

24. (c) Annex

(2017-05)



To: CAUT Council

From: Pat Armstrong

Re: Nomination for the Executive and Co-Chair, Equity Committee

Date: April 5, 2017

Thank you for considering my nomination to the position of Co-Chair of the Equity Committee. My prior commitments mean I will miss the first executive meeting and it was suggested I send a short note instead. As I was rushing to do this before I leave on Saturday for five weeks abroad, I realized that the attached speech I delivered at a CAUT Conference would set out much of my perspective and some of my experience.

I have been involved with union and equity issues all my adult life. I would be happy to expand on this experience, beginning with my full-time work after graduation for the student council at the University of Toronto, where I was actively involved in organizing the first union at U of T and in issues of access to higher education, to my current project that includes five union partners and is focused on equity as well as quality matters in long-term residential care. Like the CAUT, I have been engaged in struggles related to pay equity, sexual harassment, employment equity, precarious employment, structural barriers to equitable employment, and strategies such as childcare care, eldercare and compassionate care. As a witness in more than a dozen cases before Human Rights and Pay Equity Commissions, I have been declared an expert on systemic discrimination.

At the same time, I realize I have much to learn from and with the CAUT Executive and members. And that new issues will arise.

Please let me know if you have any questions about my past or future commitments.

Doing Academia Differently
CAUT Biennial Women's Conference
Keynote Panel Presentation
Feb. 22, 2007, Ottawa

When I was preparing for tonight, I thought of a cartoon I saw in the in the New Yorker. Two men in trench coats are talking to a woman at the door of her home. The caption reads, ' We're from the FBI and we're just going door to door to make sure everyone is scared shitless'.

Since 9/11, if not before, the message flooding the media and underpinning government actions has been "be scared". Make no mistake. The message is not confined to the U.S. I recently sat beside someone on the train who worked for the Canadian Public Security Agency. He said Canadians will have to get used to giving up some human rights in order to be secure. And we must remember that many of the gains for women have been made in the name of human rights. The removal of equity from the Status of Women mandate is no isolated incident. Cathy Jones says current government policy should be understood as "You've come far enough baby". But it may be worse than that. These are chilling times and neither equity nor social justice are spoken often in government or corporate circles.

I do not want to underestimate the opposition we have faced in the past or the struggle we have made to make important gains for women in and out of academe. I remember well a Dean we encountered when seeking to introduce what I think was the first credit course in women's studies at an Ontario community college. The Dean wrote that he had watched stallions

bite mare's asses in the field and knew that this was the proper order of things. The very useful work of people like our chair, like Janice Drakich and Penni Stuart, among others, who have documented the sorry state of women in academe in ways that have allowed them and others to use the evidence as a base for demanding change.

Not long ago, a young woman researching the development of a sexual harassment policy for academe told me that we had developed, at Vanier CEGEP in Montreal, the first sexual harassment policy and said we were really lucky to be there. Luck had little to do with it. We worked very hard against strong opposition, including from another Dean who kept sending us articles from religious magazines on the place of women. And many of us remember the sit-ins for day care, the threats following the McGill birth control handbook, the enemy's of the state list and the police on horses at our demonstrations.

But we were lucky in facing a somewhat different political and employment climate. Neo-liberal global forces were not as evidently powerful. And perhaps we were a little naïve, unlike many in the current generation of young women.

Now many of us hold some rather privileged positions, in large measure as a result of those struggles and some luck. But this very success may make us more reluctant to take risks, not to mention older bodies that may not survive in those cold demonstrations.

Another recent experience brought this problem home to me. I am on the board for the Canadian Health Coalition and the Coalition, along with the CLC, launched a legal case against the Canadian government for failure to implement the Canada Health Act. We were seeking expert witnesses.

Although I do most of my current research in health care, I thought I would be dismissed as a biased witness. The lawyer in the case approached a range of senior experts, all of whom were unwilling even though most supported the claims in the case and all the academics had tenure. One major reason was the fear of jeopardizing funding from the government.

My point is not only that fear stalks the land but also that the fear has spread into academe, even into the ranks of the most secure. Part of the reason is our increasing reliance on research funding. Without it, it is hard to make a phone call, let alone support students or work with ones who have support. Moreover, increasingly grants require partners who can contribute. Community organizations that support women are already overburdened and under-funded, and they too may fear offending the funders. So we are pressured to rely on other kinds of organizations- those with resources – for funds, organizations that may well be less likely to be interested in promoting equity. And if you do not make the plunge into research funding early in your career, it becomes increasingly difficult to get money later, especially if you want to challenge the current direction in our times. As Jan Newson, among others, has pointed out, there are real risks for academic freedom in these funds.

This takes me to my third and final point, one also made by people like Jan and Heather Menzies. It is about the time deficit women in particular face.

The pressure to have funding has been added to that of publishing, childcare, elder care and domestic work, all of which have been increased by government cutbacks and reforms. E-mails and wireless have further blurred the lines for women between their paid work and their households, making them always on call as well as making them take on more clerical work. Our success in promoting women means that there are also pressures to serve on a wide range of committees. I now ask if they want me or my genitalia, and it is usually the latter. Drawing lines is harder and the workload heavier. It will get heavier for those of us who are senior because so many of the current faculty is untenured, and unable to take on some administrative work and requiring assessments for tenure.

So where does my cheery message of fear, reliance on research undermining our academic freedom and our work overload take me. Well, I think it provides a starting point for a conference on doing academia differently. We need to develop together strategies that begin with a recognition of the conditions we face, not so they paralyze us but so that we can develop ways to address them.

This means challenging the need to abandon human rights and economic as well as social justice in the name of security. This in turn requires a feminist analysis that simultaneously seeks to capture the whole, including the global forces that influence our work, while recognizing fundamental divisions, oppressions and inequities among women. In order to do this, we need to demand the resources to conduct research in ways that allow curiosity and critique to play a central role. And it means creating that room of our own that allows us the time and space to do our work together and alone.

And, finally, it means moving beyond individual solutions to collective ones, while recognizing the needs, interests and perspectives of individuals as well as what Mahnaz Afkami, in *The Future of Women's Rights*, calls “the relativity of means”. This requires action in and outside academe, and working with other organizations. We cannot, for example, address our child and eldercare work within the university alone. Nor can we address cutbacks in research funding or the reliance on research funding within the academy alone.

We can build on our strength. We now have a significant number of women with tenure, in large measure because of our collective efforts. We still only count for a quarter of those with tenure, but this 26% is significantly better than the 14% of just 15 years ago (Sussman and Yssaad, 2005:17). We should not only celebrate that but exploit it. These women can take risks on behalf of those in more precarious situations and we need to figure out together how to do this in ways that benefit us all.

I am reminded of a headline in an Australian women's magazine almost a quarter century ago. “After you've caused inflation, unemployment and the debt, it is hard to know what to cook for dinner”. Women's work is indeed never done and economic and social justice not only takes time but must be constantly pursued and renewed. But we need to remember we have made some things better and to celebrate those victories. And we need have fun doing the work. As Emma Goldman said, I want to dance at my revolution.