

REMOVAL OF CENSURE OF SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

At its November meeting the Council of C.A.U.T. removed its censure from the President and Board of Governors of Simon Fraser University. Council had before it the report of an investigating committee that visited the University at the end of October and the results of a referendum held in early November at Simon Fraser in which faculty had voted by a majority in the ratio of 2 to 1 for removal of censure.

The report of the C.A.U.T. investigating committee, prepared without reference to the referendum, is as follows:

REPORT ON SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

At its meeting in September, the Executive and Finance Committee, having discussed the effects of the resolution of censure against the President and Board of Simon Fraser University, decided that the Association President, the Chairman of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and the Executive Secretary should “visit Simon Fraser University prior to the November Council meeting in order to assess the situation at that time.” Accordingly, Professors Macpherson, Milner, and Smith spent about three and half days at Simon Fraser (October 27-30). We met with the Executive of the Faculty Association, had separate interviews with the Acting President, the Dean of Arts, the Dean of Science, the Dean of Education, the Vice-President in charge of administration, and met either individually or in small groups with more than thirty faculty members of all ranks; we met with students and Teaching Assistants, attended a meeting of the Faculty Association and a meeting of the Student Council, and had a lengthy meeting with the Board of Governors. The discussions were frank — although we ourselves were criticized by the President of the Student Council for being “reticent” — and we are convinced that we were exposed to a good cross-section of prevalent opinion on the campus.

Much that was said indicated that there continues to be a considerable amount of unrest and dissension in the University, which ranges from such subjects as the organization of departmental structures to the function of the Registrar. In part, the members of the University community are divided along faculty/student lines — but only in part. There are also deep divisions within the ranks of both faculty and students. The unrest and concern have, however, their parallels on every campus in Canada. They appear to be deeper — or perhaps the various proponents are more vociferous — at Simon Fraser for reasons related to the youthfulness and extremely rapid growth of the institution and to various aspects of its short history, many of which were described in the report of the Investigating Committee that visited the university last January.

The present Committee had, however, to direct its attention specifically to matters related to the censure. We noted that, with one or two exceptions, there was general agreement that the effect of the censure had been to bring about improvement in the administration of the University, through the resignation of the previous President and the appointment of an Acting President for whose personal, academic, and administrative gifts there was clearly great general respect. It was

agreed also that the Board of Governors had given considerable evidence of having understood what the censure was meant to convey. Nonetheless, in some quarters there were doubts — of varying intensity — as to whether the Board might not be intending simply to lie low in the hope that the censure would be lifted quickly, and then to resume the modes of action that had helped to precipitate the resolution of censure.

The resolution was of course directed specifically at the President and the Board. The former having left the scene, we had to consider the actions and position of the Board. In June the Board had published a statement in which it had committed itself to the following propositions:

“We have considered in depth the ramifications of the existing fragmentation and we unanimously agree that

- 1: The Board is deeply concerned with the C.A.U.T. motion of censure and assures the university community and the community at large of its earnest desire to co-operate with the faculty in expediting measures to bring about the lifting of the censure motion.
- 2(a): The Board reaffirms its desire to have an early opportunity for considering and approving a document acceptable to the faculty that sets out policies on academic freedom and tenure.
- 2(b): The Board confirms its agreement to accept either on an interim or permanent basis the U.B.C. or C.A.U.T. statement of academic freedom and tenure.
3. The Board agrees that it will not take unilateral action in changing recommendations from the President on academic matters such as appointments, renewals and tenure.
4. The Board encourages the University Senate to make available to the Board as soon as possible their recommendations on methods of appointment, tenure and functions of Deans and Heads of departments.
5. The Board recognizes the need to re-examine the Universities Act in the light of changing conditions and will ask the Temporary Acting or Acting President to urge upon the Minister of Education the pressing need for wide and extended consultation with all interested parties, including faculty and students, before amendments to the Act are introduced.
6. The Board agrees to accept a new recommendation from the Acting President on the renewal of the contract of Dr. Kenneth R. Burstein, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology.”

Since announcing these commitments, the Board has in fact approved a document on

academic freedom and tenure that was prepared by the faculty association, and has carried out its promises as regards the fourth and sixth of these commitments. There remain points three and five, and the discussions that we had with the Board centred on these. As regards Point 5 of the Board was asked whether it had taken the action prescribed, and acknowledged that it had not yet done so. It undertook to do so.

The most difficult problem — Point 3 — remained. It is the most difficult because of the problems of definition involved in it: (a) What in fact constitutes “unilateral action in changing a recommendation,” and (b) Can “academic matters such as appointments, renewals, and tenure” be clearly defined?

In regard to (a), one may ask (i) whether simple refusal of a recommendation constitutes “unilateral action in changing a recommendation,” and (ii) whether referral back for further consideration, once, or more than once, constitutes such action. We discussed this problem with the Board at length, emphasizing that it is normal practice in Canadian universities that the Board accepts recommendations of the President on academic matters.

In regard to (b), we found some difficulty in seeing how a clear interpretation could be given to the phrase “academic matters” beyond the obvious content of appointments, tenure, and promotions. After further reflection and discussion, we take the view that it would be unwise to attempt to define the outer limits of “academic matters” specifically and that any future action that might appear to constitute a breach of the intent of the commitment should be dealt with as it occurs.

We regretted that at our meeting with the Board neither the immediate past Chairman nor the Acting Chairman was present. Nevertheless the discussions were very frank and effective, and we feel that the understanding arrived at as to the appropriate role of the Board under the present Universities act was sufficiently clear to prevent a recurrence of such actions as those that led to the censure. A recurrence would, in the ordinary course of events, come to the attention of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

We are full conscious of the multitude of difficult problems that remain to be dealt with at Simon Fraser University. We are convinced that these problems are now essentially internal and can only be resolved through the efforts of faculty, students, and administrators within the University. We take the view that the resolution of censure has served its purpose, in that it induced an energetic attack on the problems of university government and ensured that the role of the Board was reduced to its appropriate limits, or something near them.

We therefore recommend that the censure now be lifted.

C.B. MacPherson, Chairman

J.B. Milner

J.P. Smith

