

## **PREDICTABLY SPECIOUS REASONING FROM McMASTER'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

*John Carpay*

McMaster University President Patrick Deane is the latest Canadian university president to join the growing trend of silencing discussion, debate and the expression of ideas on campus. On March 16, 2017, Dr. Deane's official "Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community" stated that Dr. Jordan Peterson, University of Toronto Psychology Professor, should not have been invited to speak at McMaster University about freedom of speech and political correctness. As the Committee put it: "There is little to be gained by debating Dr. Peterson."

Dr. Peterson has gained notoriety for refusing an edict to use "gender-neutral" pronouns rather than "he" and "she." His articulate and principled objections to his university's demands are readily available to the public.

The day after the Committee's statement, a mob of loud protesters effectively shut down the March 17 event with Dr. Peterson. The protesters rang bells and beat drums, chanting "Shut him down!" and shouting "Transphobic piece of shit!" Dr. Peterson could not be heard in the classroom, and eventually went outside. YouTube videos enable people to listen to his outdoor comments, with the intolerant mob as background noise.

One can't help but remember what happened in Germany from 1921 to 1933, when the "brown shirts" disrupted the meetings of anti-Nazi political parties.

Unlike Hitler's brown shirts, the intolerant, noisy and debate-hating censors who prevented Dr. Peterson from being heard were non-violent. But disrupting a meeting is easy to do. Discussion, debate and freedom of speech are in fact very fragile. They require the unanimous cooperation of people who are willing to debate their opponents, rather than silence their opponents through noise and disruption.

Dr. Deane's Advisory Committee called not for debate, but for "public opposition" and "public protest" against the March 17<sup>th</sup> event. The loud bell-ringing, drum-beating and chanting were no accident. The non-violent brown shirts were successful in ensuring that Dr. Peterson was not heard.

The reasoning of Dr. Deane's Committee is as specious as it is predictable. Rather than engage in debate (which, God forbid, might result in losing the argument), the Committee asserts that Dr. Peterson should not be heard because of his "callous disregard" for the personhood of transgender people. This accusation is a clever way to avoid addressing the question of whether it is right and just for governments or employers to force people to use words which they don't want to use. Dr. Peterson objects to the coercive imposition of a speech code, whether by government legislation or by publicly funded universities.

Dr. Deane's Committee also accuses Dr. Peterson of having little knowledge of his subject, again avoiding the issue of whether the coercive imposition of speech codes is compatible with Canada's free and democratic society. This *ad hominem* attack against Dr. Peterson himself, instead of an attack against his argument, is as old as human history.

The Committee's other arguments boil down to the same old arrogance that censors always use: "I am so right, and it's so obvious that I'm right, that I'm entitled to silence those who disagree with me."

On March 20, Dr. Deane stated that the disruption of Dr. Peterson's speaking opportunity does not reflect "the standard of academic debate that we would aspire to model on our campus." However, he goes on to characterize the loud bell-ringing, drum-beating and disruptive chanting as "peaceful protest" which McMaster should allow, and will allow in future. In other words: you can silence your opponents as long as your tactics are non-violent. Would Dr. Deane object if he himself was silenced by drum-beating, bell-clanging and loud chants of "Shut him down!"?

Each year, McMaster and other public universities receive \$17 billion from Canadian taxpayers, by claiming to be a forum for debate, in the pursuit of truth. Dr. Deane and other university presidents betray the public's trust, by condoning the mob censorship of controversial ideas and speakers. It's high time for reasonable citizens to revisit their compelled support for universities which do not require students to think and reason, and instead allow students to silence speakers they disagree with.

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