

Repression on Campus

by George Russell

The 1969-70 academic year is barely six weeks old, but it's already shaping up to be a bad one for thinking about holding a weinie-bake in your local university computing centre. In fact, it may be a bad one for holding up your hand in class.

Traumatized by the horrific events at Sir George Williams University last year (the trials of eighty-plus defendants, charged with conspiracy to commit arson and various other indictable offenses, begins in early November), and perhaps more than a little overcome by American late-night newscasts, Canadian university administrators have already made it abundantly clear that the crypto-fascists of the student left will not be allowed to carry on their shenanigans unhindered during the current school term.

In short, peace, order and good government have become the words of the day in Canadian universities, and codes of discipline, judicial procedures and student-faculty disciplinary committees (at the more liberal campuses, with student parity) are being created just as fast as political science departments can spare the men to write them.

Students barely had a chance to pick the price tags off their textbooks this September, before the Committee of Presidents of Universities of Ontario issued — “a bit prematurely,” as a CPUO official delicately put it — a working paper entitled *Order on Campus*: a document designed to help university administrations come to terms with the knotty problems of unacceptable dissent and what to do about it on their campus.

Culled largely from a similar document issued at Harvard (no-one has seen fit to pick up on this particular example of the American influence on our universities except the Canadian Union of Students, which can be counted on to pick up almost anything.), the CPUO working paper says basically that all of this stuff has got to stop.

“This stuff” is then outlined in four trenchant pages: in effect, every form of dissent except informational picketing. And maybe not even that: one category of verboten activity is “obstruction of the normal processes and activities essential to the functions of the university community.”

As released to the press, the document unfortunately fails to include the appendix listing the normal processes and activities essential to the functions of the university community (it would have been mandatory in a Master's thesis); presumably they will be discovered by the trial and error method.

The CPUO official was probably right in his assessment of the timing of the release: students and faculty from the right, left and centre raised some sort of howl on virtually every one of the 14 Ontario campuses affected by the document, and at the University of Toronto the scuffle over the document nearly boiled over into a full-scale showdown between the Students Administrative Council and affable, aristocratic administration president Claude Bissell, long considered the Clark Kerr of the Canadian university scene (Bissell, a long-time friend of Kerr's, and mediator-in-chief at Canada's closest approximation to a multiversity, reportedly even likes the comparison himself.).

As luck would have it, the show-down at Toronto turned out to be as anti-climactic as the resolution of a Mary Worth comic strip: Bissell didn't lose, he thinks, but he didn't win either, the students think.

Instead, Bissell announced that U of T already had its own disciplinary guidelines in the works, and wouldn't use the CPUO document as a guideline for anything. He didn't exactly say he denounced it, though, and the Toronto SAC was left with more

than the niggling suspicion that, somehow, they hadn't achieved quite what they wanted.

Relieved students, led by engineering faculty and students who had been given the day off from classes to listen to Bissell, gave the president a standing ovation and sent him away from the meeting with choruses of “For He's a Jolly Good Fellow.”

And it was all so exciting that no-one got around to discussing why *Order on Campus* was written in the first place.

No-where near the same fuss was raised either by or about the situation at Sir George Williams University, where law and order wasn't just proposed; it was laid down with a vengeance, no questions asked, no answers given.

The first order of business at Sir George this year was to lay on the discipline code to end all discipline codes: students must show their identification on demand; no circulation of unsigned leaflets, etc. on the one-building campus; and “every student who fails to submit to the jurisdiction of this code of Student Behaviour is guilty of an offence and is liable (i) to be suspended from the University, or (ii) to be expelled from the University.”

So far, no-one at Sir George has raised a peep — or at least a publicized peep — presumably because according to the above-mentioned clause, it's against the law.

Apparently the trauma of Sir George still hangs too heavily on the rest of the country for students, faculty or anyone to do more than pretend the university ceased to exist alongside the late-lamented computer. No-one talks about the place in the present tense, no-one wants to know what is going on there.

And besides, the argument runs, no-one complains about rules except those who want to break them.

This particular train of logic extends beyond the silence at Sir George; in fact, it forms the first and last line of defence by Ontario administrators who discovered their students weren't quite as psychologically well-prepared for law and order as the students at Sir George.

Perhaps because they hadn't done anything to provide the slightest reason for such a code, perhaps because they were still faintly curious as to the nature of the “normal processes and activities essential to the functions of the university community” which the CPUO paper set out to defend.

“The only people who have cause for complaint against the Committee of Presidents of the Universities of Ontario for circulating a working paper on *Order on the Campus* are those people who are planning disorder on the campus,” thundered Douglas Fisher and Harry Crowe columnists in John Bassett's Toronto Telegram.

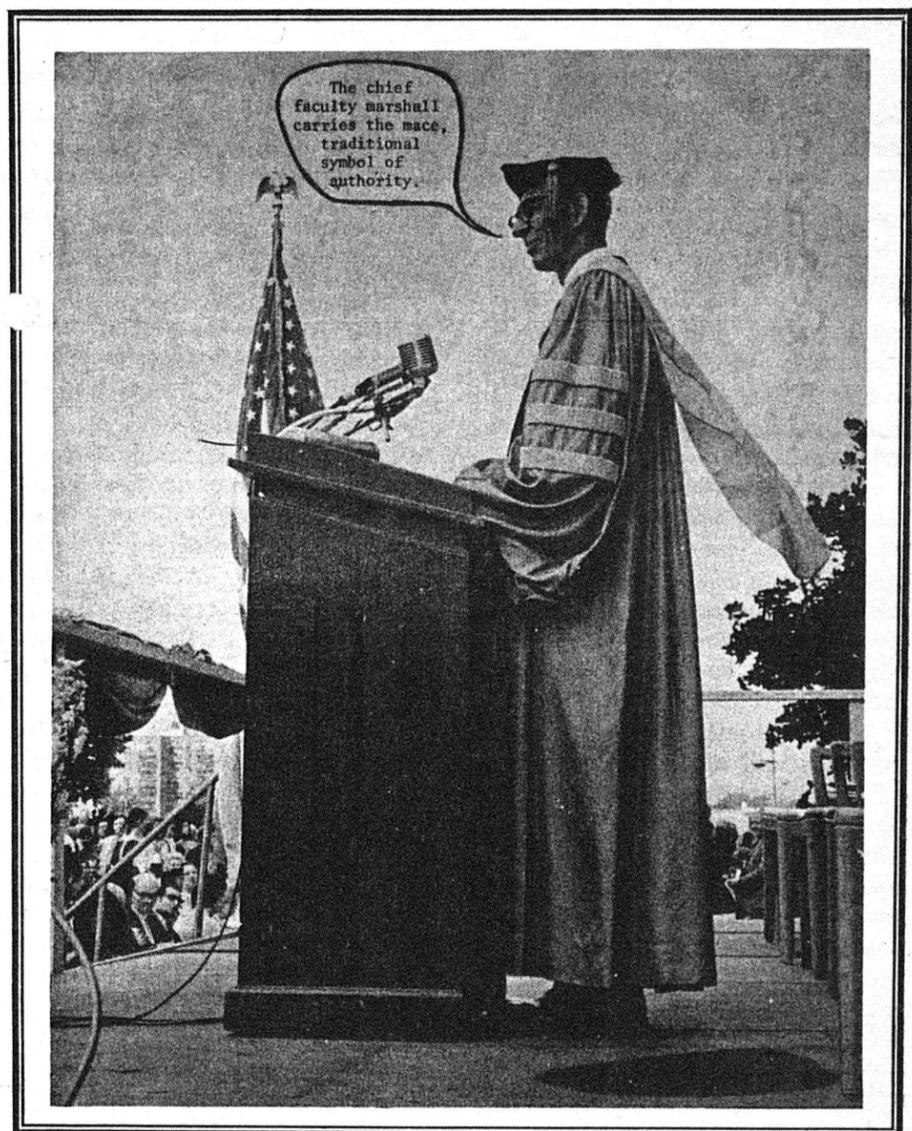
Fisher, politician-turned-pundit, is a former member of parliament for the New Democratic Party, former CBC commentator, critic of Canadian complicity in Vietnam... left-wing credentials as long as your arm.

Crowe, by happenstance, is a dean at Toronto's York University, which is adjudged to be a pretty liberal place. If they've had it with students, then everybody has had it with students.

And when they say that everyone who is against discipline codes is against discipline, well...

Their logic is becoming more familiar this year, on campuses across the country, its consistency only questioned in the odd philosophy tutorial.

At the University of Alberta, administrators brought down a proposal for a disciplinary body very similar in operation to both Sir George and the CPUO paper, with equally hazy guidelines. Their proposal, too, was pushed through to protect freedom in the university.



Freedom at the University of Alberta had such a high priority that tentative approval of the plan couldn't even wait for the students who were supposed to help in preparing the document. They noted plaintively at a somewhat later date that they hadn't had a chance to even read the proposal before it was passed.

They also said they weren't informed of the meeting where the plan was adopted. And when Steve Hardy, one of the two students sitting on the drafting committee, finally got his hands on a copy of the discipline proposal he noted dubiously that it “gave a great deal of power over the lives of students” to a new judicial body. It could, among other things, try a student twice for the same offence and expel him before he even got to see his judges.

At last report, no-one was even seen smoking in the immediate vicinity of the U of A computer.

The general tenor of the disciplinary codes which have come down during the 1969-70 year is relatively clear: in the broadest possible terms, students and faculty can talk about the university, but they can't do anything about it. And when questions are raised about the validity of such rules, the questioners must provide the burden of proof that they are not the match-wielding agents of a foreign power, or, worse, yet, flag-waving anarchists who can't even buy Canadian wheat.

“Doing” equals “destroying.” Questioning “equals” secretly wanting to destroy.”

Sir George Williams makes a far more convenient example for such an argument than, say Simon Fraser University, which is currently providing some degree of embarrassment to its own administrators.

Students and faculty in the SFU department of political science, sociology and anthropology were engaged in the most blatant disruption of the normal processes

of the university that had been seen in Canada.

As the Toronto Star (not quite the Peking Review of Canadian journalism) described it:

“In 1968, the PSA faculty decided to give students a fully equal role in decisions. Although the university faculty had overwhelmingly endorsed a motion giving each department the right to democratically run its affairs, faculty and administration began to have second thoughts as PSA became an example for students from other departments and other universities.

“The election system for head of department was bringing more junior professors to positions of influence; tenure was sometimes being recommended for good teaching as well as for publishing; and there was even talk of the secretarial staff of the department having some role in decisions. All too much for an uneasy administration facing political pressure from a right-wing provincial government.”

PSA, of course, is now on strike; nine faculty have been suspended for “coercion” — they didn't teach their regular classes, using administration-approved course material.

The Toronto Star, it's mind back on other things, did little more than issue an editorial of regret concerning the seemingly-fated smashing of the PSA department. Somehow, the Star failed to note the similarity between the rhetoric of SFU administration president Kenneth Strand and the rhetoric of the CPUO report.

And in the meantime, the Star completely endorsed the CPUO document, because, of course, anybody who objects to rules is obviously someone who wants to break them.

Under the circumstances, the editors implied, it's difficult to understand how anyone could look at it any other way.