



Letters to the Editors

How ironic that "Highlights of the Preliminary Report on the Status of Women as Graduate Students in History in Canada" (Winter, 1991) should follow so closely on the heels of Ramsay Cook's "Peace Proposal for the War of the Sexes" (Fall, 1990).

The evidence presented by de la Cour et al. of the sexism suffered by women graduate students should put the lie to Cook's misconception that affirmative action is intended only to redress "past injustice". Would that it were so. We could then abandon both affirmative action and Cook's own proposal for reform of the tenure system, to the relief of male graduate students and tenured faculty alike. Instead, we could simply begin to make hiring decisions fairly and objectively, and hence inevitably to choose the best qualified of all applicants. That should do it, shouldn't it? Except that these same people who we rely upon to make these fair and objective hiring decisions *continue* to discourage, fail to encourage, discriminate against, and, yes, even to harass the women in that potential pool of applicants.

There is no question of starting a "battle of the sexes": it began long ago.

Margaret J. Watson, Graduate Student
History, York University

Re: Prof. Ramsay Cook's "Peace Proposal for the War of the Sexes" (*Bulletin*, Fall 1990) I think Prof. Cook is trying to pull rabbits out of non-existent hats. The suggested periodic tenure review for university professors will not solve the problem of employment equity for women who still find it difficult to obtain jobs in academe. Indeed, Prof. Cook's contention that reverse discrimination is occurring for young men is an assertion not backed up by facts. In his own area of history, Prof. Cook would be well-advised to consult a study I conducted for the Canadian Historical Association which demonstrates that no great strides have been made by women in departments of history in Canada. My survey showed that in 1988-89, women represented only 5 to 25% of tenured or tenure-stream faculty in the 36 departments that replied to the questionnaire (out of 66 departments). Thirty of the

36 had less than 20% representation of women and a number of small colleges and universities had no women employed in secure positions. Most university history departments can boast one, two or three women at best, a fact which underlines the relatively poor position of women who represented 37% of the doctoral candidates in 1986-87 in history and who have obtained 28% of history Ph.D.'s since 1982, according to Statistics Canada data. Affirmative action measures need to be strengthened rather than abandoned.

Dr. Linda Kealey
History, Memorial University

No Peace Proposal This. Proposals that resort to images of threatened babies and just wars, even metaphorically, need critical scrutiny, especially by feminists. Too commonly, they threaten whatever fragile gains women have made in the course of the "longest revolution". And so it is with the "A Peace Proposal for the War of the Sexes" submitted by the longtime friend of many feminist historians, Ramsay Cook, first to the *Globe and Mail* (May 10, 1990) and then to the *CHA Bulletin* (Fall 1990). Professor Cook's forlorn hope that the abolition of tenure will somehow rectify discrimination on the basis of sex presumes that once this "dead hand of the past" is gone his modern men (read "liberal men") will "naturally" no longer discriminate on the basis of anything but excellence. Such naïveté ignores the fact that even hard-working male academics, not to mention the academic drones deplored by Professor Cook, have long preserved a vested interest in barring entry to equally or more industrious female competitors. Even the most "talented" or well-rewarded of male scholars have been notoriously oblivious, indifferent or hostile to female talent, unless it takes the form of enhancing their own careers or personal lives. As elsewhere in Canada, with some few exceptions, patriarchy has long ruled the day within history departments (see the recent CHA survey of Canadian history departments by Dr. Linda Kealey). Thus, it is plainly not sufficient, even if it could or should be done, to dismantle tenure, to leave the "good old boys" in charge of the shop.

It would be possible to feel more sympathy for Professor Cook's point of view if one could not presume that he too has participated, at least vicariously, in the validation, not only of incompetent and mediocre men, but of a system that prefers men and male thought as at least implicitly superior, as his own work on Canadian intellectual life demonstrates. Weak affirmative action programs at Canadian universities provide just a tiny, much resisted, and long overdue effort to penetrate and transform this academic patriarchy. To be sure, the occasional talented male might lose out. But we find no evidence, and Cook provides none, to substantiate his fear that young women are beating out young men for academic positions. Moreover, the male Ph.D. candidate has already benefitted from a lifetime of preferential treatment for his sex in the form of better pay, for summer jobs, for example, or in the freedom from sexual harassment. And there is little doubt that he will find many settings where he will continue to be more valued than his equally talented sister.

All the concern about the future of privileged males reminds us inevitably of the recurring fuss about male victims of unfair divorce or custody proceedings, when overwhelmingly the victims are female. Let's deal with the big problem first - universities' continuing dogged insistence on preferring males and male knowledge, while another generation of wonderful young women are barred from entering the privileged realm. So-called solutions to the problem of staffing our universities miss the point and finally shore up a fundamentally unjust system if they fail to challenge the diverse ways that patriarchy in all its forms seeks to perpetuate its bases of power and privilege.

Finally, while there has always been little enough justice in this world, and although the few women who have captured academic positions must pay some part of the price, it is surely ironic justice that departments with talented male scholars like Ramsay Cook have to suffer the surfeit of bores that patriarchy has perpetuated as part of the price of men's so-called meritocracy. Should Professor Cook truly wish to see the dawn of a new day where energy

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and truth and commitment to excellence are rewarded without regard for gender, then he should turn to university reforms that address not only abuses of tenure but also the many inequalities suffered by women and members of racial minorities - as students, would-be employees, and staff and faculty. So-called "peace proposals" are entirely inappropriate when so many injustices continue.

Margaret Conrad, Andrée Lévesque, Ruth Roach Pierson, Alison Prentice, Veronica Strong-Boag, and Sylvia Van Kirk

I long ago learned from F.M. Cornford's *Microcosmographia Academia* that universities are beyond reform. "There is only one argument for doing something," he explained to aspiring young university politicians, "the rest are arguments for doing nothing." The point is more than adequately confirmed by the responses to my modest proposal concerning tenure review.

That Harold Buckbinder cannot distinguish between a university faculty and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters comes as no surprise. His inability to grasp an argument does. The moral obtuseness that lurks so scantily clad behind the stale prose of sociological abstraction is simply depressing. "It is all men, through the agency of institutions," he drones, "which followed patriarchal policies." Where everyone is guilty, no one is responsible. But as Pogo might say, "the institutions is us." The relationship between tenure review and the "university as a market driven institution", to quote another fresh phrase, exists only in Buckbinder's imagination, and the same not especially fertile source presumably explains the claim that I "imply" that tenure review is "the only method for freeing up" positions for young scholars. It is one of a number of methods. If combined with a proposal first made by Professor Constance Backhouse, (which I would support), of reserving all positions opened up as a result of tenure review for women candidates, it might prove very effective.

Professor Matthews' objection to my proposal is really astonishing. He argues for total relativism even while holding a

position that requires that, virtually every day, he must apply standards of judgment to student essays, theses, and the books of colleagues. If there are no standards of performance that can be used in tenure review, the logic of the argument is that tenure itself, which is based on accepted standards of performance, should be abolished. Is that Matthews' proposal?

And Dr. Fleming. As every historian knows - or should know - accounts of the past should never be based only on "recall". At no time have I ever participated in (or even heard of) "a cross Canada study of graduate programmes." There were, consequently, no results to publish and nothing that "Dr. Cook should have told" anybody. Too much "cocktail conversation" is bad for the "recall."

Finally Allen Seager would be well advised to read the dissenting opinions (especially Madame Justice L'Heureux Dubé) in the recent Supreme Court case respecting compulsory retirement before concluding that justice and equity for women can be obtained by that route. Her Honour wisely warns that "the value of tenure is threatened by incompetence not by the aging process". And she continues: "The fear that aging professors will rest on their laurels and wallow in a perpetual and interminable quagmire of unproductivity and stagnation may be a real one. Yet it applies with equal force to younger tenured faculty. *Peer review, so long as it is predicated on the premise of unbiased good faith*, provides a healthy injection of critical evaluation and will serve to promote the scholastic standards indispensable to a flourishing university." (my italics).

Words that should be emblazoned on every university union hall in the country!

Thank you for this second opportunity to play the role of Sisyphus.

Ramsay Cook
History, York University

I read with interest the article "Clio Under Attack..." in the last *CHA Bulletin* (Spring, 1991). I am pleased to see that historians are interested in the teaching of history at the secondary level, and I would like to respond to the two questions posed in the article.

1. First, the reply is yes, of course [the CHA should assume a more active role in supporting the teaching of history in provincial education systems] as you undoubtedly guessed from the preceding comments. Nevertheless, the motives which you invoke to justify that action deserve, it seems to me, to be carefully defined. At the moment, they might appear to be somewhat self-serving. In effect, those which you mention are the following: to encourage more students to choose History at university and to prepare them better for it; to increase the membership of the CHA; to maintain an involvement in pre-university teaching for university professors, particularly for those who once taught in secondary schools (and who retain nostalgic memories of it!).

All that to ensure that History retains "an important part" in the program. However, the teaching of history is not only a matter of quantity. It is also a matter of quality and not every type of teaching is desirable in the schools. Where does the necessity of raising the question come from in the first place: what teaching of history and why? At times, some history professors at universities have such outdated or badly informed ideas about the reality of teaching history in the schools that the defence of those ideas confuses more than assists the teaching of history, when it does not simply do harm to the struggles which are being fought elsewhere by specialists in the field. The teaching of history has become a complex and demanding field in both theory and practice: one does not become an expert in it simply by virtue of the fact that one is involved with history in another context.

Yes, then, to your first question, on the condition that the members of the CHA who are interested in defending history in the secondary schools take appropriate measures to master the coordinates of modern teaching in our discipline.

2. To your second question [what actions might be taken], that which has already been suggested is part of the answer. And with a little work and a little thought, one might imagine others. Already, you yourself make an important suggestion: to save *HSST*. I do not really know how that might be done, but I agree with you that it will be necessary for the teaching of history. One

might also imagine that Francophones could collaborate in the undertaking - in the meantime, perhaps with the journal *Traces* (the journal of the Society of History Teachers of Québec. Editor-in-chief, Robert Martineau).

Christian LaVille, Département de didactique, Faculté des sciences de l'éducation, Université Laval.

Is There a History Crisis in the Schools? As outgoing editor of *History and Social Science Teacher* (declared moribund in the Spring 1991 bulletin), I'd like to comment on Gail Cuthbert Brandt's cry of alarm about poor "Clio".

First, *HSST* is not endangered. Last winter it was but it has been taken on by the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, and its future looks bright. The new editor, Joe Kirman (Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, T6G 2G5) welcomes contributions and subscriptions.

May I also cast doubt on the notion that the CHA must fight to preserve every high

school history course ever offered? What should be at stake in the schools is the quality of education - not the quantity of history credits students accumulate.

The vanishing history courses which Gail Cuthbert Brandt mourns mostly died because they were old-fashioned, boring, and unable to produce graduates ready to do history at higher levels. Despite the fears of some history teachers, the replacement courses - often interdisciplinary units with titles other than History, yet firmly historical at the core - are proving to be much more successful on all counts. This is not a bad thing. This is not a crisis.

Can history professors assist teachers? When I was editing *HSST*, we rarely received (or solicited) reports on historical scholarship. But the magazine was constantly full of pedagogical debate - skills teaching, critical thinking, small-group learning, student journals, the uses and abuses of software. The innovations being tested flowed back and forth between history and half a dozen other fields, to general benefit.

Fact is, there is an impressive number of skilled and dedicated teachers in the high schools. They know the value of history, but they also know a lot about curricula and how to make them work. They are not sure they have much to learn from the professors, whose only pedagogical innovation in the last 150 years has been passing most of the work over to teaching assistants.

If the academically-dominated CHA is going to get involved in the schools, it will need to learn humility. Simply to demand that high school students take courses labelled History is to engage in a pointless and counter-productive turf war. To be useful - to be tolerated! - the CHA is going to have to acknowledge the best teachers as the experts and ask them what history might offer to the schools.

Meanwhile, Gail Cuthbert Brandt could give "Clio" a nice hot cup of tea and tell her to calm down. The kids are all right. Let them get a good sound education, and perfectly adequate numbers of them will come to university hungry to specialize in history. (Whether the university must maintain its ironclad disciplinary boundaries on undergraduates is another question).

Christopher Moore

CHA Annual Conference, University of Prince Edward Island, May 31-June 2, 1992

The 71st Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association will be held in Charlottetown at the University of Prince Edward Island, May 31 to June 2, 1992. The Programme Committee has chosen three themes for the conference: ***Natives and Europeans in Early Colonial History; Transportation and Communications in the Canadian Experience; Tourists and Tourism in 20th Century Canada.*** The Committee invites proposals for papers, research-in-progress sessions and panels on these and other subjects. Proposals should state whether they are for a regular or research-in-progress session, outline the topic on a single page and add enough information to identify the proposer's experience and major publications. A selection of papers will be published in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Persons

interested in proposing individual papers or panels should write to the Chair of the Programme Committee or to one of its members: Andrew Robb, Chair, History Dept., University of Prince Edward Island; Rusty Bittermann, History Dept., University of New Brunswick; Jack Bumsted, History Dept., University of Manitoba; Gail Campbell, History Dept., University of New Brunswick; Douglas Cole, History Dept., Simon Fraser University; Jean Daigle, Département d'histoire, Université de Moncton; Deborah Gorham, History Dept., Carleton University; Harry Holman, Public Archives of Prince Edward Island; Reginald Stuart, History Dept., Mount Saint Vincent University; Joanne Veer, History Dept., University of Prince Edward Island.

All proposals must be received **no later than 3 September 1991.**

As a long-time member of the CHA, I read with great interest your article "Clio Under Attack...". I am one of those people who many of my business friends consider too academic and many of my academic friends consider too business like; therefore something of a mongrel I suppose. Nevertheless, to the extent that these comments are justified you may understand why I have been greatly concerned about the lack of teaching of history in the high schools of Ontario. As a student of the late Dr. Harold Innis and as a graduate of Commerce and Finance in 1928 I think that history has played a greater role in keeping my career somewhere near a balanced effort than any other subject which I took in high school and university. Certainly this discipline has supplied the bulk of my reading over the last 40 years and without the initial grounding I doubt if I would have been led to read as widely and as profitably as I have been able to.

John G. Crean