Book Reviews

Russell, C. (1993) *Academic freedom.* New York: Routledge, 119 pp. (softcover).

This slim volume may at first glance seem parochial and dated. It was drafted near the end of the parliamentary debates over the legislative attacks by the Thatcher and Major governments on university autonomy, which intensified in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Conrad Russell intended to put forward a rational basis for discussion between the legitimate interests of both sides: control of overall spending for the government; academic freedom and quality of education for the universities. By the time of publication, the universities had lost the war, as well as most of the battles. Nevertheless, the book is timely and relevant in North America, where similar battles have since broken out in many provinces and states, but the war is not everywhere lost.

Russell describes precisely what has been lost in Britain. His eloquent and engaging account makes it clear why academic freedom is worth great effort to preserve. The particular weakness in his project is that he failed to anticipate the likely prospect that the ideologues in Whitehall would, ultimately, reject a reasoned approach. As a result the book contains no practical suggestions as to long-term political actions through which some measure of academic freedom might be recovered. In Canada and the United States we have the advantage of two-level federal systems of government. This has delayed, at least, uniform application of the dominant ideology. For instance, academic freedom has been respected better in 1994 by the government of New Brunswick than by counterparts on both the right and left, in Alberta and Ontario.

Conrad Russell is a double rarity, a distinguished academic who is a member of a legislative body and remains a defender of university autonomy. A professor of British history (King's, London), he can say with authority that these government intrusions are the worst the universities in England have experienced since the revolutionary 17th century. Just prior to the introduction of the Education Reform Bill in 1988, he fell heir to a title and a seat in the House of Lords. Russell was thus enabled to participate directly in one of the few victories for the defenders of the universities in the Thatcher-Major era. This was the Academic Freedom amendment to the Bill, moved by Lord Jenkins, Chancellor of Oxford. The amendment provides a legislative definition of academic freedom. Although limited in scope, it is significant because it was carried on division in the Lords against the

government. It claims for academics "the freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions" (pp. 1-2).

Jenkins' definition is a focal point of the book. Russell indicates by historical examples that, although important, it represents a restriction from what was sometimes available in the past, at least through custom or practice. He then procedes to explain in detail why the government's proposed general measures on funding, rationalization and support for students, if implemented, would vitiate the amendment. It is apparent that he assumes large sections of his intended audience, academic or otherwise, do not understand academic freedom. He presents some of its central aspects and explains why it is important to the larger society.

Russell uses the term academic freedom in a dual sense, to signify both the institutional autonomy needed to protect the freedom and the freedom itself. In the Canadian context academic freedom and tenure are protected through local collective agreements or similarly enforceable documents, while institutional autonomy is protected by private acts of incorporation and arm's-length funding agencies. Recent developments across Canada have amply demonstrated that it is misunderstood or discounted by academics, politicians, and bureaucrats alike. Thus, a summary account of the more common fallacies is appropriate.

A widely embraced view is that such protection for academic freedom is no longer necessary. Adherents assert that there haven't been any significant cases since the height of the Cold War, and even then most of the cases occurred in the United States due to the McCarthyite aberration. In fact, the McCarthy era was an aberration in magnitude only. In the 1940s, 1930s and earlier, professors in the United States were commonly fired for being left-wing or offending local morality. In the post-McCarthy era, orthodoxy has been been maintained in a number of disciplines in a more sophisticated way: control of research funding and related career advancement, as has been described in books by N. Chomsky, S.S. Epstein, or R. van den Bosch, for example.

In Canada significant cases have occurred throughout the past couple of decades, including the past year. Frequently, these have involved attempts to deny tenure to very able young academics, because their approach to research or teaching was controversial or challenging to their colleagues. Most of these were resolved in the individual's favour, precisely because of collective agreement protection, or in its absence, direct intervention by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). Cases successfully resolved are

seldom made public, even on the campus where they occurred, perhaps leaving the impression that there are hardly any.

A related school holds that the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* provides all the protection that any academic could ever need. Here there is not even room for an academic debate. The Supreme Court decided, in *McKinney v. Univ. of Guelph* (1990), that "The Charter ... does not apply to the universities." The Supreme Court was, however, emphatic about the continuing need for academic freedom to be protected by tenure and university autonomy. In the same decision it declared the preservation of academic freedom to be "an objective of pressing and substantial importance."

Then there are those who believe that they are so clever or prolific that procedural safeguards are irrelevant: only the academically weak need them. In regard to themselves they may be correct; being clever and conventional carries far less risk than being clever and unconventional. It is not necessary to invoke the horrors of Nazi Germany or Communist Russia to illustrate this point. The author mentions his father, who was clever, prolific, unconventional, and famous. Nevertheless, Bertrand Russell was fired from university teaching jobs twice: in 1916 at Trinity College, Cambridge and in 1940 at the City College of New York (CCNY).

There is one aspect of academic freedom which is not accepted by some academics. They hold that unless professors have formal academic qualifications on a topic, they have no right "to put forward ... controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy" (pp. 1-2). Such a narrow view would prevent academics from changing fields or inventing new fields, such as women's studies. The Russell dismissal cases are again instructive. In 1916 he was convicted of publishing an anticonscription leaflet and fined. Trinity's governing Council then summarily fired him. Despite the wartime atmosphere, controversy ensued, centred on the absence of due process for Russell. The ultimate result was that shortly after the war he was reinstated. There are other remarkable aspects to this case. The reinstatement followed a second criminal conviction in 1918 and a six-months prison term, for publishing another pacifist article. Further, among the proponents of reinstatement were all 19 Fellows of Trinity who had served on active duty in the war and survived, in addition to their senior colleagues Rutherford, Hardy, and Eddington.

Neither had the 1940 CCNY dismissal anything to do with Russell's views on issues for which he had formal qualifications. Rather, it was his views on what we might now call lifestyle which offended the bourgeois

citizens of New York. Episcopal Bishop Manning and the Catholic Daughters of America cared neither that Godel's theorem had superseded Russell's program on the foundations of mathematics, nor that Russell's work was the indispensible basis for Godel's startling discovery. Similarly, his supporters Einstein and Dewey had no illusions that they were defending his theory of Types. Books in which the controversial or unpopular opinions were expressed were among those for which he later received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The conduct of administrators and boards in such cases, then and since, was captured nicely by G.H. Hardy (1977) in his crisp account of the 1916 affair. "They should also have remembered that the public opinion of which they were so frightened was unbalanced and hysterical, and that its currents were quite likely to reverse themselves ... their failure was a failure of imagination and common sense" (p. 46).

No great breadth of intellect is needed to comprehend the impact on academic freedom, even in the narrowest sense, of the measures now being imposed by the British government. If one's department is classified ineligible for research funding, then freedom in this area may be meaningless. If teaching contact hours and student/staff ratios rise substantially, there will be little time, as well as little money, to pursue research. Further, local academic control over teaching methods and degree standards may disappear, replaced by government decrees.

The government's declared objectives are efficiency and accountability. The author explains that these are Orwellian terms, the former standing for cheapness, the latter for central bureaucratic control. He perseveres, nevertheless, in mapping the borders of a serious debate.

He devotes a chapter to reviewing the limits to academic freedom which are appropriate in a free and democratic society, as well as in a responsible academic community. He feels that the academic community must be seen to be keeping its house in order, by being proactive against fraud or abuse, as well as proactive in legitimate exercise of academic freedom, in order to justify autonomy. He accepts that there are limits on the amount of money available for universities. In later chapters he discusses the balance between national interests and university autonomy. The impact of arbitrarily imposed cheapening of the system is assessed. In particular, lowering the standards of degrees will adversely affect both the employment prospects of individual graduates and the economic competitiveness of the country.

The central condition for implementation of Conrad Russell's program is revival of the medieval convention which had limited the powers of the

British state, in varying degrees, until the Thatcher-Major era. This is the bargain with the people wherein the government decides, but only after taking counsel from those who have the expertise required for sound advice. He goes on to make the reasoned argument that the university system is so complex that only those in it, or with extensive recent experience in it, can give proper advice. He concedes that the advice will sometimes be conflicting and that someone must make decisions. His point is that decisions should not be made without serious exploration of the consequences.

The imposition of commercial performance criteria by an ideologically driven government bureaucracy is a case in point, not peculiar to Britain. It bears repeating that emphasis on quantity over quality and short-term results over fundamental understanding commonly results in unviability, commercial or otherwise. Also, because of concentration, any central bureaucracy with excessive power is a relatively easy mark for industrial, ideological, or other lobby groups, with the result that major distortions may occur. We in the West should not be so confident as to assume that we cannot have our own lysenkoisms. Historians of science in the next generation may have interesting comments on certain developments of the last quarter of this century, flowing from central command systems reminiscent of those once prevalent in the East. This assumes, of course, that history remains a discipline in which research is permitted to be funded.

The book ends on a pathetic note. The epilogue was written after the government revealed that it wanted no independent advice, being possessed by zealotry for central control and cheapness. The author seems to have been utterly astonished that the government went on to push through even more intrusive legislation by 1992. The level of political naivety Russell thereby reveals is astonishing to the reader. Despite having noted the intrusions by James II and earlier rulers, this historian persisted in believing that their latter-day counterparts could be deflected by reason alone. He was reduced to grasping at straws, notably the suggestion that one or two private universities might somehow be established. These might, through competition, create pressure for the maintenance of educational quality in the public institutions. But he admits that there are no likely sources of funding to create an instant British Princeton in order to maintain standards at Oxford and Cambridge.

Conrad Russell's epilogue might have benefitted by a rereading of his father's observations on the sorry state of academic freedom in American private universities, during most of a long lifetime. The situation of universities in Britain and elsewhere will improve only if many more academics insist on maintaining their academic freedom and exercising it to

the full, without flinching from political activity, and with the courage and determination of Bertrand Russell.

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REFERENCES

Hardy, G.H. (1977). *Bertrand Russell and Trinity.* New York: Arno Press.

Thom, D.J. (1993). *Educational management and leadership: Word, spirit, and deed for a just society.* Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 250 pp. (softcover).

Doug Thom states in his preface that the book "is for those who wish to learn about education, how and why it changes in society, and how it can be effectively managed and led" (p. 9).

The opening chapters provide a hurried overview of Canadian society with particular reference to attempts to create and validate a multicultural society, Canada's struggles to live up to the equality rights provisions of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, a brief history of Canada, a list of social projections, and finally the report of a survey that Thom conducted with his B.Ed. students. This is followed by a chapter on "Bureaucracy." This discussion follows a familiar trail which the author has followed in work he published over a decade ago and ends with the note that bureaucracies lead inevitably to collective bargaining. The author uses these 50 pages to set the stage for his axiom that Judeao-Christian principles of morality are a necessity for Canada's society and schools.

The middle section of the book examines two areas which, according to the author, educational leaders must master: law and finance. He presents an overview of current educational legal issues with emphases on tort law, human rights tribunals, and the courts. This introduction to law is to alert educators at both the public school level and the university level to strategies that people can use both politically and legally to attain their ends or to protect their interests. The chapter on finance includes a detailed analysis of the Province of Ontario's funding formula and the crisis in educational funding and is followed by brief references to some research on possible changes to funding systems. This is one of the most complete descriptions of