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Dollars and Sense: University Finance as a Symbolic System

This paper moves from the general idea of the global university to a particular site of conflict and transformation in the Canadian university system. While networked knowledge production and circulation has become more open and mobile, the Canadian Association of University Teachers' model clause on "academic freedom" is disabled by internal compliance to external threats to intellectual work. Following Newfield (2008), I read my own university's finances as a symbolic system. I describe and analyze how the pretext of economic 'bad times' was used during and after the longest English university strike in Canadian history. Upper-level management exacerbated the tendency toward self-imposed austerity. This year, with the complicity of faculty, a "provostial white paper" and data-based analysis is identifying more "targeted cuts." By critically examining dollars and sense, we not only open a window on the global university but gain a deeper understanding of a national university system in crisis.