

Get Research Right

In an earlier issue of *Collectively Speaking*, February 12, 2014, the past Chair of our Association, Doug Chivers, unmasked alleged budget inevitabilities as in fact administration **choices** designed to simulate a crisis, a crisis on the basis of which the University of Saskatchewan could be unilaterally restructured. This so-called “crisis” was to be the pretext for, among other things, top-down choices about what research would get done and how it would be resourced, or not.

Now more than a year later, there is much talk about crisis and tough choices once again, this time in a national context. We are in the midst of a federal election where questions of choice, and of whose choices will prevail, loom larger than ever. The choices that are made on and after October 19 will have enormous implications for everyone associated with the University of Saskatchewan, including all members of USFA. The funding and stewardship of post secondary education may be a provincial responsibility, but the federal government sets the tone, especially in establishing research priorities and levels of transparency, and in determining the funding that flows through the federal granting councils and to special initiatives the Government of Canada chooses to promote.

The outcome of the October election may directly and negatively impact the choices you make as a researcher.

In order, therefore, to make a more informed choice on election day, you

need to know the choices that have been made or are being proposed regarding research and science in Canada. What are the political parties defending or promising? How can they be made more accountable for what they have done, in the case of the Harper government, or are proposing to do in the case of all parties now in election mode?

For several years the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has been documenting and critiquing the damage done to Canada’s research capacity by the Harper government. CAUT has undertaken this work through its annual analyses of federal budgets in all their omnibus complexities and concealments. Moreover, CAUT has also mounted two campaigns to raise awareness of the current manipulation of public memory, scientific inquiry, and any institution or activity aimed at producing, preserving, and sharing research findings and rigorous analysis.

“Canada’s Past Matters” (<http://www.canadaspastmatters.ca/>) is a campaign to spread the message that the knowledge of our past is necessary for a strong and equitable future. It calls for immediate action to reverse the harm being done to Canadian historical and cultural heritage institutions.

The “Get Science R!ght” (<http://getscienceright.ca/>) campaign was launched in response to a growing outcry from researchers and academics concerned about the public consequences of Canada’s current science policy. The campaign highlights the neg-

ative impact of the federal government’s approach to science, proposes steps to support science in the public interest, and encourages Canadians to take action to protect scientific integrity.

A specific piece of the “Get Science R!ght” campaign takes place between September 21 and October 2 when faculty associations from across Canada will be hosting events to raise awareness of these important federal election issues.

USFA applauds CAUT’s efforts and joins with them to augment them during the last week of September, just as other academic staff associations across the country will be doing. Our contribution is entitled “Get Research Right” and through various means, including this issue of *Collectively Speaking*, we will be raising with you research and science policy and funding issues.

In a gathering on campus and another at Station 20 West we will work to raise awareness in Saskatoon of the need for research to be independent, peer reviewed, unmuzzled, and appropriately funded.

The event on campus is scheduled for **Louis Loft on Tuesday 29 September from 3 to 6 pm**. The event at **Station 20 West will take place on October 2 from 3 to 5 pm**. All candidates in Saskatoon ridings for the federal election will be invited to attend, listen, and share their own views on research as an election issue and public concern.

We have had nine years of intimidation and punishment of researchers and scientists by the Harper government and a narrowing of research goals to short-term

“deliverables.” The exertion of control and instrumentalising of outcomes started early and intensified through two minorities into a majority Harper government.

In 2006, for example, Environment Canada employee Dr. Mark Tushingham, an expert on Pleistocene Glaciation, was looking forward to a speaking engagement in Ottawa connected to the publication of his novel, *Hotter than Hell* (2005). However, he was prevented from speaking there and at other public venues by then Minister of the Environment, Rona Ambrose. When her boss was pressed about this early muzzling of someone intent on discussing the scientific underpinnings of a work of fiction, and its connections to his government’s climate change policy, Stephen Harper declared, “I not only hope, but expect, that all elements of the bureaucracy will be working with us to achieve our objectives.” Chilling words aimed at global warming and its critics. Note the reach of that prime ministerial expectation, and the dismissive generality of the term “bureaucracy.” Public servants were on notice, and they still are - as we see with the suspension of yet another public servant who resorted to music rather

than fiction to express his citizen’s sentiments about the state of the nation.

And of course the muzzling of government scientists and scripting of members of parliament does not end there.

Consider the words of Michelle Rempel on CBC’s “Power and Politics” in April, 2013. On that program Ms. Rempel responded to the news of an Information Commission investigation into the muzzling of governments scientists as just a “media protocol” like the ones in place in universities with regard to faculty activity and “grant applications.” This was her view after serving for three years as Director of the Institutional Programs division at the University of Calgary! When she spoke in 2013, it was in her role as Parliamentary Secretary to yet another stellar Minister of the Environment, Peter Kent. As a “rising star” in Conservative Party ranks, Ms. Rempel was soon promoted to her most recent position as Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), this despite her claims that muzzling “protocols” are as normal and appropriate in universities as in the public service. The silence of the Deans is problematic enough, but the silenc-

ing, or scripting, of all faculty would be profoundly damaging to the public interest and profoundly undemocratic to boot.

Sadly, it’s already happening.

Attacks on knowledge and “the death of evidence” in libraries, laboratories, the long form census, and so on, pose multiple challenges for Canada’s research community and the public interest. Picking winners in advance of basic inquiry and due scholarly diligence is a recipe for disaster. It represents in effect the substitution of ideology and opportunism for intellectual integrity, spin for substance. The economic, cultural, and democratic consequences of such directive policies are dire. Lysenkoism here we come!

Look for e-Letters leading up to our “Get Research Right” events. Please give serious consideration to adding your voice to USFA’s upcoming conversations on research as an election issue and policy challenge, and please encourage your colleagues to do so too.

For more detailed accounts of some of the matters referred to here, see the following:

1. <http://www.itsaboutchoice.ca/>
2. <http://getsciencerright.ca/>
3. <http://getsciencerright.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2014.03.15Get-Science-Right.pptx>
4. <http://www.canadaspastmatters.ca/>
5. <http://www.truenorthsmartandfree.ca/>
6. Len Findlay. “Controlling Knowledge, Corraling Dissent.” April 27, 2015. <http://ourrighttoknow.ca/controlling-knowledge-corralling-dissent/>
7. Richard Little, “Bringing Climate Censorship Home to Canada.” <http://www.desmogblog.com/bringing-climate-censorship-home-to-canada>

Research policy and funding are federal election issues.

Get informed.

Ask Candidates for party positions.

Join the conversation:

September 29

3:00 to 6:00 pm

Louis Loft

October 2

3:00 to 5:00 pm

Station 20 West, Multi-purpose Room

On October 19

choose a government that will Get Research Right.