

Drive To Reeducate Jordan Peterson Over His Online Comments Underscores Growing Threats to Freedom of Expression

Any dissent from contemporary faddish wokeness is treated more severely than were heresies in medieval Christendom.



by Conrad Black

The onslaught of the College of Psychologists of Ontario against Canada's most distinguished public intellectual, Professor Jordan Peterson, is an embarrassment and a disgrace to the entire country, and a direct threat to the civil

liberties of every Canadian. Mr. Peterson is followed by many millions of people on YouTube and X, formerly Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and elsewhere.

His first non-academic book, "Twelve Rules for Life," has sold more than 10 million English language copies, by far the best-selling non-fiction book in Canadian history. His YouTube videos have had literally billions of views. Yet he is at risk of losing his license to practice as a clinical psychologist in the province where he resides because of the complaints of six people about the "harm" done by his online opinions.

The majority of those who claimed to be "harmed" were not Canadian residents and none of them had professionally consulted Mr. Peterson or knew anyone who had. The complaints were vicarious.

Of the offending tweets, two were about Prime Minister Trudeau, one about his former chief of staff, Gerald Butts, one about the conduct during the truckers' protest of a woke Ottawa city councilor; another was about physicians who performed breast surgery on healthy women and girls, and about a well-known movie star who expressed gratitude for having undergone such an operation.

Mr. Peterson's podcast with Joe Rogan was also the subject of a complaint, particularly Mr. Peterson's description of the "idiot climate models of the eco-fascist apocalypse-mongers and wannabe tyrants." The last complaint was that of a buxom plus-sized model who was professed to have suffered hurt feelings from Mr. Peterson's tweeted reflections on her up-front appearance on the cover of the normally more wholesomely athletic magazine, Sports Illustrated.

Every one of these objections was a political statement; it is preposterous that any "harm" was caused by any of them, and there is no allegation of defamation about any of them. Every one was a statement of fact or of opinion and the only basis

upon which anyone could have claimed to be “harmed” would be in a sense that has never been legally actionable in a free society: hurt feelings.

This is particularly absurd in the cases involving Messrs. Trudeau and Butts: very prominent public figures who have routinely been referred to, and have referred to their opponents, in far more severe strictures than those objected to here by third parties on their behalf.

If such matters are now so contentious that foreign residents may cause professional associations – today it is the College of Psychologists of Ontario, tomorrow it could be the Bar or the governing bodies of chartered accountants or architects or physicians and surgeons or engineers or ordained clergymen of any province – then freedom of expression will not exist for anyone in Canada.

If the learned professionals can be publicly humiliated and threatened with expulsion from their practice because a few people, whether resident in Canada or not, profess to be offended by what is legally fair comment, no one in this country should imagine that the liberty of expression and conduct guaranteed to them by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has any validity whatever.

The College of Psychologists of Ontario, which Mr. Peterson describes as “that august body of interfering busy-body low-level bureaucrats” decided that if he did not undergo “social media training” with one of, as he called them, “self-declared social media experts,” with no indication of how prolonged and laborious these sessions would be.

Mr. Peterson’s refusal to participate would cause a demand for his appearance before a disciplinary panel, and if the panel upheld a negative finding against him, Canada’s most renowned public intellectual since Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan would be stripped of his license as a psychologist in Ontario.

Mr. Peterson has vehemently declined to submit to any such outrage and degradation as being lectured by the college's social media experts; although he did not say this, he is himself clearly Canada's leading social media expert. He will attend the disciplinary hearing, demand that it be telecast, and drag any negative finding all the way up through the courts of Canada. His professional success has enabled him to afford to mount a comprehensive defense. He has already been invited to join the psychologists' associations of three other jurisdictions.

Any dissent from contemporary faddish wokeness that offends even an uninvolved foreigner is treated more severely than were heresies in medieval Christendom. This is all of-a-piece with the persecution of a Waterloo school trustee, Mike Ramsey, who has been disciplined and accused of being a white supremacist, though he is himself Black, for defending the right to freedom of expression of a teacher whom he had never met.

A 40-year teacher at Abbotsford, Jim McMurtry, was fired for pointing out that most Indigenous children who died in residential schools were afflicted with tuberculosis or other diseases. Nurse Amy Hamm is facing disciplinary action for agreeing with author J.K. Rowling. We are now hearing demands for criminal penalties for denying that unproved atrocities against Indigenous people actually happened.

Many readers will remember the student at Wilfrid Laurier University, Lindsay Shepherd, who was chastised for suggesting that the study group that she led listen to a recording of a speech of Mr. Peterson's, and was told that that was like subjecting students to "a speech of Hitler's." (There would be nothing wrong with that either, if it were presented as illustrative of the power of evil in the modern world.) Many will also remember the tribulations inflicted by Human Rights Commissions upon distinguished Canadian international journalist Mark Steyn, and on Rebel newsman Ezra Levant.

The common law has guaranteed freedom of expression in Canada since the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763. Pierre Trudeau sensibly patriated the amendment of the Canadian Constitution from the U.K., and he appended a Charter of Rights and Freedoms because he claimed the rights of individuals are more important than the jurisdictional squabble between the provinces, especially Quebec, and the federal government, though his charter can in specific matters of rights be vacated by any of the provinces or by the federal government.

Quebec has always championed the French notion of the prevalence of collective over individual rights, because of the fear of French-Canadians that they could be acculturated entirely into English-speaking North America if their collective language rights were not asserted within Quebec, (at the expense of other cultures).

From this hodgepodge of diverging concepts we have the iniquitous Frankenstein's monster of human rights commissions and professional associations and the courts generally trampling underfoot freedoms that every Canadian has taken as a birthright for centuries, and which our newly enacted Charter purports to reinforce.

All Canadians who believe in the freedom of thought and expression and wish to practice it must support Mr. Peterson in his heroic struggle. We are all potentially victims with him.

(Disclosure: Jordan Peterson is a good friend, but I would not alter one syllable of this column if I had never heard of him before this controversy.)

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