



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

BY EMAIL: [Jill.Dunlop@pc.ola.org](mailto:Jill.Dunlop@pc.ola.org)

October 18, 2023

The Honourable Jill Dunlop  
Minister of Colleges and Universities  
Government of Ontario  
5th Floor  
438 University Ave.  
Toronto, ON M7A 1N3

Dear Minister:

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), representing 72,000 academic and professional staff at over 120 universities and colleges, is deeply concerned about your statement in the Ontario legislature on October 17, 2023. In addressing a debate on the current conflict in the Middle East, you named several Ontario professors and accused them of "celebrating" terrorism and of being anti-Semitic. You then urged university administrations to hold the professors to account.

It is highly unusual for allegations of misconduct on the part of professors to be made in any legislature in Canada, and for good reason. By statute, universities are granted institutional autonomy so they may fulfill their mission and conduct their internal affairs free from interference of political or other special interests. Such autonomy is necessary to maintain academic integrity and uphold academic freedom. In *Canadian Federation of Students v. Ontario*, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the importance of institutional autonomy in a case where your government had been found to have breached it.

Consequently, your remarks in the legislature constitute a serious infringement on the principle of university autonomy. Universities, not governments or other bodies, are best placed to assess allegations of misconduct.

Further, by publicly naming and summarily pronouncing judgement on the professors in question, you have prejudiced their rights to due process and irreparably damaged their reputations. As Minister, you are certainly entitled to express your views, but you also have a civic duty to ensure that your statements are based on facts obtained from a thorough examination of a matter, not conjecture premised on decontextualized fragments of social media postings.

Your statement also fails to grasp the central importance of academic freedom in universities. Academic freedom requires that academics must not be hindered or impeded in exercising their civil rights, including the right to contribute to social change through free expression of opinion on matters of public interest. All professors have the right, within the law, to contribute their views

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and their expertise to public discourse. This ability to espouse even highly controversial and unpopular views fulfills an essential mission of universities and colleges and, unless it constitutes speech that is prohibited by law, must not be curtailed.

Historically, academic freedom has been most at jeopardy in times of conflict and national security concerns. The widespread dismissals of controversial professors and subsequent constraints on academic discourse during and after the two world wars of the last century should serve as warning that politically motivated restrictions on academic expression must never be countenanced.

You owe the professors you named in the legislature an immediate public apology.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Robinson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Robinson  
Executive Director

Cc: Dr. Peter McInnis, CAUT President  
Dr. Michael Arfken, Chair, CAUT Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee