



Canadian Association of University Teachers  
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université

February 8, 2021

**BY EMAIL:** [Hon.Bill.Blair@canada.ca](mailto:Hon.Bill.Blair@canada.ca)

The Honourable Bill Blair, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness  
House of Commons  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A6

Dear Minister:

I am writing on behalf of the 72,000 members of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), to express concern about an incident that recently came to our attention: the attendance of the RCMP at a book launch at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick on October 23, 2019.

The presence of the RCMP or CSIS at academic activities constitutes a serious threat to academic freedom. Students and academic staff need to discuss and debate a variety of ideas, even those that challenge dominant paradigms, without fear of police surveillance.

The event in question was organized by Dave Thomas, a Mount Allison professor in the politics and international relations department and featured Joan Kuyek, an activist and author of *Unearthing Justice: How to Protect Your Community from the Mining Industry*. Upon learning of RCMP presence at the event, Thomas filed an information request on the nature of the visit. The access to information claim revealed that RCMP presence was related to the "detection, prevention or suppression of crime," of which a book launch is not.

There has been a long history of controversy concerning surveillance activities of Canadian security agencies on university and college campuses. In 1961, Conservative Justice Minister E. Davie Fulton ordered the RCMP to halt all campus investigations in response to concerns about the impact on academic freedom and free speech. In 1963, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson and CAUT President Bora Laskin reached an accord to limit and provide oversight of RCMP activities on campus. The agreement established that security services would enter post-secondary institutions only to conduct screening "where there [were] definite indications that individuals may be involved in espionage or subversive activities."

A 1997-98 review of campus investigations called for renewed application of the Pearson-Laskin principles, and in particular that "the Service should be required to explain how a particular investigation will impact on the rights and freedoms of persons who are subjects of the investigation as well as those persons associated with the institution concerned."

The case of the book launch in New Brunswick involved the RCMP, but there have also been recent reports of CSIS activities on campus. This has resulted in the creation of a hotline for students at

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the University of Toronto to call if approached by CSIS or RCMP. The *CSIS Act* prohibits investigations of lawful advocacy, protest, or dissent, unless carried out in conjunction with defined threats to the security of Canada. The *Service* must therefore “weigh with care the requirement for an investigation against its possible impact on the civil liberties of persons and sensitive institutions in Canada, including trade unions, the media, religious institutions and university campuses.”

I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss a review of surveillance on campus and the need to protect academic freedom, at a time of your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,



David Robinson  
Executive Director

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