Len M. Findlay and Paul M. Bidwell, eds.
Pursuing Academic Freedom: "Free and Fearless"?
Saskatoon: Purich, 2001. NP. 245 pp.

Typically, university administrators refer to themselves in official capacities as "The University," as if the administration were the same as the university itself, as if faculty and students were subsidiary, even expendable. In a somewhat parallel way, academics so often think of the university as the exclusive container of the intellectual life of society, instead of as one part of it. But the intellectual life of society is bigger than the university; in fact, the university could not exist without the broader intellectual force of society as a whole, which feeds, sustains, and wants it. The key point is that institutions—sociological factors—have to be recognized and understood when dealing with such matters as "academic freedom."

The present volume is a collection of papers originally presented at a conference on academic freedom held at the University of Saskatchewan. There are 21 separate contributions, including the preface. Most are admirably brief. The range of disciplines represented is also admirable, from anthropology through English and history, to law, psychology, religious studies, among others. Administrators are also represented, as are practicing journalists, high school teachers, and librarians. Collections of essays are always difficult to review, and this collection is especially difficult because of its range and variety—First Nations issues, academic freedom as applied to the public schools, the meaning of academic freedom in the context of gay and lesbian people and their struggles, the history of copyright (and printing), learned exegeses of the esoterica of Jacques Derrida, the fairness of *Maclean's* magazine, concerns about the increasing corporatization of the university: all are here—and more. To write a review of this collection of essays practically means adding one more essay to the others.

Clearly, this is a valuable collection, and though some essays should have been condensed, I wish people would read it, and I wish more universities and groups would hold meetings to discuss issues such as the one that is the focus of this volume. Academics are a small minority and need to communicate with each other; for one thing, they need to constitute a political force on behalf of learning, if not freedom itself. Is there a difference between freedom and academic freedom? Can society be free without academic freedom? and is it possible to have academic freedom in a society that is not free? What, really, is the difference between civil rights and academic freedom (the latter a subset of the former)? Freedom,

as we constantly hear, means responsibility, too, but what exactly is the responsibility of academics, and to whom? Many questions, many problems—and few answers. But that may be good, as I shall try to explain.

To begin at the beginning, what is academic freedom? Michiel Horne notes that there are three historical themes in Canada: "the freedom to teach and to publish, and the essential role of research as their basis… the freedom of professors to express themselves on issues of public interest… [and] the assertion of professorial autonomy at the expense of the power of governing boards and presidents" (22). Does this mean then that academic freedom is a privileging of professors at the expense of others, and that this freedom is either abused or neglected or hopelessly mired in the totalizing fallacies of the *Aufklarung?* Some authors here argue that it is. Others argue, more cogently, that the university is a site of external and internal pressure not to engage academic freedom as it should be engaged. That is, the corporatization of the university, the insistence that it serve corporate interests above all, compromises the intellectual work of the university. It does so in two ways, by financial pressure, so that business agendas determine funding; and, more subtly, by moral pressure to reproduce and rationalize corporate values. Internally, the university is compromised by the ethos of competitive struggle which it fosters, and by the common attitude (widely held by the general public) that tenure is merely another word for LMT—Lifetime Meal Ticket—a "government job at last," with pleasant perquisites added. As a result, the whole issue of academic freedom becomes in effect a non-issue, a matter, in practice, of minor importance. Jerry Zaslove, generalizing from experience at Simon Fraser University, cites a "history of blacklisting, firings, smearing, bullying, lying, gossiping, red-baiting, fear-mongering, stereotyping and scapegoating" (159): extreme-sounding formulations for what is the dark side of the culture of the university generally, where conformity is a powerful force, where a subservient fascination with prestige is obsessive. The sociology of the university as a complex of internal struggles seems to be little understood and definitely needs to be brought into the light. One thinks of the dictum of that impressive winner, Henry Kissinger, that the reason why academic fights are so vicious is that the prizes are so small. Kissinger was a professor at Harvard, that most prestigious of universities, so he ought to know. The university is thus a kind of "distant mirror" of the struggles that go on in the corporate arena, where real power—dollars and cents power—is at stake.

In a gathering of widely varying angles on the topic such as this collection, one feels a certain wish for more systematic or historically contex-

tualized discussion. One misses David Noble here, the history professor at York University whose analysis of the impact of market forces on the academy would help in a volume like this (see his recent *Digital Diploma Mills*). There are a couple of references to the work of Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman on "manufacturing consent," but one would like to see some engagement with this analysis: the role of the university as an agent of indoctrination rather than of education, strictly speaking—a question that could hardly be more important in a discussion of academic freedom.

Academic freedom is inherently subversive: it must at least function in a role analogous to that of the "opposition" in parliament.

But that is an interesting thing about this volume: one cannot read about academic freedom for long without coming to what are inescapably political concerns. Academic freedom is inherently subversive: it must at least function in a role analogous to that of the "opposition" in parliament, a questioning and consciousness-raising function. By "subversive" I do not mean mindlessly subversive or "subversive" in the trendoid sense: tradition is important and must be respected. The point of academic freedom is simpler: people do not like to think, especially for themselves, and the university must constantly prod people to do just that—to think, to consider the evidence, and to imagine other possibilities than what the powerful in society insist upon. Academic freedom must be above all the right to ask the questions, because asking questions is more important than supplying answers. And perhaps that is why one comes away from this volume knowing more (e.g., case histories, copyright problems, the impact on libraries of rising costs, how data-compiling bodies like Statistics Canada interface with universities, the practical understanding of administrators of academic freedom, and so on), but one also comes away disturbed and puzzled by problems that will be with us for the foreseeable future, problems we should be thinking and talking about.

Mervyn Nicholson
University College of the Cariboo

Works Cited

Noble, David. *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002.