



**Knowledge for Sale. The Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education.** Lawrence Busch. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, USA. 2017. 176 pages. Price: US\$ 24.95.

Neoliberal approaches in higher education have largely failed as: they have not led to greater efficiencies but to more bureaucracy; they have not led to greater liberties but to more constraints on teaching, research and engagement; they have not led to more robust and autonomous institutions but to weakened institutions linked too closely to the immediate concerns of the day, and they have not led to new ways to grapple with the crises that we face but to treading farther down the same paths that created those crises. The author of this book, Lawrence Busch contends that as the capitalist economy promotes the marketing and branding of everything and everyone, pulling the world of knowledge out from the trap of the business model that aims at investing in education for getting a good job would warrant a shift towards restoring academic freedom.

This book could not have appeared at a more important time, as it reflects the painful decline that the institutions of higher learning are going through. At stake is the role of higher education as a crucial public good, which is being compromised under the influence of the markets. The crisis is so stark that its symptoms are spread all over: decline of humanities education, escalating student debt and underpaid contract faculty. One would imagine that with the only knowledge worth pursuing being that which has more or less immediate market value, such a situation was bound to occur.

Busch is not convinced and challenges this market-driven approach. His thesis is

based on the premise that most of the present-day problems – from climate change to water shortages, and from obesity to financial crises – would need new knowledge in addressing each of these issues. To imagine that market alone will resolve such issues is a fallacy worth challenging, because the market is neither inclusive nor transformative. It does alter consumptive habits only to the extent of minting profits, and almost always by externalizing costs of such a transition. Consider how market incentives in our food system promote diets that create obesity, thereby putting extra demands on medical institutions. Markets on their own cannot substitute institutions of higher education and research which co-create knowledge for the state to act upon.

Drawing a distinction between liberals of 18th and 19th centuries with neo-liberals of the 20th and 21st centuries, the author explains that while the liberals had argued that the State should merely leave the market alone, the neo-liberals sought active involvement of the Nation-states in the market. No surprise, therefore, that the market has intervened at individual and institutional levels by changing the rules of the game. Hence, markets and market-like competitions have replaced direct Government intervention in promoting higher education and research.

Professor emeritus of sociology at Michigan State University, USA, with research interests in environmental and agricultural research, Busch argues that education is a public good and that an educated citizenry is an essential component of functional democracy. Through an in-depth analysis on the influence of neo-liberalism, the book provides a crucial rationale for defending higher education as an important public good, which ought to be protected from corporate control as defined by agents of privatization, deregulation and commodification. For this to be realized, universities and research institutions must be remade as places where the future is neither already made in the mould of the market, nor in which the market is to be avoided at all costs, but where many possible futures are proposed, debated and discussed.

Among many cases of the kind, the specific case of the 10-year lease agreement worth Canadian dollars 7 million on biotechnology research between Monsanto and the University of Manitoba,

Canada illustrates how market influences research that may not necessarily be in the public interest. For three years, much to the dismay of many faculty members, the University administration unsuccessfully suppressed the news. This is not an isolated case of market-influenced research. What is more, such dubious agreements erode public faith in research institutions.

This book peels many layers of the crises, including the laid-back attitude of individual researchers awaiting paychecks to those who capitalize public resources to maximize personal goals. Such situations have created a ‘moral hazard’ for the public sector, which only helped create an opening for the market to make inroads through open competition for external grants and by tagging institutions as products in the market. Although there is some merit in this approach as it promises to increase efficiency, productivity and profits, it eventually undermines research, education, public engagement, and fails to contribute to promoting democracy. In the nutshell, public good gets compromised.

In making a case for promoting and strengthening public good, Busch examines four institutional core areas – administration, education, research and extension – in enlisting specific proposals for change. Ranging from making research institutions secure places with attached conditions to making universities models of democratic discourse, the book challenges the pervasive idea that higher education needs to be run like a business. Citing successful initiatives at many universities and research institutions, Busch has drawn an actionable agenda at the core of which the leading question before the society at large is: what kind of universities and research institutes do we want to help us come out of the wicked problems afflicting the society?

For those in the spheres of academics, this book offers substance to view the current predicaments while at the same time remaining brief and accessible.

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