

Political Correctness Ontario-Style

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My 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.

In 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 The second reason was that the book contained "outdated references and serious factual errors."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 gotten 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 if 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.

The 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 fas-

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Wars usually result in some civilian casualties. The war on drugs is no different. The innocent people who are caught in the crossfire between rival gangs (or between drug dealers and police), the children who can't play outdoors because their neighbourhoods are unsafe, the people who are mugged on the streets or whose homes are burglarized by punks looking for drug money—they are all victims not of the drug trade, but of the drug war.

There are other drugs, legal drugs—like alcohol, nicotine and caffeine—that are perhaps equally addictive and equally unhealthy, but no-one totes a gun around to safeguard a purchase of Taster's Choice. Maxwell House and Nescafe don't have shoot-'em-up turf wars. It

is only when the law intervenes to prohibit the trade in such substances (as with alcohol during Prohibition), or to create territorial price differentials which reward smuggling (as with cigarettes in Canada earlier this year) that gunfire starts to become a familiar sound near trading zones.

The resemblance to real war goes further still. In the war on drugs, police have the same problem that American soldiers had in Vietnam. The enemy—drug traffickers—are visually indistinguishable from the rest of the population. So the conflict becomes a guerilla war in which everyone is a suspect. The temptation for nervous cops to abuse their power must be strong. Racial minorities who complain that the police pick on them are

probably not imagining it. The resulting racial tension is becoming palpable on the streets of our major cities.

There are worse horrors to come. The war on drugs has led inexorably to a war on guns. The anti-gun crusaders would like to disarm everyone except the military and the police. Of course, no-one expects the drug dealers to miraculously turn in their weapons. The law-abiding majority of the population, disarmed, will be sitting ducks, defenceless against violent criminals on the one hand and an ever more powerful police state on the other.

Canadians don't have to approve of drug use, but it's about time we just said no to the war on drugs.

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cism 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, Coordinator of English Language Learning Media in the Curriculum Policy Development 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 them to make me back off, or the government of Ontario would not buy any more of their 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 their 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 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 nor 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.