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The Service of Dissent

BY  BROWNSTONE INSTITUTE MAY 3, 2024 **CENSORSHIP, EDUCATION, VACCINES** 5 MINUTE READ

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Is academic freedom becoming a casualty of the modern university, as the latter is transformed by the public-private partnerships that increasingly dominate our political life?

Just before Easter, a Montreal man, father of four and full professor at a university founded shortly after Harvard, was informed of his dismissal for speaking publicly about his scientific findings and opinions. He wrote a letter about this to colleagues, asking some very profound questions, which can be found in translation [here](#).

His story was broken in the mainstream French press by [Le Devoir](#) on 26 April, and in the English press by [the Epoch Times](#) four days later. The following brief reflection on this story arose from an impromptu consultation by scholars from other universities, working either in the sciences or in various disciplines of the humanities.

All are convinced that what transpired, however significant for one man and his family, is of much wider import. A worrisome pattern is emerging, in America as in Canada, that requires sustained attention.

Here is the letter signed by colleagues.

A very odd thing is happening. As the list of reasons to be concerned about the impact of a certain popular genetic therapy grows, such that even Health Canada seems finally to be paying attention, so does the list of scientists and doctors disciplined for having questioned it.

Patrick Provost, an accomplished biochemist with acquired expertise in, among other things, RNA and lipid nanoparticles, is the latest addition to the latter list. He was in a good position to grasp the potential harms of the Pfizer and Moderna modified mRNA injections. He came to the conclusion some time ago that the risks outweighed the rewards, at least where children were concerned.

He considered it his duty as a scientist, indeed as a human being, to come to the defence of children by speaking publicly against their use on them. For this he was attacked by parties inside and outside Université Laval, in which he was a full professor. Over the past two years, the university twice suspended him and, last week, fired him.

From the very beginning, there were eminent scientists in a number of cognate fields saying similar things. As the scale of injury and death from damage to the vascular system began to come clear, and concerns about cancers and genomic alterations grew, many others began to speak up. In Canada, Byram Bridle at Guelph comes to mind as an early dissenter. He too was harassed and persecuted in the name of Science. Last month, to offer a recent American example, Martin Kulldorff was fired by Harvard.

This is all of a piece with the orchestrated attack upon the famous authors of the [Great Barrington Declaration](#), evidence of which turned up in the Fauci emails. In other words, this persecution of a Quebec scientist, Patrick Provost, belongs to a much wider campaign, not to save science, but to suppress scientific dissent from a narrative in which there are powerful vested interests, both economic and political.

Whether Provost is in good company or bad, however, and whether he was right or wrong in particular findings or opinions, is beside the point. He did his job as a scientist and as a citizen. He fulfilled a fiduciary duty in the academy and to the general public, whose tax dollars pay for the academy. People like this should be rewarded, not punished, for their faithfulness and courage. Those who seek to punish them undermine the scientific enterprise and invite probing questions as to their real motivation for doing so.

What is at stake here? For Provost, obviously, his vocation and his livelihood. For Quebec, the viability or risibility of its new [Act Respecting Academic Freedom in the University Environment](#). For all who work in that environment, the confidence that they can and should go where the evidence leads, without fear of discipline for producing results that others may find inconvenient or upsetting. For Laval University, its place among honourable institutions that prize truth above popular opinion, fair dealing above petty professorial politics, and academic integrity above financial advantage.

And for the rest of us? Confidence that such institutions still exist; that higher education has not altogether lapsed from the pursuit of truth into an exercise in right-think; that it has not shamelessly prostituted itself to the powers that be, to the point that even tenure means nothing.

Academic freedom, which tenure supports, is the last line of defence against such prostitution. It lies in everyone's best interests. Without it, democracy itself cannot flourish; arguably, it cannot even survive. For if we give place to censorship in the university, we give place to censorship virtually everywhere else.

What is left is no reign of truth, but rather an impending reign of terror. For the narrative of the powerful is imposed on the weak when they need not convince by persuasion but can silence by force. What comes of that is never merely suppression of speech. The narrative always gets darker when exposing it to the light is forbidden.

Patrick Provost drew a line at what amounted to medical experimentation on children. He stood for the weak when he stood for children. The question is: Who will stand with him now? Who will take his side? We call for his reinstatement, with a full apology from the university. We applaud the unions and professional associations that are doing likewise. We urge students and alumni and honest donors to add their voice and their weight, not only at Laval but wherever such betrayals are taking place.

In the last four years we have seen an astonishing rise in censorship, as in other forms of bullying and coercion, inside and outside the academy, even from governments and state agencies. We can't reverse that by regret. We can only reverse it by acts of resistance. The first antidote to censorship is bold speech and consistent action. Of that, Patrick Provost has provided an admirable example that we ought all to follow.

Signatories:

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