

# A Pluralist Approach to Research Support

(AN EDITORIAL)

Who threatens good and free research? In this issue of *PROD*, a Civil Liberties Union subcommittee warns of business and the federal government. We look back in history and say, "Everyone in sight, including the academicians themselves." Deans and Presidents are primordial enemies of scholarly independence. But abstract principle needs more distance; so the theory of academic freedom was scared from professorial throats by "outside" rulers of universities—by kings, clerics, and powerful boards. Legislatures, first State and now federal too, succeeded to royal powers. And today we must contend with modern business corporations and foundations.

Questions of power are tied to problems of support. It is further stated that research is either under-financed or over-financed, and in either case is a victim of misallocation of resources.

We share these beliefs in their *general form*: many good sectors of study are starved; many are pampered; and to errors of judgment are added the unbalances caused by lack of plan, whether by the "invisible hand" or the "iron fist." We emphasize, however, "in their general form." That is, a lot of nonsense is being spoken on the essential wickedness of one or another agency of society. To oppose foundations for interfering in university business assumes that universities ought to be sealed containers or that university administrators are ordinarily righteous and brilliant but weak, both patent absurdities. There is no question that government agencies of all types are aiding education and research, imposing restrictions, influencing priorities, and otherwise disturbing a certain previously existing equilibrium: of what value to indict this relationship in itself? As for business corporations (and labor unions), they interfere too much or too little. They usually specify highly applied projects, or give grants, as foundations do, "to keep the ball rolling." They should think more about what they want their money to do. (They would learn more, too, and giving as well as receiving should be educative.)

We are convinced that education and research will gain if all elements of the community assist and criticize their enterprises. We say that educators forget too readily the degree to which their work is hampered by their own university. They readily fall victim to the vacuity at the bottom of the doctrine of academic freedom. They still display the worn-out socialist (and pre-capitalistic) bigotry that business is by nature corrupt.

We assert furthermore that research and education need support from all sides. If commercial corporations, non-profit agencies such as unions and welfare groups, foundations, local, State, federal, and international governments, and wealthy and energetic individuals want somehow to give and receive from the institutions of education, they should be obliged. A relation with one of them alone would be disastrous. Their variety, number, and counterbalancing forces compose society's structural support of education. Together they give us a valid possibility of freedom through pluralism where this may matter most — in the building of men, ideas, and knowledge. How well the particular bargains over control and content are struck, and how much the plural forces and the community of knowledge receive from each other, are a measure of the worth of university administrators and scholars. Inasmuch as we presume to teach others the ability to choose and reject, we should welcome the challenge to do likewise ourselves.