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Academics on Empty? Academic Freedom, Collegial Governance, and the Failure of Academic Leadership in Canada

Context

- ▶ “Modern” academic “management,” pleading austerity and impersonating leadership, prompts urgent questions about academic control of the academic agenda and the consequences for PSE in Canada
 - ▶ This managerialism performs both an internal power-grab and a capitulation to outside
 - ▶ Or, as the following cartoon suggests ...
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Manitoba Commonwealth, 7 June 1947


In Contrast to Max Horkheimer just a few years earlier

- ▶ “Thought itself is already a sign of resistance, of the effort to allow oneself no longer to be deceived.”

(“Authoritarian State,” 1942)

The Frankfurt School intellectuals had of course lived through (or died in the course of) the rise of fascism. What do you think we are living through now in Canada?

Disclaimer and Affirmation

- ▶ I am not here to tell you how things should be done; *you* know local conditions and current challenges best
 - ▶ But I do know a fair bit about your interim President, and how he and his peers operate
 - ▶ And I am happy to share a little of my CAUT experience, and what it means to resist top-down prioritization in a university still reeling from the results of administrative co-optation and violation of collegial process
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Three Stops On the Way to Empty

- ▶ Subordinating academic freedom and collegial governance to institutional autonomy (i.e., presidential will)
- ▶ Current fracking priorities expressing the “new extractivism” (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014) in Canada’s extractive economy and its extractive academy: resources and resourcing
- ▶ Key lessons from TransformUS and the Buckingham Affair about academic leadership and about having your fill of empty

Some sense of what a university is

- ▶ The idea of a university or equivalent entity is ancient, pervasive, and persistent
- ▶ Such entities derive mostly from two human impulses: the desire to know (see Aristotle's *Metaphysics*), and the desire to control what knowledge can do or enable (see, e.g. Foucault, or Henderson&Battiste, or Bill C-51)
- ▶ The *history* of this interplay between inquiry and control matters hugely in a time of state-sponsored amnesia, rapacious presentism, and the partisan remaking of public memory

The idea of a university contd.

- ▶ The tension between time and place for reflection, and desire for control of reflection's outcomes, is constitutive and never goes away
 - ▶ This tension produces **contingencies of inquiry and teaching** debated across a wide array of academic disciplines where authority uneasily resides, aptly challenged from within and inexcusably threatened from above and outside
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The lesson of location

- ▶ Historically informed understanding of the *current* context or conjuncture is basic to sound daily operations and effective cyclical review; i.e., we need to think of **the conjunctural campus**, both physical and virtual, not the ivory tower
- ▶ And this work is *everybody's* responsibility and opportunity, especially where overextension fuels obedience and despair, thereby inducing that empty feeling

The lesson spelled out

- ▶ When reporting and review occur, the roles of scholars, students, administrators, and governors reveal themselves along an axis of accountability extending and ramifying from inside the institution to its multiple outsides (and “Canada’s Open University” has its vital internal organs too, like other universities)
- ▶ At such times the institution’s *relative autonomy* becomes apparent, as do the reasons not to romanticize it (as AUCC conveniently does; cf. Robert Hassan)

Governance: the basics

- ▶ Collegial governance is a distinctive set of rights and responsibilities to establish and periodically review **academic** goals
 - ▶ Collegial governance exists in relation to external entities (like governments, corporations, donors, accreditation boards, community organizations) and internal mediators of external pressure and priorities
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Governance contd.

- ▶ Academic staff, administrators, and governors each represent a distinct set of interests and duties which, together, complement or conflict with each other
- ▶ When things are going as they should, the work that these groups do is academic, enabling, and fiduciary, respectively
- ▶ When things are going badly, *domain-creep* from 'above' and in the name of "leadership" is usually the reason, with infantilizing and intimidation of staff as its trademark

Governance contd.

- ▶ This domain creep takes a number of forms, some of which you seem to be struggling with:
- ▶ The “call centre” story, e.g., still strikes a chord across the country because of the repugnant paternalism of its proponents and reduction of faculty decisions to mere “advice” or “under[ling] advisement”
- ▶ It can be linked to “the Lukaszuk effect” in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, etc.

Globally Driven PP

- ▶ Institutional niche marketing and brand management is obsessive, international recruitment allegedly essential
- ▶ Meanwhile, old-growth internationalism has given way to recruiting after the domestic clear cut, with a homogenizing offshore or online revenue stream remaking priorities, redistributing resources, and inserting consumerism and market muscularity where collegial governance and academic reason should be

Resultant Identity Crises

- ▶ Metastatic and contagious self-loathing and performance anxiety across the faculties and disciplines
- ▶ **The anxious academy** becomes the goal of overbearing, over-reaching leadership because it is more manageable
- ▶ Meanwhile, an Enlightenment motto like Kant's "Sapere aude!" [Dare to know!] must bow to the demands of Big Brander and the managerial cult of risk aversion, labour immiseration, and techno-triumphalism

Enforcing Federal Priorities; or, It's the Bullying, Stupid

- ▶ Neoliberal hegemony: brass knuckles and a nimbus, bullying and social conservatism, all the way to the Supreme Court
- ▶ The state's communications "war room" and its matériel: secrecy, muzzling, spin, and smear (even of our Chief Justice)
- ▶ Bad inclusivity: the budget as bundling and bungling, foreign aid as trade, and NGOs as corporate alibis and coerced allies;
- ▶ Economism eats value, including academic value at the Canada-UK Foundation for Canadian Studies and our granting councils


AUCC Apes the PMO and its Provincial Clones

- ▶ From the liberal to the neoliberal arts in the “managed university” and its bundled budget, while enforcing campus law and order
- ▶ The university’s bloated “war room” and its matériel: opaque partnerships, directive donors, secret searches, and silencing—all in the name of “the brand”
- ▶ The sad coercions of “strategic planning”; venal internationalization; imminent intellectual desertification and species loss in non-compliant and/or unprofitable places
- ▶ Academic economism eats academic value hitherto understood, preserved, and produced as diverse, independent inquiry, distinctive teaching, dissemination, and outreach: i.e., daring to know and to make known, in the university most of us remember and value

Towards Harper U: the State and its Re-calibrated Collegium

- ▶ Harper: stacking the Senate and fracking the nation: the politics of division
- ▶ ‘The university’: stacking our councils and fracking the academy: the race for resources and repute produces ‘winners’ and ‘losers’
- ▶ Harper: interpellating citizens as (Rob)Fordist, suburban, zionist, and scared
- ▶ ‘The University’: interpellating ‘good’ faculty as self-maximizing careerists who stay on message, ‘bad’ faculty as targets for deskilling and worse

Tough on Thought–Crime? Or Bill C–51 Comes to Campus

- ▶ Collegial governance or managerial autonomy?
 - ▶ Why are so many disciplines seen as safely *contained* by accreditation agencies, or *constrained* by commercially driven technologies?
 - ▶ Why are the arts and sciences viewed and treated as an ungovernable, unprofitable rump instead of as the trusted guardians of academic quality, integrity, and value?
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Institutional Autonomy As Priority

- ▶ Such autonomy ought always to function in the service of academic freedom as envisaged by CAUT *and* entrenched in collective agreements, *not* in “University Policy” or the AUCC’s new statement (2010), far less as described in MacKinnon’s recent book
- ▶ Otherwise, managed autonomy becomes internally limiting and externally abject, both sovereign and for sale, with autocratic academic managers doubling as shills for corporate and governmental interests

Hollow Autonomy Means U

- ▶ Hollow autonomy escapes collegial oversight while pleading financial exigency or *peerless* ‘vision’: the chance to shrink or eliminate disciplines, or redefine accessibility while prioritizing bureaucratic bloat (where the blubber hits the road) *qua* academic “leadership” and panoptic capacity
- ▶ Meanwhile, academic freedom is constrained or violated by exclusion, termination, casualization, and precariousness

And AusterityU is Fracked: i.e.

- ▶ More and more subject to an extractive model tied to a reductive theory of value
- ▶ Universities' residual educational and research potential pressured by consultant slurry and corporate toxins whose names and nature are withheld "for commercial reasons";
- ▶ And with little heed to knowledge ecologies (like yours) that have developed complex connections and interdependencies over time
- ▶ And with little sign of the Honour of the Crown and the Duty to Consult First Nations


Lessons from TransformUS

- ▶ When a new President tries to set a new tone, it is still too often a top-down process
- ▶ The new tone usually takes a visionary and a managerial path, both potentially obstructed by institutional memory and collegial capacity (and, let's hope, a Collective Agreement)
- ▶ A potential legitimacy crisis is averted (or worsened) by making the President's vision "ours": through town-hall meetings, targeted consultations, alleged rethinking, regular imperiousness, and nauseating spin

Lessons contd.

- ▶ A potential legitimacy crisis is also averted (or worsened) by making collegial governance work *for* rather than *with* the President
- ▶ Our new President's predecessor bar one (i.e. PMac) established a court culture, a coerced collegium, and a compliant Board, while drafting the AUCC Statement on AF
- ▶ Our next President built on this legacy in new ways, showing inadvertently how conjunctural analysis is key to faculty resistance

Lessons contd.

- ▶ The increasingly coerced collegium rubber-stamped presidential decisions and proposals re. mandate, resources, and priorities
 - ▶ Meanwhile, academic stewardship underwent a forced migration from sites of collegial governance to the text of the Collective Agreement
 - ▶ At the same time, the need to camouflage or sanitize an essentially managerial process became ever clearer; leaders wrought havoc in the names of necessity and vision
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Lessons contd.

- ▶ In response, academic competencies and values exposed the PP sham on 4 main grounds:
- ▶ First, the intellectual mediocrity and anti-faculty bias of the source text
- ▶ Second, the shady pseudo-collegial circumstances behind its adoption
- ▶ Third, the bad pedagogy of assigning a single text in a complex area and insisting it be read only one way, i.e., uncritically
- ▶ Fourth, the duping of naïve faculty who tried to save the U of S from “financial ruin”

Lessons contd.

- ▶ Evidence is not enough: the administration was unabashed and undeterred by questioning and criticism
- ▶ When Dickeson was discredited, it was claimed, wrongly, that his trial-by-templates had been substantially modified to suit the U of S; but it had been adopted almost verbatim
- ▶ Motions of non-confidence in PP were ignored (in the case of the students) and soundly defeated (in the case of the Findlay/Brooke motion in University Council)


Lessons contd.

- ▶ But that hubris led to catastrophic over-reach in the case of Buckingham's dismissal
- ▶ Faculty and student resistance to PP was revisited, revalued, and intensified
- ▶ Good internationalism kicked in, in the form global outrage at the security escort off campus at dawn, and the arbitrary, instant stripping of Buckingham's professorial tenure
- ▶ In Greek tragedy hubris produces nemesis and atē, and administrators ignore at their peril what student and staff leaders think


Lessons contd.

- ▶ Administrators also dismiss at their peril what they take to be the whining of “tired and entitled” malcontents and deadwood
- ▶ If not, bad things can happen to them: as the firestorm intensified, the Provost fell on his integrated planner, taking one for the senior team; then the President was dismissed “without cause” while, like the Provost, retaining her tenure; then the Chair of the Board of Governors announced her decision to stand down last fall, but only after defending prioritization and the decision to take the Sims Arbitration to judicial review

Today and tomorrow

- ▶ Amidst all of this we had ceremonial pathos: at Spring Convocation (with the Buckingham elephant in the auditorium); and then, in a separate ceremony soon after, the muted and awkward installation of the Interim President
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 - ▶ Then another head rolled: the Associate VP Human Resources, and other key members of PMac's team who remained after his departure ... and we are not done yet ...
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Today and tomorrow

- ▶ Meanwhile, it became known that the budgetary crisis that ostensibly triggered PP had somehow vanished, and more thoroughly than support staff dismissals and an incentivized faculty retirement plan could so readily have accomplished
 - ▶ Famine had become feast as rapidly and mysteriously as feast had become famine
 - ▶ But then, what to do in the Big House?
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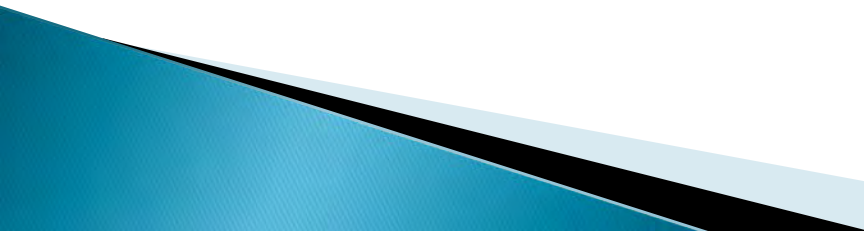
Today and tomorrow

- ▶ OK, they seem to have thought, let's use this embarrassingly good financial news to bribe the faculty: 7.25% on scale over three years, significant catch-up for (400) women faculty, and we'll abandon (sort-of) PMAc's quest for a Presidential veto in the new contract, so we don't become known as RubeU or SuckupU or even FuckupU
- ▶ Meanwhile, ineptitude at the top continues, alas, on this and other campuses, as we learn at CAUT every day

Today and tomorrow contd.

- ▶ Vigilance and resistance are never futile, no matter how discouraging and intimidating things may seem in the short term
 - ▶ Do not give up on collegial governance; it is a crucial site in which to press for transparency and the right to determine academic priorities
 - ▶ Avoid the divide and rule trap, and the self-fracking it enables
 - ▶ Build solidarity with students and other associations to promote the public good
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So, “It’s the Academy, Stupid”

- ▶ Our staff associations and collegial governance have the resources to make the academic argument most effectively
 - ▶ We have institutional memory and unrivalled understanding of publicly-funded PSE
 - ▶ We have unrivalled access to faculty analysis of conditions on the ground across our institutions
 - ▶ And we know the folly of picking winners and of imperious leadership in public universities
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Final reminder

- ▶ You are not a loose aggregation of cyberserfs
 - ▶ You work in a university, even if in unusually dispersed circumstances where the temptation to divide and rule is perhaps especially tempting for someone “just visiting” (or for Premier Prentice)
 - ▶ No-one can unilaterally change your relationships with your students
 - ▶ Act on your academic knowledge and values and you will truly be serving the public interest
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