

## Campus Life in Canada's 1960s: Reflections on the "Radical Campus" in Recent Historical Writing

Paul W. Bennett

Volume 42, numéro 2, summer/autumn 2013

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad42\\_2re02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad42_2re02)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Bennett, P. W. (2013). Campus Life in Canada's 1960s:: Reflections on the "Radical Campus" in Recent Historical Writing. *Acadiensis*, 42(2), 147–156.

## Campus Life in Canada's 1960s: Reflections on the "Radical Campus" in Recent Historical Writing

SURVEYING THE RECENT SPATE OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES on campus life in Canada's 1960s, reality began to bite: the "radical campus" of my youth, in the late sixties, was now a part of history. After the 1969 appearance of Tim and Julyan Reid's collection of political manifestos, *Student Power and the Canadian Campus*, the die was essentially cast for our understanding of the formative period for the baby boom generation, fixing in the popular imagination the image of youth rebellion and social protest.<sup>1</sup> Such images, stereotypes, and misconceptions persist to the present day. A new collection of essays, entitled *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* and edited by Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, attempts to alter that perception. Instead of depicting the 1960s as essentially a time of protest, they contend that it was more of "a social, political, cultural and economic *phenomenon*" with far-reaching, diverse, and lasting impacts upon the society we now inhabit.<sup>2</sup> Rather than looking at the period as a finite period of time, say from the mid-1960s to 1974, they embrace what is now known as the idea of the "long sixties." By assessing three different books – Hugh Johnston's *Radical Campus: Making Simon Fraser University* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), James M. Pitsula's *New World Dawning: The Sixties at Regina Campus* (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 2008), and Peter C. Kent's *Inventing Academic Freedom: The 1968 Strax Affair at the University of New Brunswick* (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company, 2012) – we can take measure of whether those older notions of university campuses as turbulent places of near mythical status, overflowing with protest and student radicalism, withstand scrutiny. These recent additions to the literature, along with *Debating Dissent*, fill in a few of the missing pieces of the lasting legacy and stand in stark contrast to today's student experience.

1 See Tim and Julyan Reid, eds., *Student Power and the Canadian Campus* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1969), for an early collection that helped solidify and perpetuate the popular image of campus rebellion and radicalism. The infamous Sir George Williams computer centre action is dramatically retold in Dorothy Eber, *The Computer Centre Party: Canada Meets Black Power* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1969). One of the first to challenge the popular stereotype was Cyril Levitt in his controversial 1984 book, *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Breaking with popular theories that the student movement was a grand conspiracy of Marxist origins or the product of the "collective neuroses" of baby boom youth, he situated the movement in the broader economic and social context as a revolt of "privilege against privilege, for privilege in society in which the character of privilege has been changing." That particular passage was first identified as the book's thesis in Paul Axelrod's book review of Cyril Levitt's *Children of Privilege*, *Journal of Higher Education* 14, no. 3 (1984): 101.

2 Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3 (emphasis in original).

To enter university in September 1968 was to be immediately swept up in the swirl and ferment of campus life in Canada's late 1960s. When I arrived at the "instant campus" of York University, it was as a studious, bespectacled, gawky 18-year-old suburban student from Thornhill – the first on my father's side of the family ever to attend university. Since I was a Student Council-type, I gravitated immediately to student politics and found myself elected to the first Student Council at McLaughlin College along with future notables such as Toronto chiropractor Jamie D. Laws and City of Vaughan Councillor Alan Shefman. So absorbed was I in politics of all kinds that I failed to notice current CTV-News anchor Sandi (Brycks) Rinaldo gracing the halls of our college. On the Metro Toronto frontier Keele Campus, McLaughlin College, the newest addition to York's college system, was a modernist monument to the massification of the universities: a grey concrete slab protrusion in the original college pod complex.<sup>3</sup>

The York Main Campus on Keele Street was tame, by the radical 1960s standards, but lively, raw, and frontier-like in its expansionist atmosphere.<sup>4</sup> Rubbing shoulders with the industrialist Colonel R.S. McLaughlin and President Murray Ross one night then making your way through the phalanx of Vietnam War protesters the next day made for fascinating times. Having adopted shaggy hair, wedge-shaped sideburns, and loud modish Carnaby Street clothes, I did my best to "fit in" to what one Montreal journalist once derisively described as "the herd."<sup>5</sup> Walls were lined with Vietnam protest posters and small groups of "student radicals" manned petition tables, often urged on by young American draft dodgers and professors opposed to the war – both of whom were labelled by threatened administrators as "outside agitators."<sup>6</sup>

In the fall of 1968, a rising student protest mounted against the didactic teaching and "imposed curriculum" in one of my compulsory first year general education courses with an unforgettable name: "Modes of Reasoning."<sup>7</sup> Philosophy professor John McFarland attempted to keep a lid on the growing student agitation broadcast live each week on closed circuit television from the main stage of the "guerrilla warfare" theatre, the Stedman Lecture Hall. Students rose in their seats and challenged the professors and complete disaster was barely averted when one hapless professor "cracked" under the stress and the administration caved in,

3 See Michiel Horn, *York University: The Way Must Be Tried* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), and *The York University Gazette* (January 1969), York University Archives.

4 For searing insights into York's wild and woolly early years, see John T. Saywell, *Someone to Teach Them: York and the Great University Explosion, 1960-1973* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

5 Canada's universities were on the front lines of a culture war in the late 1960s. Seasoned journalists such as Peter Desbarats, in *Saturday Night* 84 (September 1969), viewed rebellious youth as "sad examples of Canada's most forgettable generation" and considered youth rebels as little better than "cases of arrested individual development." For a more sympathetic perspective, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 245-8.

6 Student radicals or Vietnam War dissenters were commonly referred to as "outside agitators." See Paul Axelrod, book review of Cyril Levitt's *Children of Privilege*, 101.

7 The York University "Student Revolt against the Modes of Reasoning" course, involving hundreds of first year students, is referenced in Horn, *York University*, 106 (but only in passing).

promising to re-write the curriculum with a student delegation over the December holiday period. It was certainly a raucous affair, unfolding amidst another student protest directed at protesting the long walk from external student parking lots and marked by the ripping down of reserved for faculty signs closest to the formidable and monolithic Humanities and Social Sciences Building.<sup>8</sup>

Protesting the Vietnam War was the major focus of student political activity at York, far exceeding in appeal the rather petty internal political battles over student seats on the university senate. The “Faces of the City” teach-in in September 1969 grabbed the headlines when Dean of Arts John T. Saywell and Toronto MP Phil Givens were shouted down and virtually driven from the stage.<sup>9</sup> Far more memorable, however, was the surprise appearance of touring American radical Jerry Rubin, wearing war paint and draped in a National Liberation Front of South Vietnam flag. In his trademark fashion, he issued his usual provocation: “Is there anything here on campus that needs liberating?”<sup>10</sup> Although mostly a participant-observer, I instinctively knew it was important to be there in case you missed something. Student radicals like Larry Goldstein, though few in number, enjoyed considerable cachet on campus. My own personal politics were more moderate, tending to favour the more mainstream student activists such as York Student Federation presidents John Adams and Paul Axelrod. The student newspaper, *The Excalibur*, edited by Ross Howard, captured the spirit in an October 1968 headline that screamed “THIS UNIVERSITY BELONGS TO THE STUDENT. DIG IT!”<sup>11</sup> Such a declaration was hard to resist in those impressionable undergraduate years.

Fast-forward roughly 40 years to the most recent outpouring of writings on Canadian student activism during the sixties. What fresh insights do they provide? With the passage of time comes more critical distance and a small flurry of studies generated by both younger scholars, such as Roberta Lexier, who approach the topic with more critical detachment,<sup>12</sup> and a few aging, battle-tested veterans of the so-called “radical sixties” on campus. The popular image of Simon Fraser University (SFU), for instance, as “Berkeley North” – Canada’s hotbed of student radicalism in the sixties – is definitely perpetuated in Hugh Johnston’s *Radical Campus*, which is essentially an authorized history of the formative years of British Columbia’s own “instant university.”<sup>13</sup> As a veteran of the Simon Fraser history department, Johnston writes from the vantage point of a university insider observing the rise of SFU from

8 York Student Federation (YSF), *Manus, 1969-70* (Downsview: Communications Commission, YSF), 22, York University Archives; Murray G. Ross, *Those Ten Years, 1960-70: The President's Report on the First Decade of York University* (Toronto: York University 1970), 17.

9 For a vivid description of the Teach-In confrontation, see Saywell, *Someone to Teach Them*, 125.

10 On the American Yippee leader Jerry Rubin’s Canadian campus tour, see Basil Waugh, “Invasion!: Many Vancouverites Recall the 1968 ‘Uprising’ that Saw 3,000 Students Take Over the UBC Faculty Club,” *UBC Reports* 53, no. 12 (6 December 2007).

11 Ross Howard, *Excalibur*, 10 October 1968, York University Archives, and John Saywell’s astute commentary in *Someone to Teach Them*, 121-3.

12 See Roberta Lexier, “To Struggle Together or Fracture Apart: The Sixties Student Movement in English Canadian Universities,” in Campbell, Clément, and Kealey, *Debating Dissent*, 81-94.

13 Victoria journalist Donald Stainsby is credited with coining the term “instant university.” See Johnston, *Radical Campus*, 12-14, tracing the term back to Stainsby’s March 1964 article in *Saturday Night*.

its opening in 1965 until the early 1980s. The story is cast within the framework of a dynamic period of “ferment and flux,” when traditional academic ideas were under attack and the Western world was feeling the impact of student activism, the civil rights movement, and growing protest over American intervention in the Vietnam War. With the eye of a keen observer and the acumen of the historian, Johnston is at his best describing the birth pangs of SFU, its reputed mission of openness and innovation, and the absence of an anchoring tradition (13-28). He also explains, in convincing fashion, how the initial infusion of mature students and the arrival of young, idealistic, and mostly American faculty contributed to the “educational and political fireworks” of those early years (114-22).

Johnston was not particularly moved by the student radicalism exemplified at SFU during the 1960s. That tone of scepticism surfaces in a remarkably candid section on “the coming of hippie culture” (123-44). Surveying the changing appearance of SFU students pictured in the student newspaper *The Peak* from 1965 until the mid-1970s, he notes the deterioration of personal neatness and tidiness as “long hairs” took over the campus. “Year by year,” he notes, “one sees more hair, first with the men and then the women.” The hair bothered Johnston just as it did members of the general public at the time. Johnston’s caricature of SFU’s best-known student radical, Martin Loney, as an ill-mannered long-hair who had the temerity to debate Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau without a shirt and tie is particularly telling, as is his reference to Trudeau’s increasingly long sideburns and locks (123-4). Sex, drugs, and rock ’n roll are also described as the outward manifestations of a “bohemian style” complete with Timothy Leary and his decadent “psychedelic drug culture.” By the summer of 1967, Johnston notes that the editors of *The Peak* were alert to the emergence of an “us” versus “them” culture war. While it was popular off-campus to “attack hippies,” the book quotes a student editorial expressing the view that “they may have something to tell us about our inconsistencies” (125).

While Johnston’s book is entitled *Radical Campus*, he is largely unsympathetic to the infusion of “potheads and radicals” and infers that, for many SFU students, “going to demonstrations was more fun than attending classes.” Early protests at SFU from 1966 until 1968 centred on local issues, such as the construction of a gas station, the firing of five teaching assistants for participating in an off-campus high school demonstration, and the demand for transfer credits. We do learn that most SFU students, like the majority of Canadians, opposed the Vietnam War. Some 69.4 per cent of students polled in the summer of 1967 were against US involvement in the war, and 63 per cent were against Canada selling arms to the US (129-30). That suggests that anti-war sentiment was stronger at SFU than at York University, where most students continued to favour on-campus hiring by military firms like Hawker Siddeley.<sup>14</sup> As a new university with a younger teaching faculty, Johnston confirms that Simon Fraser did take on more of an American hue. By the fall of 1966, a handful of American draft dodgers, including professors Mordecai Briemberg and Paul Ivory, were active in the Vancouver Committee to Aid War Objectors. Most of the political activism, in Johnston’s view, was derivative, owing much to the significant

14 Horn, *The Way Must Be Tried*, 105.

continental Marxist influence of Columbia sociologist C. Wright Mills and German-American political philosopher Herbert Marcuse. He confirms Cyril Levitt's contention that, after 1965, the student movement at SFU gradually took on "a more ideological bent," seeking "more fundamental social change" only to collapse in the 1970s as a result of internal political quarrels and worsening job prospects (133-4).

Martin Loney's critical role in radicalizing Simon Fraser University students is given considerable attention in the book. As a Yorkshire-born, Bradford Grammar School-educated graduate student in January 1968, Loney organized a radical Students' Democratic Union group on campus and succeeded in toppling moderate Student Council President Arthur Weeks and sweeping to power in early summer student elections (157-8). Johnston contends that he used this SFU post as a stepping stone and, in the fall of 1968, was elected national president of the Canadian Union of Students for 1969-70, the organization's final year of existence. Faced with a stark choice between two slates, student moderates versus Loney's radicals, some 68 per cent of SFU students voted in the annual elections for the moderates in an attempt to quell what Johnston describes as "campus disruption." It is clear that the author gives credence to SFU founder Gordon Shrum's claim that much of the "furor" could be blamed on malcontents from the United States and Great Britain (158-9, 208).

SFU was, as Johnston concedes, "the ultimate demonstration" of the problem of Americanization of the universities. When it came to SFU during the late 1960s, there was legitimacy to the claim in Robin Mathews's and James Steele's *The Struggle for Canadian Universities* that hiring so many American professors was imperilling Canadian culture.<sup>15</sup> Canadians on the SFU faculty, as Hershel Hardin noted in *A Nation Unaware*, represented "just small enclaves in their own institutions."<sup>16</sup> It would take a new woman president, Pauline Jewett (1974-1978), to turn the pattern around with "hire Canadians first" policies, later reinforced by changes in Canadian immigration laws giving clear preference to Canadian citizens and landed immigrants (207-9).

Americanization of the universities was less of a public issue on campuses in the Canadian Prairies. James M. Pitsula's *New World Dawning* covers similar ground at the Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan and concentrates almost exclusively on the 1968 to 1974 period of student activism. As a baby boomer with a self-confessed "soft spot" for the sixties, Pitsula is far more sympathetic to student culture and its legacy. His approach is scholarly, but the narrative reads more like a recovering "child of the sixties" giving voice to an often maligned and misunderstood generation. Much of the book is based upon the voice of Regina Campus students as expressed in the *Carillon*, reputed to be one of the best student newspapers at the time. It is particularly significant that the author donated all royalties from the book to "the continued pursuit of excellence" in student journalism at the University of Regina (ix).

The *Carillon*, the author notes, like Bob Dylan's "chimes of freedom," is presented as valuable testimony about student life in the sixties forged amidst

15 On the Canadianization of the universities, see Stephen Azzi, "The Nationalist Movement in English Canada," in Campbell, Clément, and Kealey, *Debating Dissent*, 226-7.

16 Cited in Johnston, *Radical Campus*, 207.

“storms of controversy.” In stark contrast to Johnston’s standard institutional history, Pitsula is at pains to demonstrate the “personal authenticity” exemplified in documents the students themselves produced – spontaneous articles, editorials, letters to the editor, columns, cartoons, and photos. Recognizing the “chaos of the period,” he sets out to provide an interpretation set within a conceptual framework and supported by an explanatory narrative (1). In other words, Pitsula is determined to right the balance in skewed interpretations of campus life of the late 1960s. Like myself, he seems disturbed by the sweeping generalizations offered up by the current generation of popular armchair critics.<sup>17</sup>

Pitsula’s *New World Dawning* demonstrates, quite successfully, that “the Regina sixties was not the North American sixties writ small” (3). Utilizing the *Carillon* as his prism, he shows how the Regina campus had its own character as a prairie outpost on the treeless edge of the city. Clashes between the Regina student newspaper and both the campus administration and the right-of-centre Ross Thatcher Liberal government enliven the story, especially the ongoing battle of the authorities to “clean up” the *Carillon* – which they labelled a vulgar, indecent, “red rag.”<sup>18</sup> Freedom of expression, Pitsula shows, eventually prevailed over censorship, but the student paper’s greatest legacy lay in promoting new public issues, including Native rights, women’s liberation, student power, and nuclear disarmament.

The *Carillon* was a lightning rod and a bugbear for the Saskatchewan establishment. Regina police chief Arthur Cookson declared war on “hippies and radicals,” and the RCMP put the campus under close surveillance (232-4). While Pitsula recognizes that Regina students held a range of different views – radical, moderate, conservative, and tuned-out – he credits the *Carillon* for articulating what he describes as “an extraordinary sense of generational solidarity” that reflected the “coming of age” experience of the baby boom generation. Most significant of all, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* fed off the *Carillon* for stories on discrimination against Aboriginal people and freedom of the press; the Regina *Leader-Post* also came to rely upon the paper as a source of student opinion and news (77-103).

Pitsula, like Saywell and Johnston, sees 1968 as a turning point in student activism. The student uprising of 1968-69 certainly had its echo on the Regina campus. In June 1968, Principal William A. Riddell prepared contingency plans in the event of a student revolt. Riddell and police chief Cookson had established a secret code to be used in the event that the university needed to call in reinforcements (262-3). *Carillon* editor Norm Bolen was active in the Canadian Union of Students (CUS) and, in September of 1968, a student rally featuring CUS president-elect Martin Loney attracted some 500 students at the Regina campus. Undeterred by heckling from a band of engineering students, Loney urged Regina students to back up their talk with action. When Dean of Arts and Sciences Alwyn Berland resigned to protest the strict limits imposed by the Thatcher government on

17 For a prime example of the pop history genre, see Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 23, 33, 261.

18 See Pitsula, *New World Dawning*, particularly chap. 3 – “‘Filthy Rag’: The *Carillon* in the Sixties,” 72-105.

the university's autonomy and budget, the Student Union rallied 850 students at its annual general meeting and demanded a say in the selection of the next dean. University President John W. T. Spinks rejected the proposal in blunt fashion and found himself depicted in the *Carillon* as a later day Louis XIV, proclaiming "The University? I am the University." It all came to a head at the 26 October 1968 fall convocation, when Regina student radical Ron Thompson refused to accept his degree after being denied the right to speak and the *Carillon* ran the infamous front page "THIS UNIVERSITY BELONGS TO THE STUDENT. DIG IT!" published a week earlier in York University's *Excalibur* (264-73).

Pitsula's book is generally balanced in its outlook, but imbued with a certain nostalgia for best of the sixties. Summing up his appraisal, he freely admits that, in some ways, the student activists and writers of the *Carillon* were "self-righteous and self-indulgent" but expresses "a twinge of admiration" for students who actually did something to back up their rhetoric by marching on the Saskatchewan legislature to call for lower tuition fees, an independent university, and an end to the war in Vietnam. They did not, Pitsula says, quoting philosopher George Grant, "crawl through university simply as a guarantee of the slow road to death in the suburbs."<sup>19</sup> That sounds like the thoughts of a professor who has weathered the politically arid decades since the mid-1970s.

Student unrest in the sixties captured headlines, of course, in cities known to be hotbeds of the student movement. Fiery student protest marches at McGill University, massive student sit-ins at UBC, teach-ins at the University of Toronto, battles over interdisciplinary studies at SFU, and the destruction of the computer centre at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia) are all well-known student disturbances of the late 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Much lesser known is a surprising eruption at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in New Brunswick's "somewhat sleepy" provincial capital,<sup>21</sup> resurrected in Peter C. Kent's 2012 book *Inventing Academic Freedom: The 1968 Strax Affair at the University of New Brunswick*. It started, innocently enough, as a simple act of civil disobedience in, of all places, the Harriet Irving Library. Before it was over, it led to a faculty dismissal, a prolonged sit-in protest, and the resignation of a thought-to-be untouchable university president.

The aptly named "Strax Affair" at UNB was, in many ways, an anomaly among the student protests of the late 1960s. The initial confrontation on 20 September 1968 was a guerrilla warfare-like "Bookie-Book" action protesting the introduction of

19 See Pitsula (299) for his rather nostalgic summation. The George Grant pronouncement is found in George Grant, "A Critique of the New Left," in *Canada and Radical Change*, ed. Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1973), 59.

20 See Tim and Julyan Reid, *Student Power and the Canadian Campus*, for the university hotspots. For a more careful, judicious assessment of the Sir George Williams computer centre crisis, see Marcel Martel, "'Riot' at Sir George Williams: Giving Meaning to Student Dissent," in Campbell, Clément, and Kealey, *Debating Dissent*, 97-114. For more on the teach-ins at the University of Toronto, see Catherine Gidney, "War and the Concept of Generation: The International Teach-Ins at the University of Toronto, 1965-1968," in *Cultures, Communities, and Conflict: Histories of Canadian Universities and War*, ed. Paul Stortz and E. Lisa Panayotidis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 272-94.

21 The Norman Strax Affair of 1968-69 disturbed the New Brunswick capital's popular image harkening back to the 1950s. See Kent, *Inventing Academic Freedom*, 37.



student ID cards and aimed at “the cats that control this place,” identified on a windshield broadsheet as industrialist K.C. Irving and President Colin B. Mackay. Norman Strax, a young assistant professor of physics, and two students, refused to show their ID cards at the circulation desk of the Harriet Irving Library and occupied the space, for two hours, piling up some 250 books on the check-out counter.<sup>22</sup> Unlike student protests at other universities, it was sparked more by the rebellious actions of a faculty dissident, precipitated a two-month long “cold war” student sit-in, and led to a bitter faculty schism that culminated in a controversial intervention by a fledgling faculty union, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT).

The title of Kent’s book, *Inventing Academic Freedom*, is a bit misleading. The primary focus is on the Strax Affair and the book is part memoir, part exposé that lifts the veil on a troubled, mysterious period in the University of New Brunswick’s recent history. As a junior member of the Department of History, and executive assistant to the president, Kent found himself in the thick of the action and privy to the intimate details known only to UNB’s chattering classes (8, 17-29, 35-7). He is surprisingly candid in his vivid and entertaining story-telling, but he is far from a distant, objective observer. The book amounts to a case study in the painful birth of academic freedom in Canada’s universities. It is also evident that, 40 years after the Strax Affair, Kent is still scarred by its “tragic conclusion” (203).

In the history of UNB, 1968 was a pivotal year. Up until the mid-1960s, as Kent demonstrates, UNB was a very traditional, hierarchical university and headed by a supremely confident, autocratic president in Mackay (1953-1969); but it was also essentially controlled by shadowy major benefactors, notably Lord Beaverbrook and K.C. Irving. With the passage of the UNB Act in 1968, the teaching faculty, for the first time, gained significant representation on the Board of Governors and dominance on a future Senate. Consistent with governance reforms elsewhere, the UNB Act began to “democratize the university.” The first real test for the new constitution, based upon more active engagement of faculty and students, was Norman Strax’s ID card protest at the Harriet Irving Library and Mackay’s arbitrary response to this event (51). Kent’s memoir works well as a case study of the Strax Affair and provides rare insights into faculty infighting over Strax’s brand of anarchism and the principles of academic freedom. When President Mackay reacted to the militant actions by suspending Strax, the dissident professor holed-up in his office – dubbed “Liberation 130” – hunkering down with a band of student supporters. While Kent attempted to mediate, he was in a compromised position and referred to the occupied room as an “anarchist commune” on the UNB campus (97). As an American-born Jewish academic, Dr. Strax saw the UNB protest as a mobilization comparable to his own radicalizing experiences at two American universities – Columbia and Chicago. He was, by all accounts, a rather polarizing figure, not really popular with the far-more-conservative UNB faculty epitomized by Dean of Arts W. Stewart MacNutt, Academic Vice-President Alfred G. Bailey, and Associate Professor of Physics Theo Weiner (26-7). Some of the adverse reaction smacked of anti-Semitism, an aspect all but ignored by Kent except for one

22 Kent, *Inventing Academic Freedom*, 17-22.

passing reference to “the atmosphere of lynching” and whispering about the “Jew” in the relaxed confines of the UNB Faculty Club (113).

Kent does a masterful job of unravelling the complexities of the unfolding crisis. Mackay’s suspension of Strax and the 10 November 1968 Remembrance Day weekend’s forcible removal of the Liberation 130 occupiers led to mounting tensions. A more radical roster of candidates, led by Geoffrey Green, won control of the UNB Student Council and began calling for an investigation into the Strax Affair, including the police action on campus. The “Case of Professor Norman Strax” was taken up on 16-17 November 1968 by the National Council of the CAUT at the urging of business professor Harold Sharp, economist John Earl, and philosopher Perry Robinson. The Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers (AUNBT) subsequently weighed in by expressing reservations about Mackay’s legal proceedings against Strax. Eventually, President Mackay shocked everyone by resigning his position effective 30 June 1969 (119-33).

CAUT’s role in the Strax Affair was crucial to the advance of UNB faculty power. By taking up the case and raising the matter of academic freedom, CAUT, led by its president, University of Toronto political philosopher C.B. MacPherson, put external pressure on Mackay and the UNB administration to yield to demands for arbitration. Getting directly involved in such a controversial issue tends to add credence to Catherine Gidney’s recent claim that the CAUT was shedding its earlier preoccupation with “bread and butter issues,” such as salaries and pensions, and beginning to embrace a broader, more democratic mission aimed at achieving faculty independence and “control over workplace conditions.”<sup>23</sup> Emboldened by the rising dissent and the actions of CAUT, approximately 1,000 UNB students staged a massive demonstration on 20 March 1969 that ended with a public burning of a makeshift wooden coffin representing the Board of Governors and meant to symbolize the passing of the “old order” at the university. It forced Mackay’s hand, and the board agreed to arbitration in the Strax case. While the dissident professor elected not to proceed, he saw it as a moral victory in his larger struggle “to fight and kick out those who hold too much power, such as K.C. Irving,<sup>24</sup> and to build a truly democratic society” (170-2). Saddest of all, Strax remained in Fredericton for another ten years, spouting libertarian ideas, driving a rusted-out Volkswagen Beetle, and living a hand-to-mouth, hermit-like existence in a ramshackle cabin on Royal Road on the northern outskirts of the city.<sup>25</sup>

23 Catherine Gidney, “The Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Rise of Faculty Power, 1951-1970,” in Campbell, Clément, and Kealey, *Debating Dissent*, 78-9.

24 Industrialist K.C. Irving was a regular target of Strax, but the real kingmaker at UNB was Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook. He “discovered” Colin Mackay and personally engineered his 1953 appointment as university president. As a major benefactor, Irving wielded considerable influence, especially while he served on the UNB Board of Governors. He reportedly gave Mackay the signal in December 1968 that it was time to step down. See Kent, *Inventing Academic Freedom*, 17, 31-7, 129-31.

25 Dr. Norman Strax’s life was forever haunted by the UNB suspension and subsequent faculty crisis. He eventually secured a position at Wabush College in Crawfordsville, Indiana, in the early 1980s and died of prostate cancer in 2002 while living in New York State. His obituary in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* focused almost exclusively on his life story up until his arrival at UNB.

Kent's *Inventing Academic Freedom* is a welcome addition to the growing stack of books and academic articles on Canadian universities in their "radical phase" from the 1960s to the early 1970s. The rise of student power has garnered most of the scholarly attention because of its significance as a barometer of the fundamental shift in political, social, and economic values as well as the growing recognition of the lasting influence of changes in student rights, gender equality, Aboriginal rights, and university governance. Younger scholars, drawn from the baby boom echo or the millennial generation, such as Dominique Clément, Roberta Lexier, and Marcel Martel, are bringing fresher perspectives to the themes and preoccupations of historians who, irrespective of their intentions, are still, like this aging boomer, intellectual "children of the sixties."

Reading books about Canada's 1960s inevitably conjures up vivid memories of some of life's most formative experiences and moments. In my case, it prompted me to re-visit my early "radical years" at York University. Most of us, it has been said, have been "absorbed into the consensus."<sup>26</sup> Surveying the campus of today populated by greater numbers of practically minded students seeking marketable skills, the contrasts are truly striking. It was the popular Canadian writer Myrna Kostash who said it best: "What is special about growing up in the Sixties," she observed, "is how close our learning came to being revolutionary. You can't get much luckier than that."<sup>27</sup> Compared to the sixties, today's campus experiences do seem rather prosaic, far more predictable, and driven by the vagaries of the job market. We now inhabit, in many ways, the university world we created. Tuition fee hikes and student debt loads do produce mass protests and, in the case of Quebec universities and colleges, considerable social upheaval.<sup>28</sup> On most Canadian campuses outside of French Quebec, though, the broad social, political, cultural, and economic changes of the 1960s have now come to represent the status quo and, if there is a 21st-century youth counter-culture, it bears the distinct whiff of neo-liberalism.

PAUL W. BENNETT

26 On the sixties generation being "absorbed into the consensus," see Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 247.

27 Myra Kostash, *Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980).

28 See Martin Patriquin, "Quebec's new ruling class," *Maclean's*, 30 May 2012, for a preliminary exploration of the neo-liberal motivations of CLASSE (Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante) and the 2011-12 Quebec student protests. For a radically different perspective, see Ingar Solty, "Canada's 'Maple Spring': From the Quebec Student Strike to the Movement Against Neoliberalism," *Global Research*, 31 December 2012, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/canadas-maple-spring-from-the-quebec-student-strike-to-the-movement-against-neoliberalism/>.