

## Corporations limit academic freedom



Source: The McGill Daily (McGill University)

By **Simon Rabinovitch**

MONTREAL (CUP) - Corporate players are acquir-

ing an increasingly large handle on authority in academia.

For instance, at McGill University this year there have been two controversial cases of corporate presence on campus:

Coca-Cola became the school's exclusive pop supplier, while Chapter's acquired management of the university's bookstore.

The book giant was much maligned for its inefficient service during the early year textbook rush, while the Coke agreement was criticized by students who resented the deal's choice limitation.

With large

cutbacks in government funding over the past decade, it is not surprising universities are looking to the private sector for funding. But for many schools this means turning towards a corporate model.

Nowadays, universities are run and managed more like big businesses. One can look at the McGill Board of Governors to see this trend.

Sitting on the Board - one of McGill's central decision making bodies - are John Cleghorn, CEO of

the Royal Bank, David Kerr, CEO of Noranda Inc., and other high-ranking corporate executives.

In contrast, academic staff hold only two gubernatorial positions.

A recent report by the Canadian Association of University Teachers confirms this corporate trend across the country.

According to the report, over 850 corporations are now represented on the boards of Canada's Universities. The Royal Bank has the greatest presence among university decision-

makers with seats on 13 boards.

But a larger, more troublesome problem lies at the heart of the debate about corporations on campus.

The fostering of knowledge and research has always been a central tenet of universities. But academia's fruits, once held to be part of the public domain, are increasingly treated as privately owned, marketable goods.

Moreover, corporate funding is a major source for universities' operational budgets.

If strings were

## Mumia

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pressed alarm at the "racist" use of the death penalty in Philadelphia, pointing out that ethnic minorities make up 90 per cent of prisoners that have been sentenced to death in Philadelphia - or 103 out of a total of 115.

"His case could examine a crucial examination of the death penalty," wrote Gloria Steinem, feminist and founder of Ms. Magazine. "It could lead us to investigate

the prison industrial complex, and the reasons why more and more prisons are being built even as the crime rate declines. It could help us reveal who is in prison - and why."

While the case has garnered international attention, the recent rash of

Free Mumia graffiti prompts an interesting question - why are Montreal activists so interested in the case? And how effective is pro-Mumia political action in a city facing a whole slew

of completely different issues?

Lise Kuhn, an activist with the Montreal Free Mumia Coalition, says the recent "right-wing swing" in Canada has placed human rights low on the agenda. And as trade agreements serve to further blur economic borders, activists are concerned that social and political freedom will be traded like a commodity.

Kuhn suggests that Jamal's case catapulted Montreal activists into larger

discussions of political oppression, encouraging them to question Canadian issues such as the threat of prison privatization.

While there has been pro-Mumia action in Montreal since 1995, the Coalition was founded in October 1998. Last year, the group sent 70 activists to Philadelphia to join in a free Mumia rally. Over the last couple of years, the Coalition has organized protests, set up tables at McGill and Concordia Universities, and produced

pamphlets with information about the case.

Kuhn says pro-Mumia support crystalized after former Black Panther Lorenzo Kom'boa Erwin spoke at Concordia two years in a row. She said that while pro-Mumia graffiti may have targeted the wrong city, it made Jamal a household name.

"We focus on grassroots support," said Kuhn. "We try to talk to the alternative press, but we rarely get mainstream media atten-

tion."

Kuhn admitted that while the Coalition succeeded in raising awareness about the case in Montreal, the lack of mainstream attention makes it difficult for the group to reach past the activist community.

Still, Kuhn pointed out that the Internet has allowed activists to organize around the world, sharing information about the case, and promoting broader discussions about civil liberty and systemic racism. And while some