The Canadian Journal of Higher Education
La revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur
Volume XXX, No. 3, 2000 pages 157 – 178

SPECIAL FEATURE / CONTRIBUTION SPÉCIALE

"The Wood Beyond": Reflections on Academic Freedom, Past and Present*

MICHIEL HORN
Glendon College of York University

The title of my address and the form it has taken are serendipitous. While in Victoria last March, I dropped into Munro's Bookstore for a novel to read on the flight back to Toronto. I had just finished *On Beulah Height,* a superb Dalziel and Pascoe mystery by Reginald Hill that my wife had given me to read on the way out to the Coast, and so I chose the book that preceded it. *The Wood Beyond,* like all Dalziel-Pascoe novels, is set in Yorkshire, but a key subplot is Peter Pascoe's discovery that his great-grandfather was unjustly executed for cowardice during the third battle of Ypres, better known as the battle of Passchendaele. And the name of that battle rang a bell.

Passchendaele is the name of a village in the Ypres salient finally captured by Canadian units in early November 1917. The battle ranks among the most disastrous engagements of the 1914–1918 war. In the course of 103 days of fighting, from July 31 to November 10, the forces commanded by Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig moved a twelve-kilometre front line about five muddy kilometres eastward, at the appalling cost of 70,000 English, Scottish, Canadian, Australian, and

* Keynote address, Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education, Edmonton, Alberta, May 26, 2000

New Zealand dead and 170,000 injured. The eminent military historian John Keegan (1999) writes, "The point of Passchendaele... defies explanation" (pp. 368-369). Few would disagree.

It was during this battle in October 1917 that a young Canadian historian saw action for the first time. The carnage he witnessed then and during the following year marked Frank Hawkins Underhill (1889–1971) for life. This, in turn, would have implications for the history of academic freedom in Canada.

In the late 1950s, Underhill (1960) wrote:

> I did my military service...in an English infantry battalion. I discovered that this Edwardian-Georgian generation of Englishmen made the best regimental officers in the world and the worst staff officers. The stupidity of G.H.Q. and the terrible sacrifice of so many of the best men among my contemporaries sickened me for good of a society, national or international, run by the British governing classes. (p. x)

Although the basis for this feeling was laid in 1917 and 1918, Underhill began to give voice to it only in the 1930s. As R. Douglas Francis (1986), his biographer, makes clear, Underhill returned to Canada believing "that the Great War was...the beginning of a new millennium when the full flowering of liberal man would show in all its splendour" (p. 48). He also became a fervent Canadian nationalist. In 1923 he described the Canadian Expeditionary Force as "the greatest national achievement of the Canadian people since the Dominion came into being," and its accomplishments as:

> ...the real testimony to Canada's entrance into nationhood, the visible demonstration that there has grown up on her soil a people not English, nor Scottish, nor American, but Canadian — a Canadian nation. (Underhill, 1923, p. 286)

That assessment, like Underhill's hopes for the post-war years, owed a lot to his efforts to make sense of the slaughter at Passchendaele and elsewhere, and of the horrors he remembered all too clearly. If the war heralded a better future for the world and had also earned nationhood for Canada, this in some way seemed to justify the destruction, the loss of

life, and the shattered bodies and minds of so many of the survivors. The disillusionment that followed in the 1930s, when the peace signed at Versailles looked more and more like the precondition for another European war, helps to explain the neutralism of Underhill's post-1933 speeches and writings on Canada's relations with Britain and the League of Nations. The expression of his views tested the limits of academic freedom at the time and more than once got him into serious trouble.

Academic freedom is a concept that has changed its meaning over the last century. In the 1930s its defenders applied it to teaching, research and its publication, and, more controversially, to the public expression of opinion. (Its extension to cover criticism of the institutions in which academics taught and of administrative officers and governing boards, dates to the 1960s.) The roots of academic freedom in Canada were found in the nineteenth-century German universities, in the German-influenced research universities of the post-bellum United States, and in the British tradition of academic free speech. The justification for academic freedom was that the university and society were best served by independent instruction, research, and social, economic, and political commentary. Not everyone agreed. Teaching and research that challenged the prevailing orthodoxies aroused protest on occasion. The expression of unpopular views did so more reliably. Certainly Underhill's criticism of British foreign policy and his attack on Canada's ties to the Empire aroused strong hostility.

The historian's views at mid-decade are best expressed in the chapter on foreign policy in *Social Planning for Canada,* published in 1935 under the auspices of the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR).[1] He had to accommodate the views of other members of the LSR research committee, but the chapter was essentially his work. It briefly traces the course of Canadian foreign and imperial relations from the days of Sir Wilfrid Laurier to the Statute of Westminster (1931). This seemed to be the "final defeat" of a current of British imperialism that dated back to the 1870s. Unfortunately, "the world is once again drifting towards war as it was in the days of Laurier," (League for Social Reconstruction, 1935, p. 517) and British statesmen were beckoning Canada once more. However, "Canadian nationalism is an achievement of no significance

if Canadian policy is in the end always to be determined by the *faits accomplis* of the British Foreign Office" (p. 518).

Underhill continued, "War is an inherent institution in our present capitalist civilization and...can only be eliminated by a world-wide reconstruction of our social and economic institutions" (League for Social Reconstruction, 1935, p. 518). These included not only the British Commonwealth, but also the League of Nations. The collective system was primarily a scheme for maintaining the post-1918 domination of Europe by France and Britain. Furthermore, even in its "uninspiring role as a society of retired burglars defending the principle of private property the League is now failing to function" (p. 520). France and Britain had shown a willingness to subvert the principle of collective security when it served their interests to do so. Noble in principle, collective security was in practice "incompatible with the capitalist imperialism of the great powers" (p. 521).

What, then, should Canadian foreign policy be? Neutrality, though difficult and in some ways unpalatable, seemed best. Canada had a strong interest in European stability and prosperity, bt there was little or nothing Canadians could do to solve European problems. "We should therefore make clear to London and Geneva that we intend to fertilize no more crops of poppies blooming in Flanders fields" (League for Social Reconstruction, 1935, p. 522).

If Underhill had been clearly identified as the author of the chapter, he would certainly have come under attack. Beginning in 1933, after Adolf Hitler's seizure of power in Germany rekindled fears of war, the historian's assertions that Canada must avoid war and his criticism of British foreign policy brought demands that the University of Toronto silence and even dismiss him. The harshest criticism came from Conservative quarters. The main Tory newspaper in Toronto, the *Mail and Empire,* commenting in 1933 on extension lectures Underhill had given in Orillia, charged that he was using his position at an institution "supported by the taxpayers of Ontario in a manner which will not be approved by a great majority of those taxpayers," and added that a "vociferous minority among the professors should [not] be allowed to poison the minds of young men and women whose fathers

pay the professors' salaries" (University of Toronto Archives, 1933a) — in fact, Underhill kept his political views out of his classes. President Henry J. Cody responded to complaints by asking the historian to tone down his public speeches. A year later, after Underhill predicted (accurately, as it turned out) in London, Ontario, that another major war would spell the end of the British Empire, Cody demanded that the historian make no more speeches for a year (Francis, 1986, p. 99). Underhill agreed, and from 1934 to 1937 he expressed his opinions only in written form, often anonymously.

Like Robertson Davies's schoolmaster Dunstable Ramsay, Underhill could rarely resist getting off "good ones" — sarcastic barbs that wounded and gave deep offence. Typical of his style was a paragraph from a private document he wrote for the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) in 1935, a paragraph that came back to haunt him four years later:

> We must therefore make it clear to the world, and especially to Great Britain, that the poppies blooming in Flanders fields have no further interest for us. We must fortify ourselves against the allurements of a British war for democracy and freedom and parliamentary institutions, and against the allurements of a League war for peace and international order. And when overseas propagandists combine the two appeals to us by urging us to join in organizing the "Peace World" to which all the British nations already belong, the simplest answer is to thumb our noses at them. Whatever the pretext on which Canadian armed forces may be lured to Europe again, the actual result would be that Canadian workers and farmers would shoot down German workers and farmers, or be shot down by them, in meaningless slaughter. As the late John S. Ewart remarked, we should close our ears to these European blandishments and, like Ulysses and his men, sail past the European siren, our ears stuffed with tax-bills. All these European troubles are not worth the bones of a Toronto grenadier. (Underhill, 1935, p. 269).[2]

Underhill was not writing for publication and he could not have known that his comments would prove useful to a political scientist who was preparing a book about Canadian foreign policy. The paragraph appeared in *Canada Looks Abroad* (1938), written by Robert A. MacKay of Dalhousie University in collaboration with an economist, E.B. Rogers, and published by the Oxford University Press under the auspices of the CIIA.

In April 1939, the passage suddenly appeared before a public much larger than the readership of the book. This came about in an unusual way. A story appeared in the *Globe and Mail* on April 8 quoting the Trinity College classicist G.M.A. Grube, mistakenly identified as a "U. of T. professor," as saying at a CCF convention "that any war that would come in Europe at the present time would 'have nothing to do with democracy' " (*Globe and Mail,* Apr. 8, 1939). Grube made his remark in speaking to a motion describing the recently-expanded Canadian defence budget as "a waste of public money in the interests of British imperialism." An MPP put the text of the motion in Grube's mouth, however, whereupon Liberal and Conservative MPPs united in attacking him. Head of the Liberal government, Premier Mitchell Hepburn implied that Grube was a communist and others said the University of Toronto should discipline him. Contacted by the press, President Cody pointed out that Grube was employed by Trinity College. When he was informed of this, Hepburn said that either Trinity should discipline "this foreigner" (a naturalized British subject, Grube had been born in Belgium and had served in its army during the war) or its federation with the university might be adjusted in some way harmful to the college — might even be revoked (*Globe and Mail,* April 13 & 14, 1939).

At this point attention shifted to Underhill. Architect of the shift was the Leader of the Opposition (and later a Conservative premier of the province), George Drew, who pointed out that Grube was not the only professor whose loyalty was in doubt. Underhill was another. Drew quoted from the book he was holding: "We must therefore make it clear to the world, and especially to Great Britain, that the poppies blooming in Flanders fields have no further interest to us." "Shame, shame!" Hepburn cried. Drew read the remainder of the paragraph and looked up.

"The time has come," he said, "to stop...permanently statements of that kind by a man who either in or out of the educational institution is speaking as a member of that institution" (*Globe and Mail,* April 14, 1939).

Agreeing fervently with Drew, Colonel Fraser Hunter (Liberal) described Underhill and Grube as "rats who are trying to scuttle our ship of state" and introduced a motion to have then dismissed for "hurling insults at the British Empire" (*Globe and Mail,* April 14, 1939). The Minister of Education, L.J. Simpson, demurred, saying that nothing should be done without consulting with the authorities at the University of Toronto and Trinity College and allowing them to discipline the two professors. Drew concurred. So did Hepburn, but not without promising that the government would act if the two offenders were not dealt with. No MPP asked whether Underhill might have been right when he wrote the words in 1935 and he might even be right in 1939. None defended his right to state an unpopular opinion. The architect Humphrey Carver (1939) asked in the pages of the *Canadian Forum* some weeks later: "Are...[they] so intimidated by their infernal party machines that they cannot recognize a fundamental issue when they see one?" (p. 41).

If they could not, it was because pro-British sentiment had blinded them. Emotions at Queen's Park were seriously overheated, the result of recent developments on the other side of the Atlantic. By April 1939 the British policy of appeasing Nazi Germany, until recently favoured by many Canadians (Prime Minister Mackenzie King among them), lay in tatters. Breaking his September 1938 promise at Munich to respect the territorial integrity of what remained of Czechoslovakia after it ceded the Sudetenland to Germany, Hitler had ordered his forces into Prague on 14 March 1939. Feeling betrayed, the British government led by Neville Chamberlain had given a territorial guarantee to Poland, already allied with France. A European war seemed very near.

In response, on March 23 the Ontario Legislature unanimously passed a motion, introduced by Hunter and amended by the Premier himself, asking the Government of Canada to pledge the country's support for "any action which it may be necessary for the Imperial Government to take," and petitioning "the Federal Parliament...to immediately pass Legislation providing that in event of a War emergency the wealth and

manpower of Canada shall be mobilized...for the duration of the war, in defence of our free institutions" (Saywell, 1991, p. 419).

Men who had passed such a motion were apt to regard opinions that challenged the British connection as unpatriotic, even treasonable. Meanwhile the principle of free speech struck even some newspaper editors as a frill the country could do without in time of crisis. The *Globe and Mail* and *Telegram* attacked Underhill and Grube (the *Toronto Star* was silent), while in Montreal, the *Gazette* opined editorially that "an intellectual and political house-cleaning seems necessary in more than one of the country's larger educational centres and there appear to be some excellent reasons for commencing the process in Toronto" (*Gazette,* 1939).

There were other editorial voices, too. One of Underhill's friends, the Ottawa journalist and broadcaster Alan Plaunt, reported to the McGill law professor Frank Scott, that "adverse comment on the Drew-Hepburn gag racket" had appeared in several Ontario newspapers, among them the *London Free Press,* the *Windsor Star,* and the two Ottawa English-language dailies, the *Citizen* and the *Journal* (National Archives of Canada, 1939a). The weekly *Saturday Night* had also criticized the attempt to silence the professors; so, outside the province, had *Le Devoir* and the *Winnipeg Free Press.* Aware, however, where the institution got its money, and that Hepburn and Drew were in agreement, the University of Toronto's board of governors was more inclined to pay attention to Underhill's critics than to the champions of academic free speech.

Having been forewarned of Drew's intentions, the board met on April 13 and asked President Cody to determine, before Underhill appeared before them, whether the historian had been accurately quoted, whether the passage had been used with his permission, and whether he still held the views expressed in it. Underhill reported to a friend, the journalist George V. Ferguson, that the president had accused him of being a trouble-maker "who was costing the University untold sums of money (this trouble came just in the midst of troubles about our estimates)," (National Archives of Canada, 1939c) and had warned him that the board might seek his dismissal if he did not seem appropriately contrite.

When Underhill appeared before the board, he found that the Dean of Arts and Sciences, Samuel Beatty, Principal Malcolm Wallace of University College, and Harold Adams Innis of Political Economy had spoken on his behalf. The board had at least listened to him, he told Ferguson, and he thought he might escape with a reprimand. "A few days ago I was preparing to drop my golf club so as to economise before going on relief. This is the worst business I've been through yet, and it ruined both my sleep and my appetite for a while" (National Archives of Canada, 1939c). A few days later Underhill wrote to another friend, historian Arthur Lower, that "this trouble has been so severe that we pretty well have to keep quiet for a while" (Queen's University Archives, 1939).

The letter Underhill sent to Cody was penitent in tone. He explained that a private document had been made public without his knowledge or permission, that he still held to the view expressed but had ceased to express it publicly, and that he had meant no disrespect for those who had fought in Flanders fields. After all, he had been wounded there himself! He regretted that his choice of words had offended, pointed out that he had very largely lived up to an earlier promise to "try to avoid undesirable publicity," and stated that though he could not guarantee that he would never offend anyone in the future, Cody might take the fact that he had behaved himself "reasonably well" in recent years "as a guarantee that I can be trusted when I say that I shall do my best in future to behave as reasonable men would expect a professor to behave" (University of Toronto Archives, 1939c).

Who these men were and how they expected professors to behave were questions Underhill neither asked nor answered. Was Hepburn a reasonable man? Or Drew, or Colonel Hunter. Or Underhill's friend Escott Reid, who wrote from his diplomatic post in Washington, D.C.:

> I had no idea that the stupidities of the Ontario Legislature were to be taken seriously. Now I am no longer amused. I am ashamed and frightened. I had expected that sort of thing in war-time but not in these pre-war days. If the patriots are so hysterical now what will they be like when the bombs begin to drop on London? (National Archives of Canada, 1939d)

The University of New Brunswick economist Burton S. Keirstead wrote to Underhill: "Now that [Hepburn] has raised the issue of academic freedom, I hope that the University of Toronto will stand behind you and fight the issue out with him" (National Archives of Canada, 1939b). Underhill did enjoy considerable support, from colleagues, from students (1,014 of whom signed a petition supporting his right and Grube's to state their views), and from alumni. One of the latter wrote to Cody:

> In the classroom, any teacher should confine himself to the subject he is hired to expound,...but outside, he [has] a perfect right to his own opinion, and unless we want a state of affairs such as exists under Hitler & Mussolini, he should not be penalized for expressing his opinions. (University of Toronto Archives, 1939b)

From Cody's perspective and that of the board the matter was not as simple as that, however. Aside from what they thought of Underhill's sentiments — we may surmise that many if not all board members deplored them — or about the value of academic free speech, they had to consider the university's financial health, given its dependence on the provincial government. The Trinity authorities were annoyed by Grube's comments, but at least they did not have to worry about provincial support, since the college got none (Horn, 1999, pp. 122–123). Seeking to balance the provincial budget for 1939–40, the government had cut the University of Toronto's grant as well as the grants made to the province's two private, non-sectarian institutions, Queen's and the University of Western Ontario. Another Hepburn biographer, Neil McKenty, writes that when Western's students publicly protested against the cut:

> ...the Premier (who never showed much sympathy for or awareness of the problems of higher education) remarked that universities were largely populated by children of the rich, a state of affairs that would scarcely be ameliorated by cutting their grants. (McKenty, 1967, p. 190)

The University of Toronto's board of governors had to deal with the reality of a premier who had quit school four weeks into grade eleven and showed no respect for higher learning. (After all, he had

managed to become a successful farmer and politician without it!) One board member, the mining engineer Balmer Neilly, surmised that Underhill's continued presence might increase Hepburn's hostility to the university. Writing in May 1939 to the secretary of the board, Neilly argued that Underhill should be fired. If he stayed "and he or others like him transgress again, we may find our grant again reduced and the whole future of the University put in jeopardy" (UTA, 1939d).

Cody was less worried than Neilly. In a June 1939 statement to the board, the president said that Underhill had promised to mend his ways. As well, Cody added, some "senior men" in Arts and University College were setting up "a small committee which would...assume the task of investigating public statements made by members of the staff which prove to be irritating to a section of the public to the detriment of the University." This group "would not only ensure thorough investigation," but would help prevent "unwise and unwarranted public statements on the part of members of the staff." Pleased by the prospect of professorial self-censorship, Cody recommended "that the Board take no further action at present" (UTA, 1939e). The board concurred.

The committee seems not to have got off the ground and the proposed scheme may have been little more than an attempt to take the heat off Underhill. The heat was going down in any case, for interest in the Grube-Underhill affair waned quickly. The Legislature had been about to rise and Hepburn and Drew had other things to worry about. As well, Peter Oliver writes, a former premier who was a member of the university's governing board, Howard Ferguson, smoothed ruffled feathers in order "to help Harry Cody out of a tight spot" (Oliver, 1977, p. 438). Ferguson and Cody, it should be said, had once been college roommates.

Underhill would get into even more serious trouble in 1940–41, when his job was saved only through intervention by high personages in Ottawa (Francis, 1986, pp. 114–127). One result was that thereafter he avoided controversial subjects altogether, with negative implications for academic freedom. However, the April 1939 furore in the Ontario Legislature serves nicely to get me to "the wood beyond," leaving the past behind and entering the present.

With this process Underhill was very familiar. Historians are sometimes urged to stick to observing and chronicling the past while leaving the present to journalists, political scientists, economists, and the like. Underhill would have had a quieter life had he followed such advice during the 1930s. But past and present cannot be separated. They are a continuum. Underhill could not talk about Canadian foreign policy without recalling the Great War and drawing lessons from his (and Canada's) experiences. He felt compelled to warn against repeating what he had come to believe had been a mistake. In response to Marvin Gelber, one of his former students, who called Underhill and others like him "liberals with a Versailles complex," the historian wrote in 1936:

> Having myself taken part in a fairly recent war for the elimination of Kaiserism from Europe, a war which eliminated Kaiserism only to replace it by Hitlerism, I have lost my faith in the effectiveness of the policy of burying more Canadians in that continent — whether we profess to bury them for the sake of liberalism or democracy or socialism or communism. (Underhill, 1936, p. 4)

Dealing with the past meant dealing with the present; understanding the present meant having to interpret and understand the past.

The point is splendidly made in a recent German novel. The protagonist of Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (1995) (ambiguously rendered into English as *The Reader*), having become a legal historian interested in law during the Third Reich, muses that the study of history is a kind of escape or flight. And yet:

> Fleeing is not just running away; it is also going somewhere. And the past in which I arrived as a legal historian was no less full of life than the present. For it is not true, as an outsider might assume, that although one can observe the richness of past life, one participates in life only in the present. Doing history means building bridges between past and present, observing both riverbanks and being active on both. (p. 172)

I suspect Underhill would have agreed with this.

In my recent book, *Academic Freedom in Canada: A History* (Horn, 1999, pp. 327–349), I have tried to identify and discuss the various challenges currently facing Canadian universities and academic freedom. I want to say a few words about a very real threat to academic freedom in Ontario today and to discuss its implications.

There are many differences between Ontario in 1939 and Ontario six decades later. But there are also similarities, and from the point of those interested in higher education, one striking similarity is that the governments of Mitchell Hepburn and Mike Harris share a generally hostile attitude to higher education, though for different reasons. Hepburn and others who thought like him disliked what they saw as the elitism of universities. A key reason for the hostility shown by the Harris government is its preference for the private sector and the free market. Dependent on public funds and, to a considerable extent, insulated from market demands, the universities are suspected of wasting money, of devoting too much time and money to impractical subjects and research projects, and not enough to giving students the skills needed to function in a high-tech labour market.

There is probably more to it than this. It would be entertaining and possibly enlightening to speculate about the personal reasons for the Tories' dislike of universities. But on the principle that business precedes pleasure it is more important to identify the nature of the current threat to academic freedom.

The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has recently announced that half of $33 million in new operating funds for 2000-01 will be granted on the basis of three performance indicators (PIs). These are: (1) the graduation rate of students who registered for the first time in 1991; (2) the six-month employment rate of 1997 graduates of undergraduate programs; and (3) the two-year employment rate of 1997 graduates of undergraduate programs. The $16.5 million available will be divided evenly among the three PIs, and institutions will be ranked for each of them. The top third of institutions will share two-thirds of the money available in each $5.5 million pot, with an institution's share of this money determined by its share of the total Basic Income Units of all the winning universities. The middle third of institu-

tions will share the remaining third of the available money, and the bottom third of institutions will get nothing from that particular pot. Every university will receive some small amount of money unless it is in the bottom third for each PI (as it seems four institutions are). Then it gets *nada que nada,* nothing at all.[3]

Early this year much has been said about the PIs, most of it critical. Their most basic flaw is that they confuse quantity and quality, but the indicators are flawed for other reasons, too. A comment by David Crane, the business columnist of the *Toronto Star,* is ungenerous, but not inappropriate or unfair. He states that linking the increases in grants to the performance indicators is an implementation of "one of the dumbest ideas ever tried" (Crane, 2000).

The *Globe and Mail*'s John Ibbitson (1999), who blew the whistle on the government's plans for higher education a year ago, has pointed out that in the two employment categories "the differences between first and last place fall within the statistical margin of error. Nonetheless, funding will be granted and withheld based on differences of as little as a few hundredths of a percentage point" (Ibbitson, 2000). Asked to comment, the Minister responsible, Dianne Cunningham, did not believe this to be unreasonable. "We work with the data that is available," she said, "I wanted to make sure that the universities are accountable to the students and taxpayers." She thought the PIs were "fair," she added, but expressed a willingness to work with "the university community...to refine the formula." (Ibbitson, 2000). Perhaps someone will be able to enlighten her about the significance of sampling errors.

Wrong-headed and damaging as the two employment indicators are at least to some universities, at present they seem to constitute no direct threat to academic freedom. In the short term, the harm done by these two PIs will mainly be confined to professorial salaries and the quality of the classroom experience of students at the unlucky institutions. I do not want to underestimate the seriousness of these kinds of damage. But since my primary concern is with academic freedom, I want to focus on the first and most immediately dangerous of the PIs — the graduation rates of students who entered the system in 1991.

The survey of graduation rates reveals much greater variation than the employment data. Some 90.3% of students who entered Queen's University in 1991 have received degrees so far. For the lowest-ranked university, Carleton, the graduation rate is 48.5%. Does this mean Queen's has done a better job than other universities? Not necessarily. Graduation rates are influenced by admissions policies, the types of programs offered by a university, the money available for student support, the financial and intellectual resources that students bring to their studies, the propensity of students to move among universities,[4] and the course requirements set by professors and their grading policies, to name some obvious variables. Under Ontario's funding formula, universities are discouraged from reducing their admissions, and they will find it difficult or even impossible to significantly affect four of the remaining five variables listed above.

What can be most easily done so that higher graduation rates may ensue? Adjusting course requirements and grading policies, of course. Three ways of pleasing students and ensuring they get their degrees expeditiously are (1) not to ask them to do a lot of work, (2) not to give them low grades, and (3) above all not to fail them. Here I see a threat to academic freedom, as well as to professorial and institutional integrity.

When the historian Harry Crowe got the J.B. Milner Award in 1974, for service to the cause of academic freedom, he said, as I recall, that universities might be compelled to admit students because outside agencies such as provincial ministries of education held them to be qualified, but whether they graduated or not was up to the professors. What may now happen is that professors will feel pressure not to demand quantities of work or award grades that seem likely to interfere with students' progress towards a degree. However, essential aspects of the freedom to teach are the freedom to assign work that instructors think necessary, and the freedom to grade students according to the professors' best judgment of the quality of the work done. An appeals mechanism should be in place to accommodate students who believe their work has been unfairly assessed, but in such cases due process must be scrupulously observed.

Still, if universities are to be rewarded or punished for their graduation rates, financial self-interest will point institutions and their professors

towards reducing requirements and inflating grades. Some will resist, others will not. The price for giving in will be paid in the coin of integrity, but while the reputation of a given university may as a result be called in question, under the PI regime this will hardly matter. After all, reputations can be assessed subjectively but they cannot be measured. If what matters is to gain reward and avoid punishment — and evidently the Ontario government believes this ought to matter — some administrators and professors will do whatever it takes, and integrity be hanged! Anyway, how stands the market for integrity these days?

The immediate prospects for Ontario's universities or for some aspects of academic freedom are not good. Yes, it is possible to criticize government policy, as I have done today, without fear of institutional sanction. We should not read too much into this, however. One reason academics are freer to speak their minds than they were earlier in this century is that journalists, newspaper editors, and radio and TV producers have largely ceased to heed academics, except for a few superstars like Nobel Prize winner John Polanyi, a handful of right-wing professors mostly domiciled in Calgary and Toronto, and the occasional person who expresses an outrageous opinion or seems otherwise newsworthy. And who at Queen's Park cares what disaffected professors have to say? What do we matter, given the apparent triumph of the "common sense revolution" and the reality of universities that are increasingly businesslike?

The common sense revolution incorporates some of the pet notions of the half-informed and half-educated, of people inclined to look for simple solutions to complicated problems (and sometimes non-problems), but it also enshrines to some degree neoliberal ideas. In North America often (and confusingly) called neoconservatism, neoliberalism has its origins in laissez-faire liberalism and social Darwinism; doctrines which share little common ground with traditional conservatism. The chief neoliberal heroes today are the economists Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, and (to some) the novelist Ayn Rand. In Canada, the Fraser Institute and the *National Post* are the most important neoliberal mouthpieces.

Useful to people, mostly wealthy or trying to become so, whose overriding creed is a limitless self-interest and whose delusion it is that

this interest serves the interest of the human species, neoliberalism sees life as a ceaseless struggle in which individuals should enjoy maximum freedom of opportunity to succeed or fail — neoliberals talk a lot about "winners" and "losers." Freedom of opportunity requires free markets, including free labour markets, and minimal government intervention in such areas as regulation of industry and environmental protection. Functions carried out by government are to be privatized if they show any prospect at all of being profitable. Not least important, taxation must be reduced and then kept low.

Neoliberals have no quarrel with academic free speech. Once the universities are under the discipline of market forces and are obliged to meet consumer demand, academics may state their personal views freely but, unless they share the dominant ideology, to little or no effect. As for freedom in teaching and research, these will get short shrift. In an ideal neoliberal world students, seen as the primary consumers and beneficiaries of higher education, should pay for it at market rates with their own or their parents' money, or with money borrowed wherever they can. They could then insist that their education be supplied to them on their terms, in the classroom or over the Internet, in four-month terms or all year round, without having to subsidize the costs of research that, in their judgment, is irrelevant to *their* courses. Andrew Coyne (1996), a prominent neoliberal journalist, writes, "It is surprising how many changes you can think of, once you design a university around the needs of students rather than the needs of academics," describing with approval the University of Phoenix, a private, for-profit institution. "The university designs the course, then hires professors to teach it. Most are freelancers, there is no tenure." No research either, or academic freedom.

An article in the *New Yorker* describes Phoenix as "a para-university," possessing "the operational core of higher education — students, teachers, classrooms, exams, degree-granting programs — without a campus life, or even an intellectual life." President William Gibbs states: "Our students don't really want the education. They want what the education provides for them – better jobs, moving up in their career, the ability to speak up in meetings, that sort of thing" (Traub, 1997). Willy Loman wants to become more marketable, and in the market-driven

university the customer is king. Should we be surprised that Ontario is moving towards the accreditation in the province of Phoenix, among other private institutions?

That students go to university for career-oriented reasons is nothing new. However, if they graduate without also having learned to think critically, to acquire knowledge and apply it to new situations, and, paraphrasing George Santayana, to find their place in the world and learn what things in it can really serve them, they have been short-changed or they have short-changed themselves, no matter what credentials they may have picked up or how well-paid the jobs they get. A university which accepts that its students "don't want the education" and caters to this, and which makes no attempt to add to the stock of the world's knowledge, is a university in name only.

The call for the sort of market-driven universities that neoliberals like has calamitous implications for some of the academy's key functions: the expansion of the realm of knowledge, the quickening of students' minds and sensibilities, and the provision of an informed and disinterested analysis of phenomena and events. Not only these functions are in danger, moreover, but also the freedom of professors to determine the content of their courses and the direction of their research. That freedom is an anomaly from a business point of view, in which academics are employees to be managed, and from a neoliberal perspective, in which they are suppliers of personal services who must seek to "make it" in the market. One of the early champions of neoliberalism, William F. Buckley Jr., wrote in *God and Man at Yale* (1951), subtitled *The Superstitions of "Academic Freedom"*: "Every citizen in a free economy, no matter what wares he plies, must defer to the sovereignty of the consumer" (p. 185). In this brave new world, scholars and scientists are peddlers in pursuit of sales, and academic freedom is a mere superstition.

This may seem some distance removed from the PIs discussed above. The concept of accountability is the link. Consistent neoliberals will want to make universities and their teaching staffs accountable in market terms. The Ontario government, which must face the electorate from time to time, probably cannot afford to be consistently neoliberal even if it wants to (this is not clear). Its goals are more limited, I believe.

The PIs are a ham-handed attempt to compel the universities to rationalize programs and course offerings so that these will in time be geared more closely to supplying what the government believes students need and ought to want, i.e., training for jobs in the private sector. Doubtless members of the government can justify this attempt at *dirigisme* because the government continues to provide a large (though declining) part of university funding.

I have taken you from Passchendaele to performance indicators. What conclusion, if any, can be drawn from all this? At the moment, other than surmising that conditions in Ontario universities and with it the state of academic freedom will likely get worse before they get better, no firm conclusion seems possible. I cannot see into the future.

The other day, as I was waiting at the top of Queen's Park Crescent for the light to change, my eyes were drawn as usual to the memorial column raised in homage to the 48th Toronto Highlanders. Among the names of the battles chiselled into the stone is that of Passchendaele. Looking south, I more sensed than saw the outline of the Legislative Building through the trees. Turning my head back to check the traffic light, I saw ahead of me the mansion built for Sir Joseph Flavelle (now part of the University of Toronto Faculty of Law). Frank Underhill had his office there during his last years at the university. "Things fit together in odd ways," I thought, "but I'm not at all sure what it means. I wonder what Andy Dalziel or Peter Pascoe would make of it."

Notes

[1] Underhill was one of seven signatories. The other six were: Eugene Forsey; Leonard Marsh; and Frank R. Scott of McGill University; J. King Gordon, formerly of United Theological College in Montreal, but by 1935, a travelling lecturer; J.F. Parkinson of the University of Toronto; and the journalist and political organizer, Graham Spry. Several others had asked that their names not be included.

[2] Underhill, quoted in *Canada and the organization of peace,* a mimeograph prepared by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs for the

International Studies Conference, 1935 (see MacKay & Rogers, 1938, p. 269). John S. Ewart (1849–1933) was a distinguished lawyer and essayist who advocated Canadian constitutional independence.

[3] It should be said parenthetically that the available employment data provide no support for the notion that the liberal arts prepare students less effectively for jobs than more "practical" fields. Mindful of the possibility that sampling error has distorted the results, we note that the three institutions that ranked highest in graduating students who find and keep jobs are Wilfrid Laurier, Brock, and Nipissing Universities. None of the three is noted for its concentration on applied fields (Ibbitson, 2000).

[4] One of the obnoxious aspects of this PI is that students who move from one university to another are treated as dropouts. (Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, 2000).

References

Buckley, William F., Jr. (1951). *God and man at Yale: The superstitions of "academic freedom."* Chicago, IL.

Carver, H. (1939). Premier Hepburn and the professors. *Canadian Forum, 19.*

Coyne, A. (1996). The case for blowing up our ivory towers. *Globe and Mail,* May 4.

Crane, D. (2000). Bungling our universities and colleges. *Toronto Star,* May 7.

Francis, R.D. (1986). *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual provocateur.* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Gazette. (Apr. 15, 1939). Universities and professors.

Globe and Mail. (Apr. 4, 1939).

Globe and Mail. (Apr. 13 & 14, 1939).

Horn, M. (1999). *Academic freedom in Canada: A history.* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Ibbitson, J. (1999). Higher education next Tory target: Colleges, universities could be turned into job factories. *National Post,* April 26.

Ibbitson, J. (2000). Universities facing funding crapshoot. *Globe and Mail,* March 30.

Keegan, J. (1999). The first world war. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

League for Social Reconstruction, Research Committee. (1935). *Social planning for Canada.* Toronto, ON: Thomas Nelson.

MacKay, R.A., & Rogers, E.B. (eds.). (1938). *Canada look abroad.* London, UK: Oxford University Press.

McKenty, N. (1967). *Mitch Hepburn.* Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart.

National Archives of Canada. (1939a). Frank R. Scott papers, vol. 1, file: Academic freedom, Alan Plaunt to Scott, April 26. MG30, D211.

National Archives of Canada. (1939b). Frank H. Underhill papers, vol. 4, file: Burton S. Keirstead to Underhill, April 15. MG30, D204.

National Archives of Canada. (1939c). Frank H. Underhill papers, vol. 5, file: Underhill to George Ferguson, April 21.

National Archives of Canada. (1939d). Frank H. Underhill papers, vol. 7, file: Escott Reid to Underhill, April 15.

Oliver, P. (1977). *G. Howard Ferguson: Ontario Tory.* Toronto, ON: Univeristy of Toronto Press.

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. (2000). *Briefing note: Performance indicators and university accountability.* Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, March 22.

Queen's University Archives. (1939). A.R.M. Lower papers, vol. 1, file: Underhill to Lower, May 1. 5072.

Saywell, J.T. (1991). *'Just call me Mitch': The life of Mitchell F. Hepburn.* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Schlink, B. (1995). *Der Vorleser.* Zürich.

Traub, J. (1997). Drive-thru U. *New Yorker,* Oct 20 and 27.

Underhill, F. (1923). The Canadian forces at war. In C.A. Lucas (ed.), *The empire at war,* vol. 2. London.

Underhill, F. (1936). Reply to Marvin Gelber, That liberal façade. *Canadian Forum, 16.*

Underhill, F. (1960). *In search of Canadian liberalism.* Toronto, ON: MacMillan.

University of Toronto Archives, President's Office. (1939a). Professor Underhill's ramp at Orillia. *Mail and Empire,* November. A68-0006/012(03).

University of Toronto Archives, President's Office. (1939b). Olga Johnson to Cody, April 18. A72-0033/001(04).

University of Toronto Archives, President's Office. (1939c). Underhill to Cody, April 18. A72-0033/001(03).

University of Toronto Archives, President's Office. (1939d). Balmer Neilly to C.E. Higginbottom, May 8. A72-0033/001(03).

University of Toronto Archives, President's Office. (1939e). [H.A. Cody], Statement regarding Professor Frank Underhill, June 1939, A72-0033/001(03).