” which was to be achieved not only by extending equal rights to previously marginalized groups (African Americans, women, francophone Quebeckers, Aboriginal peoples), but also by the renewal of citizen involvement in democratic action. The political and social climate could not help but influence the universities, where activist youth congregated and where questions were raised about the nature and goals of liberal education. The discussion was to a large extent conditioned by the immediate and pressing concerns of the moment: the desire for students to have a say in what was taught and how it was taught, the need to make the curriculum more “relevant” to contemporary issues, and the inclusion of previously omitted topics such as women’s studies, labour history, and non-Western cultures and religions. It was very much a “sixties debate,” but, whether the participants realized it or not, it was also a continuation of a much older debate, the debate between the “philosophers” and the “orators.”

The debate was especially lively at Regina Campus, an “instant university,” which was not firmly anchored in tradition and which set out to forge a distinctive identity. At the heart of the discussions was the 1963 Regina Beach statement, which articulated a liberal arts policy based on relevance to social problems, interdisciplinary conceptual understanding, opposition to specialization and fragmentation of knowledge, and the critique of ideas and institutions on the basis of essential human truths. In the course of the debate, the Regina Beach statement took on a life of its own, its symbolic potency transcending its literal content. As J.L. Wolfson shrewdly observed,

While no honorable person of good will could possibly find fault with the Policy...it surely must be realized that it means different things to different people, and it is interpreted by each according to his interests. To some it is a very useful weapon; one simply states that a proposal not to one’s liking is in violation of the Policy and forthwith the proposal is defeated. But more than this, the Policy is a magic cloak which provides sure immunity against attack. Like some medieval knight holding out the cross to ward off evil, the wearer presents his own proposals for approval, secure in the knowledge that nobody would be so foolhardy as to attack one manifestly as holy as he. To those skilled in its use the policy is indeed both invincible armament and impenetrable armour.

It was a touchstone and talisman, a repository for hopes and dreams. It is not surprising, then, that when the audiotapes of the Regina Beach discussions went missing, Dallas Smythe hinted that they had not been “lost,” but deliberately destroyed. Some unnamed and unknown person or persons had not wanted them to see the light of day. Only a conspiracy could account for the disappearance of records charged with such value and meaning.⁵⁵

The conflict of ideas occurred on more than one level and how it was defined depended on the lens through which it was viewed. It was a debate between general education and specialization; community involvement and the ivory tower; applied knowledge and knowledge for its own sake; social activism and traditional academic standards; the community and the individual; “human values” and technology; conservatives and liberals; left and right. But most of all, it was a debate between “orators” and “philosophers.” How else can we explain why Dallas Smythe, a leftist and probably a Marxist,⁵⁶ made common cause with Robert Hutchins, a traditionalist and advocate for the “great books” of western civilization? Why would Smythe, a victim of McCarthyism, have reservations about academic freedom, oppose technological “progress,” denigrate “cafeteria-style” education, and condemn the departmentalization of the university? The debate cut across political ideology; it was too complicated to be just a matter of left versus right. Kimball’s typology helps us make sense of what otherwise appears to be a hodge-podge of policy positions.

As Kimball makes clear, the liberal-free version of liberal education has become increasingly dominant in universities since the late nineteenth century, and the “orators,” to the extent that they are visible or audible, have been fighting a rear-guard action. Why did the “orators” lose the sixties debate, and why do they continue to lose? The question is not easy to answer because it relates to the fundamental assumptions and values of our society. Some maintain that most students do not really want a liberal education of any sort; all they want is training for a well-paying job and middle-class status. As for faculty, they

55 URA, 80-38, 302.11-8, Hall Commission, Statement of Dallas Smythe, 2 Aug. 1973.

56 At the time of his death in 1992, Smythe was writing his autobiography. He did not complete the chapter on the Regina years (1963-1973), but he left a few scratch notes, including the cryptic comment that one of the focuses of the chapter would be “the emergence of my Marxism in theory and practice.” Simon Fraser University Archives, Dallas Smythe Papers, F-16-1-6-1, Notes for autobiography.

must “publish or perish.” No professor has scaled the heights of his or her profession on the basis of designing a well-integrated liberal arts curriculum. Governments increasingly demand outcomes measured in dollars and cents – more technologists and fewer sociologists – and business corporations give money to universities on the condition that they pursue a narrow economic, utilitarian agenda.⁵⁷

But as important as these factors are, the root of the problem lies deeper still in our civilization’s concept of the “highest good.” Is it knowable truth expressed in active citizenship, as the “orators” would have it, or is it the freedom to search for truth, as the “philosophers” believe? Each taken by itself as the principle guiding liberal education is unsatisfactory. The critical scepticism and open-mindedness of the liberal-free ideal leads to excessive individualism, unbridled scientific research, and the dissolution of community standards. The “orator’s” conviction that he has the truth gives rise to dogmatism, rigidity, and denial of academic freedom. Nor can the two ideals be happily blended together to combine their assets and cancel out their deficiencies, since the strength of each ideal is also the source of its greatest weakness. This is the paradox that lies at the heart of liberal education, and there is no way to resolve the conundrum. The best we can hope for is to maintain balance and tension between the two, recognizing that this is not a “solution.” The worst situation is the total domination of one ideal over the other, as is the case now when the liberal-free ideal is almost uncontested. George Grant predicted that because we have made freedom the supreme good in the “age of progress,” technology rules – what can be done, will be done.⁵⁸ Dallas Smythe wrote more hopefully that the death of the liberal arts “will only be inevitable if and because a succession of people make mistaken decisions to identify the university with the short-term interests of the technological order.”⁵⁹ Let us hope that he is right and we will not.

57 Paul Axelrod, “Challenges to Liberal Education in an Age of Uncertainty,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 10, 1 and 2 (1998): 6-13. Axelrod develops these themes more fully in *Values in Conflict: The University, the Marketplace, and the Trials of Liberal Education* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), esp. chaps. 3, 4, and 5.

58 George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 94.

59 URA, 78-3, 400.18, Dallas Smythe to Faculty of Division of the Social Sciences, 26 Jan. 1968.