

# Liberal's reverse discrimination comes at a cost

MARGARET WENTE

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Kirsty Duncan, Justin Trudeau's Science Minister, is on the rampage against Canada's leading universities. She's told them to improve diversity – or else. Unless they meet their gender quotas for new research chairs, the federal government will **yank their funding**. Despite a decade of concerted hectoring, Canada's most prestigious researchers are still too non-Indigenous, too white, too abled and, especially, too male. "Frankly, our country cannot reach its full potential if more than half of its people do not feel welcomed into the lab where their ideas, their talent and their ambition is needed," she sermonized.

At stake is hundreds of millions in grant money – as well as the ability of expert hiring committees to make their own decisions. (Universities must sponsor the grant applications, which are nearly all approved by the federal funding bodies.) From now on, these committees will be overseen by phalanxes of bureaucrats whose job is to ensure that they come up with the right answers.

The government's emphasis on equity and diversity is central to its branding. Its 50-50 cabinet has won universal praise. But now it has embarked on a campaign of reverse discrimination that deeply undermines the concepts of fairness and excellence.

Academia isn't the only target. Since last fall, the Trudeau government has **named 56 judges**, of whom 33 – or 59 per cent – are women. (Women made up only 42 per cent of the applicants.) It's clear the Liberals will keep it up until the balance of judges is more to their liking. But at what cost? "In the old days, it was offensive that people got judgeships just because they were Liberals or Tories," Ian Holloway, law dean at the University of Calgary, told The Globe and Mail. "That helped breed contempt for the judiciary. What we don't want to do is replicate that in a different form." The definition of equality has changed dramatically in recent times. Equality used to mean fairness. It meant that everybody should be treated equally, and that discrimination is not acceptable. But the new definition of equality is equal outcomes. And if outcomes aren't equal, they must be adjusted until they are.

No one disagrees that our institutions should broadly reflect the society we live in. No one disagrees that disadvantaged people and underrepresented groups deserve a helping hand, and sometimes preferential treatment. Many businesses and public institutions have an unwritten rule: If all else is equal, hire the minority candidate.

But what if it isn't? What if fair hiring practices produce disparities in outcome – as they inevitably do? For example, it's mainly men who like hard sciences – despite a generation of effort to encourage women. This effort has borne fruit. But it has not produced a massive change in women's career choices, which are overwhelmingly on the "soft" side. There's also a sizable body of research **showing** that even women who are highly career-minded are less intent on attaining senior positions than men are.

On the face of it, the Canada Research Chair numbers don't look great. **Women hold** only 30 per cent of the 1,615 filled positions, a number that Ms. Duncan regards as "**dismal**," and at some universities it's much lower. Among the new applications, she notes disapprovingly that **twice as many** come from men. But these positions are heavily skewed toward hard sciences. Forty-five per cent are for natural sciences and engineering; 35 per cent are for health sciences; and just 20 per cent are for the social sciences and humanities.

But "fair" is no longer good enough. Only outcomes matter. The new **quotas** for Canada Research Chairs are: 31 per cent women, 15 per cent visible minorities, 4 per cent disabled, 1 per cent aboriginal. And woe to you if you do not comply.

Other institutions have gone much farther. At St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, a document called Gender Equity Guidelines for Research Search Committees states, "We are hoping to achieve recruitment of 50 per cent female scientists in the next 3-5 years, as well as to achieve 50 per cent

female faculty in leadership positions in the next 5-7 years." Given the natural gender imbalance in science research, they might as well just post a sign saying: Men, don't bother! The document further states that all search committee members must take training in unconscious bias (an increasingly discredited idea), and that their work will be closely scrutinized by the diversity police to ensure the proper outcomes.

I'm all for diversity. But these future researchers have important work to do. They could save lives. Don't we want people who can research and teach, instead of prove how diverse we are? I guess not. We've got quotas to fill.