

Pyroclasts: Give Us More Presidents Like This

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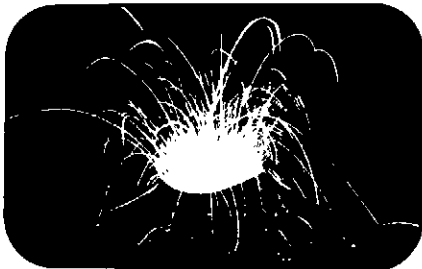
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Features



Pyroclasts

By Ward Neale

Give Us More Presidents Like This

In the epic CGC report on geology and geophysics in Canadian universities, the role of senior administrators is discussed (p. 23, in case you have your copy in hand). Mention is made of two university presidents in Canada who unashamedly stated that geoscience is essential to rational development of the country and, hence, they strongly support it at their universities. Readers of the epic have asked if such paragons of geoscience virtue actually exist in high places or if they were creations of the authors' fertile imaginations. At least one was for real and as he has now retired, thus safe from academic slings and arrows, it is only fitting that we mention his name - M.O. (Mose) Morgan of Memorial University. Mose Morgan felt that geology was one of several arts and sciences that deserved to flourish for the benefit of the province and country.

He gave each discipline that was considered relevant to the place and time the spiritual and material assistance needed to set it off and running. Those that failed were temporarily shelved until new leadership made another start worthwhile. Those that appeared to be flourishing were watched carefully, partly with the aid and counsel of external assessors. I was associated with the geology department at Memorial some years ago and recall aspects of the presidential assess-

ment technique. Once, for example, the department submitted a long list of its recent publications, achievements and kudos. Back came a short paragraph of congratulations followed by a much longer paragraph in which the pragmatic president asked us to explain how these accomplishments aided provincial development and could we produce any evidence that showed that our links with industry were growing stronger. Little nudges like that tended to make one keep the bridges to the outside world in good repair!

The average outsider will rightly say that this is only good senior management practice. True, but such management is relatively rare in academic circles. Do you know of any other schools where the president has devoted most of his convocation address to praising the achievements of his geology department (as Mose Morgan did a few years ago)? Geology departments at several universities received favourable mention in the CGC report - but do you know of another president who quoted extensively from that report at the 1981 spring convocation (as did Mose)?

The visiting committees who gathered material for the CGC report found several geology departments which, despite good leadership and fine performance, had not been able to break through the barriers of tradition and established pecking orders. They remained understaffed, in shabby quarters and with no local recognition of their achievements. Morale was falling even during the present geoscience high. Geology (and other important, neglected disciplines) badly need more people like Mose Morgan in the upper echelons of our university systems.

Many commentators (including this columnist) have bemoaned the lack of geoscientists among the ranks of Canada's senior academics. But is it really necessary to have some of our own at the top? It is interesting to look at Mose Morgan's background in this light: his early training was in classics, he practiced as a political scientist, maintained a

long involvement with the military following WW2, and he entered the senior administrative ranks while still comparatively young. Oh yes, one other thing - he spent a most memorable summer as an assistant to the late G. Vibert Douglas, Dalhousie's super enthusiastic field geologist!

Can Peer-Awarded Grants be Overdone?

Along with most other geoscientists, I have long been a strong supporter of peer-awarded research grants as administered first by NRC and now by NSERC. At Memorial, departments that produced good science (e.g. Biochemistry, Geology and Marine Bioscience) received awards far above the national average, hence the system seemed fair and equitable. I could never quite understand President Morgan's lack of enthusiasm for peer-awarded grants which, he claimed, ultimately benefited the rich and enhanced regional disparities.

Residence in Alberta and recent reading of a book by Peter Leslie entitled "Canadian Universities 1980 and Beyond" (AUCC, 151 Slater Street, Ottawa K1P 5N1) brought this old debate back to mind and I find myself tempted to change sides. The book contains much fascinating data and analysis concerning enrolment, mobility of students, changing structure, controls and finance. The financial aspects include a good deal of background on the federal government role in support of post-secondary education. The Feds first gave universities a shot-in-the-arm by support of the war veterans. Next they responded to universities' pleas by paying subsidies based on provincial population (1951-67). Then, amid complaints from Quebec and, later, other provinces, they withdrew from direct granting and started payments to the provinces, partly by tax concessions and partly by cash transfers. The Feds paid full the cost and left the provinces in full control of the universities (1968-77). In 1977, Established Programs Financing was introduced which increased Federal support of hospital

insurance, medicare and post secondary education, half by conceding tax points and half by cash transfers. The cash transfers to the provinces currently run around \$1.5 billion for higher education alone and they are virtually unconditional - so that this aspect of the Federal role in university financing is almost invisible. As you've read in your newspapers, with the present altercations between governments, the universities worry that the Feds will eliminate these moneys which it presently turns over to the provinces without either acknowledgement or recognition.

In his book, Peter Leslie points out that the Federal government does support a program that is visible and viable, namely the \$200 million spent on sponsorship of research. He rightly claims that such peer-awarded federal grants are presently the only carrots offered for innovation in the universities, the only direct relationship between performance and reward. His recommendations are that the Feds ease out of the \$1.5 billion in transfer payments and put all of their money into programs where their presence is established and approved (e.g. NSERC sponsored research) or where their mandate is clear, e.g. scholarships and subsidies that would promote the interprovincial mobility of students. Almost every university professor I have talked with favours the Peter Leslie suggestions but, of course, I live in the west and talk to western professors.

As I recall, Mose Morgan's arguments against too strong an emphasis on peer-awarded grants was because these were awarded chiefly for proven excellence and that some areas in Canada could afford to buy excellence and other could not. This is true. The salary scales cited in the CGC report show, for example, that Atlantic professors are paid at least 20 per cent less than their counterparts in all western and most larger central Canadian schools. If Alberta lost the \$140 million or B.C. the \$185 million in current transfer payments, these miniscule amounts would hardly leave a noticeable void in the provincial treasuries. Additionally, Alberta's Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, which is bound to be duplicated in scientific and engineering fields, will buy some of the best brains and that province's universities will soon challenge the long-time supremacy of central Canadian institutions. However, withdrawal of \$80 million transfer payments from Manitoba or \$45 million from Newfoundland would be a blow to these provinces that would be reflected immediately in further austerity for already lean institutions. If the Feds opt

for Peter Leslie's idea and inject most of their support into research, the prime contenders for this bonanza would be those universities in the provinces with flourishing economics. The rich will become very rich and excellence will blossom only in the lands of milk, honey and oil. The Atlantic Province universities will become virtual community colleges and will have trouble maintaining the few bright sparks they have struck, e.g. geology at Memorial and oceanography at Dalhousie. Is this the path to unity and equal opportunity across the nation?

Leslie's solution to university financing has made me sympathetic to my old boss's worries about too many golden eggs in the peer-review basket and not enough of them thrown toward development of regional excellence - the only foundation for national excellence in a country such as ours.

Congratulations (and slightly raised eyebrows)

- To *Digby McLaren* for escaping the civil service jungle in the most painless and profitable way imaginable. According to a University of Ottawa release, he is now a visiting honorary professor at that institution, encouraging francophones to study geology and drawing his salary from E.M.R. What a deal!
- To *Bill Hutchison* for six good months as Director-General of the Geological Survey of Canada where his dynamic presence made an impact in many areas. He also set a record - the shortest term ever as GSC Head Honcho. He was made Assistant Deputy Minister in EMR's Booth Street tower in July. Ex-colleagues extend best wishes for survival in the highest trees of the jungle.
- Congratulations to St. Francis Xavier for setting up their splendidly endowed W.F. James Research Chair which will allow a great thinker to sit and think in Antigonish's splendid countryside. And to *David F. Strong* who was the first to receive the call to lucrative contemplation. It rivals Digby McLaren's deal.
- To *Ray Price*, Cordilleran tectonist extraordinary, who leaves Queen's where he has been since 1968 to return to GSC. While at Queen's, he served a term as head, was a senior Killam Fellow, and Canada's most prolific producer of maps and Ph. D.'s in structural geology. Many of the latter

are now working at GSC and will welcome Ray back as charge d'affaires for the 1:1,000,000 map series.

- To *David Strangway*, V.P. of U. of T., who must be involved in some way with that university's recent decision to institute a program of regular external review throughout the faculty of Arts and Science. Dave introduced such a committee to look at Geology when he was chairman and he also has served as a member of committees looking at other geology and geophysics departments. Once again geoscience shows the way!
- To *John Maxwell* (GSC) and *Wes Johnson* (BCDMPR) for bringing out a new edition of Maxwell's very useful book on "Rock and Mineral Analysis" (J. Wiley and Sons, N.Y.).

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New Stratigraphic Code

A newly completed North American Stratigraphic Code is now available for distribution and for comment by the profession.

The draft new Code was prepared by committees and advisory groups appointed by the recently renamed North American Commission on Stratigraphic Nomenclature (NACSN). Although it is based on the principles embodied by previous American codes and by the 1976 International Stratigraphic Guide of the International Subcommittee on Stratigraphic Classification, innovations are introduced to cope with the special problems of Precambrian and Quaternary geology and of high-grade metamorphic and plutonic rocks. The draft has not yet been adopted by the NACSN and cannot be until the profession has had an adequate opportunity to comment.

The Draft Code has been printed through the generosity of the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists and several supporting companies. Copies may be ordered by sending \$3.00 (Canadian or U.S.) for each (to cover handling and postage costs) to:

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