

Our campuses show we're practicing cultural genocide on ourselves

Fiascoes like Shepherd's raise the question of how this society allowed its education system to become steadily poorer the more money it stuffed into it



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Little remains to be added to what my esteemed colleagues Christie Blatchford and Barbara Kay have written about the shameful performance of Wilfrid Laurier University in the Lindsay Shepherd affair. The 22-year old graduate student showed a discussion group a video extract of a debate between Jordan Peterson, one of Canada's most brilliant, courageous, and rigorous academics, and the transgender advocate Nicholas Matte. For this heinous offence of neutrally presenting two sides to a current news story and public controversy, Shepherd was the subject of complaint, official harassment, and a nauseating Star Chamber which, fortunately, she surreptitiously recorded.

In the course of her lengthy interrogation, she was informed that unnamed students of undisclosed number were “disturbed and upset” for unspecified reasons and that Shepherd had created a “toxic climate” and an “unsafe learning environment,” and had violated the university’s “gender and violence policy,” and had incited “gender-based transphobia” by presenting, with contrary argument, the views of Peterson. The inquisitors falsely described Peterson as a “white supremacist” who “targeted and harassed” transgender students and incited “transphobia” in a manner that is illegal under human rights legislation. Shepherd was accused of committing an act morally indistinguishable from presenting a speech by Hitler. In fact, she presented a debate (and there is nothing wrong with playing a speech by Hitler in an academic place in an appropriate context — he was an evil man but an important historic figure). It need hardly be added that comparing Hitler and Peterson is outrageous and defamatory, as well as monstrously unrigorous academically — Jordan Peterson would not agree with one opinion Hitler expressed in his adult life.



Wilfrid Laurier University professors Nathan Rambukkana, left, and Herbert Pimlott, right, reprimanded teaching assistant Lindsay Shepherd for showing a video featuring controversial U of T professor Jordan Peterson without denouncing his views. *Wilfrid Laurier University*

Shepherd let it be known that she had recorded the session, where she was grilled by two faculty members, in the presence of an official devoted to assistance for those of minority sexual orientation or in a state of sexual transition or ambiguity. There was no official response from the administration or the academic gender police until Shepherd's release of the tape to the media after about a week, which gave it wide and sympathetic play. (It must be said that almost the entire Canadian media, across the political spectrum, handled the issue intelligently, and generally took the side of Shepherd.) Once the rock was lifted on this process and the force of public opinion could be detected, the WLU

leadership wobbled and crumpled in a familiar display of instant capitulation by university administrations at the first indication of headwinds. It appears to be the modus operandi of that university in particular to surrender at once to any adversity, but it is satisfying that the university at least caved in the right direction this time, to a justly aggrieved complainant and not to the totalitarian spirit of those who arraigned her. There was great agitation among the university's alumni and financial benefactors, and tepid apologies were issued, which contained some self-serving flimflam about protecting sensibilities.

But if Shepherd had not recorded the session and circulated it, she would have been consigned to the doghouse of the politically incorrect. The cowardice of the regime limped to the aid of the winner of the media and public relations contest, as the University of Toronto did last year when transgender groups tried to force Peterson to address them in a special vocabulary, the words "he, she, and you" being somehow disrespectful. That it took a week to elicit a climb-down from them, and that they were no paragons of contrition, makes it clear how little principle, as opposed to tactical manoeuvre, was involved. Nothing in this case, as the well-spoken and brave Shepherd told the inquiry, is what universities are supposed to be or how they should act.

The last time Wilfrid Laurier University was tested publicly on a controversy anything like this was when a project to commission and unveil statues of all of Canada's 23 prime ministers was cancelled and the initial statue, of the country's principal founder, John A. Macdonald, was removed because of complaints and threats from aboriginal groups. This disgraceful episode, in February 2015, elevated the false claims of a few native activists that Macdonald was anti-aboriginal and tried to eradicate their culture above the facts that Macdonald was friendly with a number of native leaders, gave the natives the right to vote, and did his best, by the lights of the time (which were not entirely illuminating) to

assist the native people to participate fully in Canadian life. (Of course, that he was the chief architect of the only trans-continental, bicultural, parliamentary confederation in history, now the oldest functioning political institutions of any important country in the world except Great Britain and the United States, and a great statesman even in the time of Lincoln, Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone and Bismarck, was irrelevant.)

Macdonald (inevitably) was portrayed by the complaining native militants as a Hitler also, as if Macdonald would have approved anything Hitler did after he was mustered out of the German army as a decorated corporal. (Surely, if he had had a chance to reflect upon it, the last thing Adolf Hitler would have expected, just before he discharged a bullet into his head as his wife of one day took poison, in their bunker with the Red Army only a few hundred yards away, was that his name would be invoked to discredit liberal-minded democrats and believers in free elections and academic exchange in ostensibly free countries 70 years later. The Fuehrer thought the democracies degenerate then; he would likely find nonsense like this a flattering vindication of that judgment.)

Fiascoes like this raise the question of how this society allowed its education system to become steadily poorer the more money it stuffed into it. And how did we allow our centres of higher learning to degenerate into these theatres of the absurd where stupefying sums are squandered to enable questionably qualified people to teach largely irrelevant material in life-assured sinecures of six-hour work weeks with three months annual holidays, while thoughtful discussion is suppressed, all to produce masses of under-educated people largely unqualified to get or hold a serious job? Obviously, the answer is complicated, and some of it was touched upon a few weeks ago when I excerpted from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation publication that the solution to deteriorating school testing results was to eliminate the tests.

I take advantage of Shepherd's persecution to propose the outline of a radical plan for the resuscitation of Western education. In addition to deunionizing the schools, testing all the teachers and students for objective competence levels each year and rewarding them all meritocratically, (i.e. those who fail do not proceed farther until they pass), we must get over our collective snobbery about skilled work and trades and produce people who can do the work society needs and will pay for, even if we have to call plumbers bachelors of sanitary engineering. Much of undergraduate university could be put online and the personnel could be thinned out accordingly. The untouchability of tenured professors must be revoked in cases of egregious abuse, just as the protection of incompetent or indolent teachers must be ended. Any strikes should be interpreted as acts of resignation. Abstruse university courses, which will include propagandistic examinations of very absurd and faddish subjects, should be cut back somewhat, and possibly made more expensive than more productive disciplines and curriculum. Any university that fails to maintain normal freedom of expression and encourage civilized exchange should have its charter revoked.

The immense financial savings from ending this culturally suicidal indulgence of mediocrity and self-induced public ignorance would enable generous rewards for the best teachers and professors, and the balance of the savings could be rebated to lower and middle income taxpayers; they could spend and invest the money they have earned more wisely and productively than our governments can, and they don't have to skim the profits from the alcoholic beverage, gambling and marijuana businesses to do it. The retiring chief justice of Canada has falsely accused Canada of attempting cultural genocide on native people; in fact we are inadvertently trying to practice it on ourselves.

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