

**BOOK REPORT** / *A textbook on government and politics was dropped from the list of titles approved for purchase by Ontario's high-school libraries. The question is, why?*

## Political correctness, Ontario style

BY TOM FLANAGAN

**M**Y colleague Mark Dickerson and I are the authors of *An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach*, a textbook meant for first-year students in Canadian universities and community colleges. It is not a profound work of scholarship, but students and professors apparently find it useful in the classroom. It is now in its fourth edition; it has sold an average of 5,000 copies a year since it was first published in 1982, and has been adopted at one time or another in virtually every English-speaking university and college in Canada.

At midsummer of 1993, we received a letter from our publisher, Nelson Canada, telling us that the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training had dropped our book from "Circular 14," a list of titles approved for purchase by high-school libraries. Although our book was written for the university level, it is occasionally purchased by school libraries as a reference work for advanced students. The number of sales involved is small, and we would not have minded being dropped from Circular 14 had it not been for the reasons proffered to justify the decision.

Two of these reasons were silly but not otherwise offensive. The first was that the book was (surprise!) "found to be university-oriented." True enough, although it seems like a desirable characteristic in reference books for advanced students. The second reason was that the book contained "outdated references and serious factual errors." True again, but only because the ministry had just got around to reviewing the second edition, published in 1986 before the collapse of the Soviet Union. They had missed the third edition altogether, and when the letter arrived we were already working on the fourth edition.

The other reasons would be more sinister. They were not so farcical. A report appended to the letter stated that the book was

guilty of "racial, religious and sex bias," particularly against Jews and women.

The allegation of sex bias was supported only by this astonishing statement: "Six females are named. Approximately one hundred male historians, philosophers, economists and authors are named." We had made the fatal mistake of thinking that Canadian students should be able to recognize names such as John Locke, Edmund Burke, William Lyon Mackenzie King and Pierre Trudeau! More seriously, it is hardly surprising that a political-science textbook mentions far more men than women; feminists are unanimous in asserting that politics always has been and still is a male-dominated field.

**T**HE allegation of bias against Jews was supported in the first instance by an even more astonishing statement: "Israel is not included in the index; the PLO and the Palestinians are included. This appears to be a calculated omission." Such paranoia is usually found only in mental institutions. It is true that the index of the second edition omitted an entry for Israel, but it did contain entries for Jews and anti-Semitism. As is often the case, we had been asked by the publisher to compile the index very quickly during the teaching term, so we had hired a graduate student to do the work.

Further evidence of our anti-Semitism was offered in marginal notes made on a few photocopied pages of our book. For example, in the section on ideologies where we discussed National Socialism, we wrote that Mussolini was the creator of fascism and that "Hitler also added a heavy dose of anti-Semitism, which had not been part of Mussolini's doctrine." The anonymous reviewer underlined this sentence and wrote in the margin that "this comment trivializes the true meaning of the Holocaust." He also noted "9B" and "10B." We never learned what these admonitions meant because no one would give us the code.

I have to admit that I was irritated by this

nonsense, so I wrote a letter to the official who had banned our book — the implausibly named John Smith, co-ordinator of English-Language Learning Media in the Curriculum Policy Department Branch. He did not reply to me, but he did deign to instruct the publisher: "The Ministry of Education and Training will not discuss evaluations with individual authors. Please take some time to discuss this with the author involved."

This was the official response. Unofficially, someone in the ministry called Nelson Canada to tell it to make me back off, or the Government of Ontario would not buy any more of its books. I learned this when I got a panicky call from an editor begging me to keep quiet. Nelson Canada sells a lot of books to the public schools in Ontario and did not want its business jeopardized by a cranky professor arguing with the ministry.

I also gave the story to the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, and the president of that organization wrote a letter of complaint to the Education Minister, the Honourable Dave Cooke. He replied that a new review would be carried out and mailed to the publisher by February, 1994, but nothing has ever arrived. In the meantime, according to the publisher, the issue has become moot because lack of money has forced Ontario to stop buying books listed on Circular 14.

I don't want to overdramatize this shabby episode; it did not cost Mark Dickerson and me any money or prevent any university students from using our book. But a government that can act in such a Kafkaesque way is also capable of doing far more serious damage in the world of science and scholarship.

*Tom Flanagan is a professor of political science at the University of Calgary. His latest book is *Waiting for the Wave: The Reform Party and Preston Manning* (Stoddart). This piece is reprinted from the December issue of *The Fraser Forum*, a monthly bulletin of the Fraser Institute.*