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COLLEGES SCORED ON U.S. CONTRACTS

Critic Charges Professors
Become 'Mercenaries'

By FRED M. HECHINGER

Federal research contracts have undermined the independence of the nation's major universities and have turned many professors into "mercenaries of science and scholarship," Gerald Piel, publisher of Scientific American believes.

He contends that multimillion dollar contracts are increasingly being approved by panels of professors whose departments are the recipients.

Without belittling the historic role played by universities in advancing scientific research and bolstering economic and military security, Mr. Piel warns that the question of which discipline gets Federal support has become a divisive issue that "reaches into the heart of the university."

The fact that professors become increasingly "for hire on studies done to contract specifications" reduces the integrity of higher education, downgrades the teaching function and weakens the universities' role as "agents of free inquiry" and as "centers for the independent criticism and surveillance" of Federal policies, Mr. Piel charges.

The trend has destroyed in large measure the loyalties of professors to their institutions, because the granting agencies rather than the home campus becomes the "alma mater," the "true source of nourishment," Mr. Piel adds.

"After the fashion of Madison Avenue account executives, he is in a position to take his staff and his grants elsewhere if the university does not meet his terms," he said in describing the activities of the modern research professor. He also suggested that some faculty negotiators of grants act in conflict with their institutions by holding down the overhead and maintenance payments to the university so as not to reduce the research money.

Division of U. S. Funds

Mr. Piel issued his sharp criticism in a paper presented to last week's annual meeting of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. He pointed out that 10 leading universities received nearly 40 per cent of the Federal research and development funds and the top 20 institutions got nearly 60 per cent. Of more than 2,000 colleges and universities, about 100 account for 10 per cent of all Federal funds.

Federal funds supply 32 per cent of Harvard's total budget, he said, but in other universities the total runs as high as 85 per cent.

"A full third of the Federal money-flow sluices into the 14 major and the many lesser research institutes and laboratories which the big universities operate for the Federal government," Mr. Piel said. This was a reference to such institutes as the Livermore Radiation Laboratories and many others that work on such assignments as the fashioning of thermonuclear weapons, the design of bombers and missiles defense systems.

The Department of Defense, he added, which disbursed about \$400 million to university-associated research in the last fiscal year, supplies nearly one-fourth of all Federal funds going to university science.

Mr. Piel stressed that he was not opposed either to Federal aid to higher education or to research. But he charged that these grants were "a subterfuge" for Federal aid. The myth is carefully perpetuated that the recipient institutions are not really aided, but are simply executing contract work. This excludes lesser institutions from Federal subsidy, he said, while the powerful ones get all the money.

Yet, Mr. Piel said bluntly, few of even the richest universities could continue to maintain many of their tenured professors if Federal research grants were to be cut off.

Directorates Interlock

In his criticism of the unofficial, interlocking directorate that lets grant recipients sit on panels that determine where the grants should go, he cited the following ironic description of the procedure by Warren Weaver, a leading foundation executive:

"These men are intensely interested in X, often with lifelong dedication to X, and sometimes with a recognizably fanatic concentration of interest on X. Quite clearly, they are just the authorities to ask if you want to know whether X is a good idea."

Another academic critic called the panel system "weak insofar as judge, jury, plaintiff and defendant are usually one and the same."

Mr. Piel said that the combination of more rapid promotions and greater financial reward, much of it through contract and consulting work, had widened the rift between the science and humanities faculties.

Earlier, Harold Orlans, in a study for the Brookings Institution, warned that this trend had cut faculties in two—in terms of teaching load, income and esprit de corps.

Mr. Piel urged the universities to seek general Federal support openly so that they would be able to shape their programs, on specific grants.

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