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Star Wars draws Canadian engineers

by Peter Kuitenbrouwer
of Canadian University press

OTTAWA (CUP) — Research spending on U.S. President Ronald Reagan's space-based defense system could suck Canadian engineers out of universities here to vast demand in the States, warns Canada's national professors group.

The U.S. Department of Defense plans to spend almost $3 billion on the Strategic Defense Initiative next year, $26 billion in the next five years.

Many U.S. university engineers will be lured into defense labs, creating shortages in American Universities, said Donald Savage, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

"If they put up that kind of money for the research, private universities will comb the world for researchers, and the closest place to come is Canada," Savage said.

"I don't see how you can spend billions and billions on SDI research without having a dramatic effect on the market for engineers and scientists," Savage said.

U.S. immigration laws already have exemptions for immigration of engineers, and the U.S. Congress is considering immigration reforms which will make it easier for these groups to enter the United States.

Savage said even before Reagan announced the SDI plan in April, 1984, he can remember meetings in Washington where on plans for government research where people were saying "where are we going to find all the people to do these things?"

The last big drain of Canadian engineers came in 1959 when Prime Minister John Diefenbaker cancelled the Avro Arrow airplane programme. Hordes of Canadian engineers went south to work in U.S. universities or help the space race.

Savage did not know if the Canadian decision Sept. 9 not to officially support SDI research would mean less SDI contracts at Canadian universities. "If that happens, it's the penalty you pay for your principles," he said.

A study released by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research council (NSERC) in June says there is already a serious lack of scientists and engineers in Canada, and that Canada can't import manpower for research and development, innovation and technology diffusion "due to the world-wide shortage of researchers in these high-demand fields."

U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said recently that there was little worry of a "brain drain" caused by SDI research spending, the Montreal paper *Le Devoir* reported. But European governments have been calling the threat of lost engineering talent a "reverse Marshall plan."

Gordon McNabb, president of NSERC, said Canada could hang on to its engineers "if the universities could open up more faculty and research positions here."

"There's no action as yet in Canada to fund research positions," McNabb said.

McNabb said one NSERC program, the University Research Fellowships has attracted foreign engineers to Canada. One third of the 50 fellowships last year went to foreigners. "We're getting

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University threatens to shut down newspaper

WINNIPEG (CUP) — The University of Lethbridge threatened to close down the student newspaper recently if that paper published the name of a professor three students had accused of sexual harassment.

The paper ran the story with the professor's name blacked out, after getting a threatening letter for the U of L administration.

"We got a sharp lesson in the merits of autonomy," said Meliorist editor Sue Ward. The Meliorist is independant from control by the U of L student's council.

The administration told the Meliorist not to publish the name of the professor or the professor would sue the paper for libel, Ward said.

"We were on solid legal ground," Ward said. "We had people ready to testify in court for us, but we can't afford a lawsuit."

But the threats went further than that. "The Board of Governors sent us a letter as we were going to press that said 'the board recognizes that the publication at this time might have consequences that would necessitate the review of arrangements between the Meliorist and the Board of Governors,'" Ward said.

U of L president John Woods said that while the Meliorist is autonomous and self-governing, and the board has no legal authority over it, certain arrangements the university provides could be reviewed.

"I'm referring to the facilities here. The Meliorist rents space and electricity from the university," Woods said.

Wards said Woods had threatened to do more than turn off the power and lock the door.

"Woods said the Board would forbid distribution of the Meliorist on Campus," Ward said.

"He also said the board might sue or suspend staff members if we didn't pull the professor's name."

The administration contacted the Meliorist's printer in Taber, Alberta, and said the printer would also be sued if they printed the story. Fortunately the woman who took the call knew the libel laws and would still run our paper," Ward said.

The professor refused comment except to say "that phrase (sexual harassment) has never been used in connection with my name by any member of the university."

The professor responded to the three women's complaints through the university's associate dean of Administrative affairs, telling the dean to tell the woman that "no offense or disrespect was intended." He offered to apologize through Hoye's office for any offence which the complainants "may have perceived to have taken place."