

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Woodhouse, Howard (2009). *Selling Out: Academic Freedom and the Corporate Academy*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. Pages: 360. Price: 35.95 CAD (cloth).

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Dr. Howard Woodhouse (College of Education, University of Saskatchewan) begins the book by disclosing his own firing from the University of Western Ontario close to thirty years ago. This extreme disciplinary action took root when “without the protection of tenure or academic freedom”, he authored a letter that was published in the university newspaper in which he criticized a peer’s position on South Africa apartheid and it culminated when he penned a report about “the future plans of the educational development office”(p.3). Woodhouse sued for wrongful dismissal and ultimately the Ontario Human Rights Commission found on his side of the dispute. This author has both direct personal and professional experience with an academic freedom case and has published in this area for several decades. This considerable vantage point might be, in part, what prompted him to frame his cumulative argument in a series of case studies of people “who have opposed the influence of the market on teaching and research at Canadian universities” (p.3) that serve to examine both personal and institutional levels. He also takes care to situate the concrete narratives alongside abstract theory with key attention paid to “the concept of ‘generalization’ operant in the work of Alfred North Whitehead” (p.5). The essence of the ongoing argument is that the traditional goal of the university, to provoke and to share knowledge, is antithetical to, or in “necessary conflict” with (p.21), the corporatist academy of the 21 century which privileges market demands over independent thought, research, teaching and learning. Woodhouse warns that the current “innovation, commercialization and federal government funding” driven Canadian higher education engineers “ready-made products and standardized ideas for the corporate market” (p.38) while simultaneously “academic skills” are “decoupled from any disciplinary base” (p.26).

The structure of the monograph is comprised of an introduction, seven chapters supported by approximately 70 pages of notes, and a short back of the book index. The heart

of the work is the engaging set of case studies which vary from the iconic Nancy Olivieri affair (Chapter 3: Taking on Big Pharma) to the lesser known set of circumstances of other scholars who spoke out against market forces in Canadian higher education. These stories of resistance are complemented by broader narratives, including “The Market Model of Education and the Threat to Academic Freedom” and “The Value Program in Theory in Practice”. Through the two closing chapters, which counter the ubiquitous model of student evaluation as customer satisfaction and examine The People’s Free University of Saskatchewan, the book ultimately pushes questions that many of us in academe grapple with today. To what extent is resistance in the form of a “civil commons” (p.261) a possibility? How much daring will it take and at what personal and professional cost, for example “to be shunned, persecuted and possibly dismissed” (p.11)?

Selling Out is highly relevant to contemporary Canadian higher education, including its current academic dramas, such as the “August 2011 agreement between York University and RIM co-founder Jim Balsillie’s private think tank, the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI)” in which “the University agrees that it will allow CIGI not only a voice in who should be hired in the program at York, but veto power over whom the University can consider for hiring.”¹ From the “cause célèbre” (p.91) to the too often unprotected academic status of the clinical researcher today, there is a broad audience for this work. And although Woodhouse has a particular interest in critiquing the market model and the strained internal link between academic freedom and institutional autonomy, he also raises awareness about a range of other threats to academic freedom, including political correctness (PC) and exclusion of minority groups from shared university governance (pp.11-12).

Woodhouse anchors his understanding of academic freedom in the Canadian Association of University Teacher’s (CAUT) Model Clause. It states that academic freedom “includes the right, without restriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom to teach and discuss; freedom to carry out research and disseminate and publish the results thereof; freedom to produce and perform creative works; freedom to engage in service to the institution and the community; freedom to express one’s opinion about the institution, its administration, and the system in which one works; freedom to acquire, preserve, and provide access to documentary material in all formats; and freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies. Academic freedom always entails freedom from institutional censorship.”² One can assume that Woodhouse would have shuddered coldly at the highly contested 2011 Statement on Academic Freedom adopted by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC)³, but warmly welcomed the March 2012 CAUT letter by President James L. Turk titled “Universities must serve the public interest, not private ones”.⁴

Woodhouse is not the first professor to raise concerns about academic freedom and the influence of the corporate market and brand strategy, nor will he be the last. For example, Harvard-based philosopher Michael J. Sandel recently observed in *The Atlantic*: “Markets leave their mark.”⁵ However, in 360 pages, Woodhouse succeeds in contributing a unique case method work to the growing body of academic freedom scholarship in Canada. We can use it. ♣

NOTES

1. Canadian Association of University Teachers. Issues & Campaigns. York University gives faculty hiring veto to private think tank. <http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=1067>
2. Canadian Association of University Teachers. Model Clause on Academic Freedom. <http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?lang=1&page=603>
3. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. Statement on Academic Freedom. <http://www.aucc.ca/media-room/news-and-commentary/canadas-universities-adopt-new-statement-on-academic-freedom>
4. Universities must serve the public interest, not private ones (first printed in *The Record* on March 21, 2012). By James L. Turk, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. <http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=1074&lang=1>
5. Michael J. Sandel. "What Isn't for Sale?" *The Money Report*. *The Atlantic*. April 2012. Page 66.