



Holding Strong: Perspectives on a Fight to Save a University

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Abstract

Universities are generally considered to be engines of economic growth. They inject new labour, new ideas, and new critical perspectives into the cultural, business, and political communities. They identify cities and regions as centres of culture and critical thought. It is a very rare event, then, to witness an attempt to close (or radically transform the purpose of) a university. However, this is exactly what happened to the University of New Brunswick Saint John. In this edited paper, we provide a series of short summaries of events as viewed by professors from a number of different disciplines.

The New Brunswick Post-Secondary Education Commission Report and UNB Saint John, 2007: Background

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The University of New Brunswick Saint John (UNB Saint John) is sometimes referred to as ‘the quiet campus.’ Founded in the 1960s, it became a full degree-granting institution in the 1970s and in recent years is home to up to 3,000 students, many of them from China, and 300 staff and faculty. Most of the domestic students are from southwestern New Brunswick, and many of them are the first members of their families to attend university. Most of them work year-round in the greater Saint John area in order to student debt. In the early summer of 2008, UNB Saint John produced the largest graduating class in its history, more than 460 students.

In 2007, the newly-elected Graham government, whose mantra was ‘Self-Sufficiency,’ appointed a commission on post-secondary education (PSE), chaired by Dr. Rick Miner, president of Seneca College (and former vice president of UNB Saint John) and Dr. Jacques L’Écuyer of Quebec. The commission released a discussion paper, accepted briefs, held hearings and recruited advisory committees in different regions of the province; most members were from the business community and only remotely connected to any of the province’s four universities. In the summer, while the report was being written, Premier Graham, a graduate of St. Thomas University (STU), announced that both his alma mater and Mount Allison University were safe. The implication was that UNB Saint John, the University of New Brunswick Fredericton (UNB Fredericton) and Université de Moncton (UdM) and its Shippegan and Edmundston campuses, were not safe.

Accepting the argument of business and government that universities had to adapt, the UNB Saint John administration proposed ‘co-location’ with the local branch of the New Brunswick Community College (NBCC). This implied sharing of buildings and services between the two institutions, as well as greater cooperation in transfer credits and articulated programs. Saint John business interests submitted a particularly controversial brief, *Enriching Our Future*, whose cost was partly subsidized by Irving Oil, a company which had been publicizing an alleged lack of skilled workers. Rejecting social inclusion goals such as accessibility, this brief called for the reorganization of UNB Saint John into a ‘knowledge institute’ with an emphasis on training and applied programs. The document was heavily influenced by growing business and political interest in Saint John as an ‘Energy Hub,’ based on the existing Irving oil refinery, a LNG export facility under construction, a likely second Irving refinery by 2015, the refurbishment of the aging Point Lepreau nuclear power plant and

the construction of a second plant. The Energy Hub, in other words, was the gorilla in the room. The public spokesperson for this effort, brewer Andrew Oland, told a CBC radio host that PSE in Saint John should be governed by “the market” and that local students could go elsewhere to attend university. During a banquet honoring a senior Irving family member, former Premier Frank McKenna, an agent of neo-liberal change, advised Premier Graham to stay the course on PSE reforms.

Rather than ‘being patient and waiting,’ as the university administration seemed to be suggesting, or ‘trusting the government” as Liberal MLAs were advocating, first UNB Saint John, then Saint John, organized, and shaped their own destiny. Miner and L’Écuyer received a hostile reception when they presented their report in Saint John, compared to the more polite response at UNB Fredericton. Students, staff, professors, alumni and their families sent letters and e-mails, and telephoned and visited their MLAs. Blogs and a heavily-subscribed Facebook site were launched and municipal politicians were lobbied.

The report, which had been partially leaked to the media, was released on September 14, ‘Black Friday.’ Although most attention focused on its recommendations to convert UNB Saint John, and the northern campuses of UdM into polytechs, the PSE report proposed dramatic changes to the governance of remaining universities. The reforms were supposedly ‘student centred.’ UNB Saint John was to be joined with the NBCC Saint John and St. Andrews to create a polytech. Community colleges would offer first and second-year university courses, and university senates would be shorn of most of their powers. A new provincial agency would take more direct control of PSE. These radical proposals, which threatened Canada’s traditions of university autonomy and academic freedom, prompted little public outcry from the province’s other universities.

But the Quiet Campus erupted. Students organized a professional and highly effective rally in King’s Square on September 17, three days after ‘Black Friday.’ This culminated in a peaceful march to the office of the local MLA, Ed Doherty, who happened to be the minister of PSE, Training and Labour. On-line and paper petitions were started, and the Irving newspaper (which remained oddly silent during the first two months of crisis) was flooded with letters. The provincial Conservative party indicated its support for UNB Saint John, as did the Saint John Common Council and the Quispamsis town council. A campus rally on September 25 was addressed by Jim Turk of the Canadian Association of University Teachers and by the Hon. Gordon Fairweather, the first chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission. On October 13, a community rally, spearheaded by John Wallace and involving representatives from organized labour, the arts and the high schools, indicated the depth of Saint John’s support for UNB Saint John. This was followed three days later by a

demonstration in Fredericton, attended by students and staff from a number of universities, and members of the public.

These actions had a far greater effect than letters to the editor; according to political insiders they delayed the government's Throne Speech. By October 18, the premier, who previously had 'talked tough,' backed down, promising that UNB Saint John was 'safe.' Yet many individuals involved in the six-week 'war' remained apprehensive about the future of not only UNB Saint John, but all universities in the province. Things took a strange twist when a 'working group' of university presidents and community college principals, together with the deputy minister of PSE, was appointed to 'respond' to the PSE report. Student leaders, who were not considered 'stakeholders' according to the premier, were excluded from the working group. Some likened this to the universities becoming the architects of their own demise as independent institutions. The feeling at UNB Saint John was, and for the most part remains, that round one had ended in victory, but that war clouds are gathering once again.

The Economics of the 2007 PSE Report in New Brunswick: An Insider's Perspective

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Introduction

For a variety of reasons, New Brunswick is a very interesting place in which to live; wonderful people, great seasons with an explosive fall, a safe place for families to grow up, and an economy that is somewhat reminiscent of the England Adam Smith wrote about in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Indeed, Adam Smith wrote in a time when the potential for monopolies was on the rise. His treatise can, in parts, be read as extolling the virtues of competition, railing against the potential for monopolies and price-fixing, and the important role of government as a provider of public goods and infrastructure including institutional infrastructure to ensure competition.

In late 2006, the New Brunswick government, under the leadership of Premier Shawn Graham (Liberal), called for public input into a new vision of post-secondary education (PSE) in New Brunswick. This sweeping review was instituted, in part, to deal with significant projected labour needs in southern New Brunswick, primarily because of the government's own "self-sufficiency" agenda and the development of a so-called "energy-hub." A PSE Commission was struck, headed by Rick Miner and Jacques L'Écuyer.

The Commission's report, "Advantage New Brunswick: a Province Reaches to Fulfill its Destiny,"¹ was made available on 14 September 2007 after a series of "trial balloons" were floated in provincial francophone media. Amongst a number of shocking recommendations, it called for the conversion of the University of New Brunswick Saint John to a polytechnic with a focus on the emerging labour needs of the local market. This brief commentary outlines some of the economic factors that contributed to the report and highlights some of the challenges that might face other institutions in the future.

The New Brunswick Economy: A Primer

Like most provincial economies across Canada, the New Brunswick economy can be characterized as largely a mixed economy with fairly heavy reliance upon the free market. The provincial government plays a fairly large role in our economy, both in terms of generating economic activity and as an employer. In 2007, 31.7% of New Brunswick's provincial GDP was generated through government activity (Statistics Canada). This proportion of government spending is fairly

¹ This report was released at the beginning of the school year causing significant disruption. It is available at http://www.gnb.ca/cpse-ceps/EN/docs/CEPNB_cahier_ang_LR.pdf accessed 16 October 2008.

consistent across the Maritimes: PEI (37.1%) and Nova Scotia (33.1%). Nonetheless, New Brunswick is unique, both in the Maritimes and in Canada, because of the important role played by its single largest corporate citizen, the Irving family/conglomerate.

It is extremely difficult to obtain information about the Irving conglomerate because most of its holdings are private. It is well-known that the conglomerate spans across the provincial (and regional) economy including energy projects (oil refining, shipping, and speculation, electricity generation, liquefied natural gas, natural gas, and service stations), food products, land holdings, forestry, pulp and paper, fabrication, equipment rental, transportation (trucking and rail), and construction among others. A short internet search quickly reveals about 60 different companies within the conglomerate, but reliable estimates suggest numbers above 300 and perhaps much greater.² In 2008, the Irving family ranked 140th on the Forbes' billionaires list with an estimated \$6.7 billion (US) net worth.³

It should be noted that most print media, including the three provincial English-language dailies, are owned by Brunswick News which is an Irving company. The company also has interests in other media. In 2006, the Senate Committee on Transportation and Communications commented:

Still, many of the witnesses before this Committee, especially those in the Maritimes, might have been bemused to hear that the Irving media empire would provide an "independent voice" in New Brunswick. The Irvings' corporate interests form an industrial-media complex that dominates the province. According to one source it includes more than 300 companies, has an estimated net wealth of \$4 billion and employs 8 per cent of the New Brunswick labour force. [footnote] To give a frame of reference, the federal government in 2004 employed 1.9 per cent of Canada's labour force. And because the Irving interests are privately owned, they do not even have to provide the level of public reporting that publicly traded corporations are required to provide. This situation is, as far as the Committee could determine, unique in developed countries.⁴

It is estimated that in the 1960's the Irving family directly employed about 8% of the entire provincial labour force, "and this figure continues to grow."⁵ More recent estimates place that value close to 10%.⁶ However, once direct and indirect employment is considered, I have heard values between 15 and 20%. Needless to say, the Irving conglomerate has significant control of the labour market and the broader economy in New Brunswick. Consequently, there is significant speculation and anecdotal evidence of the influence of the Irving conglomerate on the provincial government independent of the political party.

An Energy Hub

² Steuter, E. (2003). Freedom of the Press is for Those Who Own One. The Dominion Paper. 10. Available at http://www.dominionpaper.ca/features/2003/11/10/freedom_of.html accessed 17 October 2008.

³ http://www.forbes.com/lists/2008/10/billionaires08_James-Arthur-John-Irving_WZIM.html accessed on 17 October 2008.

⁴ <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/tran-e/rep-e/repfinjun06vol2-e.htm> accessed 16 October 2008.

⁵ http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/heirloom_series/volume4/174-177.htm accessed on 17 October 2008.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K.C._Irving accessed on 17 October 2008.

The energy portion of the Irving conglomerate has clearly indicated it is in an expansionary phase. Beginning with a proposed liquefied natural gas terminal and a high-pressure natural gas pipeline through Saint John to the Maine border (proposed in 2004 and almost completed as of writing), other projects include a proposed second oil refinery, test-burning of pet coke in NB Power's Coleson Cove, the construction of a high-voltage international power line to Maine, refurbishment of the Lepreau nuclear power plant, potential construction of up to two new nuclear power plants, and storage of natural gas in salt caverns near Salt Springs, NB (a project with Corridor Resources).⁷ According to a *Benefits Blueprint* press release, these projects could lead to an increase of 33,000 jobs in the province.⁸ Moreover, there seems to be an increasing link between Irving energy interests, NB Power (responsible for electricity generation and distribution in the province, and accounting for "between 3 and 4% of total employment province wide")⁹, and Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (which has moved into one of the old office buildings that had been part of Irving Shipbuilding in Saint John).

A Community Comes Together

In mid-2005 there was growing resentment to the fact that the Irving sponsored LNG terminals would receive a tax break valued at nearly \$100 million over 25 years.¹⁰ The resentment continued to grow as citizens discovered that the companies associated with the LNG terminal intended to construct a high-pressure natural gas pipeline through the City of Saint John. While the pipeline would not immediately be used for distribution to city residents and businesses, there was permission for Irving industrial interests to tap into the pipeline. The main purpose of the pipeline was to export natural gas to New England.

A National Energy Board (NEB) hearing was initiated in May of 2006 and concluded in May 2007 with the NEB largely permitting Emera Brunswick Pipeline Limited to build the pipeline along its preferred route (i.e., through the City and Rockwood Park).¹¹ I served as an intervenor in the process working with the group of citizens who would prefer to see the pipeline follow a route through the harbour instead of through the city.

During our many meetings and the hearing process itself, I recall a number of citizens openly speculating if UNB Saint John would be "in their sights," where "their" referred to some combination

⁷ <http://www.corridor.ca/downloads/investors/presentation-global-energy-conference-october-2007.pdf> accessed 16 October 2008

⁸ <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/ene/2008e0399en.htm> accessed 17 October 2008

⁹ <http://www.nbpower.com/en/corporate/corporate.aspx> accessed on 17 October 2008.

¹⁰ <https://secure.globeadvisor.com/servlet/ArticleNews/story/GAM/20050326/RIRVING26> accessed on 17 October 2008.

¹¹ <http://www.neb.gc.ca/clf-nsi/rthnb/pplctnsbfrthnb/mrbrnswck/mrbrnswckgh12006-eng.html> accessed on 17 October 2008.

of the Irving conglomerate and the provincial government. The citizens speculated that with the increased technically-specific labour needs, there would be a demand to create some hybrid training institute. Moreover, they felt that because a number of local professors were willing to voice their opinions about corporate links to the provincial government, that this further defined UNB Saint John as a target.¹²

On 23 January 2007, Irving Oil proudly announced that they were “contributing \$50,000 towards the \$150,000 budgeted” for a strategic plan to be developed by the True Growth Post-Secondary Task Force entitled “*Enriching our Future: A strategic plan for post-secondary education, research and development, and technology commercialization.*”¹³ A report, with exactly that title was produced by Amulet Consulting and was submitted to the PSE Commission in April of 2007.¹⁴ This report called for the consolidation of UNB Saint John and the New Brunswick Community College in Saint John to be located on the campus of UNB Saint John, renaming the of the institution as the “Saint John Knowledge and Technology Institute,” the dropping of Liberal Arts as an area of instruction, and significantly greater influence of industry/business partners (pp. 10-11). In the end, this report from the True Growth Post-Secondary Task Force largely influenced the decisions expressed in the Miner-L’Écuyer PSE Commission Report – it was easy to trace the influence of big business and the government on the Commission’s report.

A number of very vocal protest rallies, both local and provincial, eventually caused the government to back away from the Commission’s Report, ultimately resulting in the formation of a new working group consisting of University and College Administrators, and a Deputy Minister.¹⁵ In June 2008 the government issued a new Action Plan, which defines a way forward but still has some people worried because the government is calling for and Institutes of Applied Learning and Technology and Consortia of Applied Learning and Technology which sound suspiciously like polytechnics with an agenda driven largely by business and government desires.¹⁶

¹² Steuter, E. (2002). Beneath the Fold: Reading Ideology in the Irving Family Newspapers. *Textual Studies in Canada: the Journalism Issue*. 16: 15-30. In this article, Steuter claims that national media sources, such as the Globe & Mail, would “treat as peculiar the bullying tactics, blacklisting, and brainwashing that the Irvings engaged in.” (p.23). Indeed, during the NEB, a petition with approximately 15,000 signatures requesting that the natural gas pipeline be routed through the Saint John harbour was filed blank and under affidavit because signatories were afraid for their jobs. Residents felt that UNB Saint John might likewise be blacklisted.

¹³ <http://www.irvingoil.com/community/news1.asp?newsid=150> accessed on 17 October 2007. It is unclear who else came up with funding for the report. However, the press release is clear that there was support for this initiative at both the municipal and provincial levels of government.

¹⁴ <http://www.gnb.ca/cpse-ceps/EN/docs/Enterprise%20Saint%20John.pdf> accessed on 17 October 2008.

¹⁵ <http://www.gnb.ca/Promos/PSE/RecommendationsWG-e.pdf> accessed on 17 October 2008.

¹⁶ <http://www.gnb.ca/Promos/PSE/PETLActionPlan.pdf> accessed on 17 October 2008.

Conclusion

Naomi Klein describes the increasing rise of corporatism in her 2007 book “*The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism.*” Klein outlines the increasing role that corporations take in influencing and directing education. She also writes about the concurrent decline in importance of Economics Departments – an issue addressed elsewhere in this conference.

The targeting of UNB Saint John was clearly part of a corporate agenda to use public funds to provide specific technical training to meet industrial needs. A case can also be made that it was targeted because it was a source of dissent with the combined corporate and political will. Universities must be vigilant of this increasing desire to corporatize.

Going Viral: The Facebook Group *My Saint John Includes UNBSJ*

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In September 2006, Facebook, originally designed as an online social network for American college students, altered its format so that practically anyone with a valid email address could join as a member “friend”. Online “friends” soon grew at an exponential rate, and within months this social networking site became one of the most-heavily trafficked websites on the Internet. The site’s popularity was fuelled by its easy connectivity: virtually anyone could become an online friend, share photos and ideas, or join a group of like-minded individuals. These attributes would be of enormous importance during New Brunswick’s PSE crisis of Fall 2007, as the online Facebook group *My Saint John Includes UNBSJ* played a critical role in opposing the provincial government’s proposal to fundamentally dismantle one of Canada’s oldest universities.

This essay is largely reflective in nature, as its author was the creator of the online group *My Saint John Includes UNBSJ*, which welcomed its first friend in early September 2007. I had only created a Facebook account a few months earlier, on the advice of some friends who had argued that Facebook was one of the reasons why blogging had declined in popularity – the experience of sharing ideas in the public realm was much more visceral in the internet version 2.0 (as Facebook and other social networking sites had come to be described). Linked to a few dozen friends, I shared family photos, and pithy updates regarding to my online status (e.g., Kurt is... listening to the freight train roll in to the potash terminal).

In the fall of 2007, I happily accepted a one year term as a Visiting Scholar at UNB Saint John, with the aim of expanding my social research on the inner-city of Saint John (I was previously the research co-ordinator for Vibrant Communities, an organization dedicated to reducing urban poverty in Saint John). While my “visit” to campus amounted to little more than a short commute from the city’s poor South End neighbourhood, I was keen to take up my role, and to help strengthen the linkages between the university and its host community. Within days of accepting my appointment, however, I started to hear loud rumours that the provincial government was prepared to fundamentally alter the status of UNB Saint John, both to the detriment of students and the broader community. The proposed changes also threatened the future of countless low-income Saint Johners I had spent years advocating on behalf of, in large part because the planned ‘transformational change’ (to use the government’s preferred language) would severely curtail higher education options in New Brunswick’s largest city. I

personally knew of dozens of families who, without the presence of a local university, would have never been able to afford higher education. Like others, I was ready to act.

Around September 12, just days before the much-anticipated government report recommending the replacement of UNB Saint John with a polytechnic institute was released, I decided to set up a Facebook group. There was already a small student group – *UNBSJ IN DANGER* – linked to the UNB network. In what turned out to be a sage decision, I linked my group to no single network, meaning that any Facebook member in the world could join in the fight over the future of UNB Saint John. Unsure as to what to name my group, I borrowed from a phrase that was thrown about by a grass-roots organization during the constitutional saga of the early 1990s. Remembering how some well-meaning English Canadians decided to combat Quebec sovereignty with the repetition of a simple truism, *MY CANADA INCLUDES QUEBEC*, I applied the idea locally. *My Saint John Includes UNBSJ* was established as a fan club of sorts, for all those within New Brunswick and across the world wide web who wanted to support their university in a time of great uncertainty.

The viral movement that followed surprised myself, many of the group members, and the provincial MLAs who initially appeared ready to embrace the proposed education reforms, only to retreat in the face of an unprecedented popular uprising. *My Saint John Includes UNBSJ* had an initial membership of maybe a dozen friends I had invited; within days the group numbered in the hundreds. Once the report was finally released, the group membership was over 1,000. In the tense weeks that followed, membership grew exponentially, eventually reaching over 4,000, and the organized resistance that the group collectively undertook had a very real impact, well before the government eventually abandoned its controversial plans.

A close examination of the Facebook group (which still has a membership of over 3,000, months after the crisis has passed) highlights how effective a vehicle online movements can be in mobilizing opposition. In the earliest postings, it was principally students and professors who raised the alarm, and shared the contact information of area MLAs. As the crisis mounted, the membership broadened significantly, and the site became a very public forum for debate over the future of higher education, and ultimately a place of government accountability.

Provincial MLAs who responded to individual student emails suddenly had their responses posted online, ensuring that what a politician said privately could not be contradicted by public statements. Stats Canada surveys on the importance of access to higher education, as well as other intelligent reports, were read and discussed by members. Press releases from community groups (such as the Board of Trade, or the District Labour Council) in support of the university were immediately posted, as was any information related to mass rallies, protests down King Street, or other public

events. An impressive album of online photos was developed, showcasing thousands of Saint John residents who stood up in defense of their university. It was later complemented with a series of YouTube videos. Throughout the fall of 2007, over 400 wall postings were written, alongside 160 discussion topics, over 150 photos and close to 200 posted items. The Facebook group eventually emerged as one of the largest of any linked to the website's Maritime networks.

Did *My Saint John Includes UNBSJ* make a difference? Curiously, neither the print media nor local television made mention of the online movement, despite its large membership and ability to help organize the major protest rallies (indeed, the Baron campus newspaper was about the only media organization that acknowledged the group's existence). Yet this author has a strong belief that Facebook helped UNB Saint John a great deal in its time of need, if only because of some inside information. Throughout the crisis, I maintained informal communications with the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, a Saint John area MLA whose very political future was dependent on the reversal of his government's intended reforms, and who sought my advice from time to time while he was in opposition. At one point during the crisis, I asked his executive assistant if he had been monitoring the online activity, and his response was that *they were watching it daily, and wished that cabinet ministers would stop having their correspondence posted on the site!* The movement had indeed gone viral, and not even the private emails of cabinet ministers were immune from public scrutiny.

In contrast to previous uprisings against government reforms (the failed student uprising against the movement of St. Thomas University away from Chatham, NB, comes to mind), the struggle for UNB Saint John was hyper-connected, instantaneous, and fluid, a movement in which a mass of individuals concerned about the future of higher education in this province overwhelmed the loosely-examined ideas of a Toronto consultant, and a new government bent on transformational change, yet unsure about details. The age of 'wiki-nomics' had come to New Brunswick, and the future belonged to those who embraced its connective potential, rather than those who simply referred to it in government news releases.

A University Campus and Its City

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On the first day of classes, September 6, 2007, an off-campus colleague left a voice mail message confirming what I had suspected from the end of May: the forthcoming PSE report – to be released in eight days – would recommend that UNB Saint John should become a polytechnic institute. The sackcloth ambience of the impromptu campus wide assembly held on September 12 and presided over by the university's senior administrators two days before the official government release of its commissioned report reinforced the anxiety of the students and faculty.

On September 13, when my class met for the second time, most of the students were already talking about a protest demonstration. They worried about having to give up the hope of attaining a university degree because they could not afford to move away from the city.

Well before classes had resumed in September, a number of faculty members realized that something potentially untoward was afoot, and had undertaken specific initiatives. Until I was forced to desist I spent the weekends in September and October addressing local church congregations about the danger to Saint John if the government accepted the PSE recommendation. Conversations in the vestibules of churches revealed a source of ground level opinion not accessible in other venues that was conveyed directly to a number of academic colleagues and selected staff colleagues charged with defending UNB Saint John.

In a few classes, I took time to reflect on Saint John's quest to acquire a university: an institution viewed by its early proponents to serve those in the community who could not afford to leave the city to pursue higher learning, but equally important, also seen as an institution that could establish a base for developing the city's intellectual capital. We talked about how all westernized countries had experienced some form of renewal after the Second World War: some literally rebuilding bombed out cities; others in Canada and the US rebuilding their urban infrastructure. We discussed the city's past and how a renewed urban infrastructure in Saint John had been viewed by many civic leaders as including a university ... that it had taken until the mid 1960s to achieve that goal.

At different times during class last term as I glanced across the faces of my students – all of whom had part time jobs to support their attendance at university – I wondered how could their elected representatives even contemplate removing access to higher education from their own constituents? I

felt that the students' passionate defense of their institution was a superb testimony to the success of UNB Saint John.

Saint John is a city of personal contacts where access to on-the-ground knowledge is crucial. Some of the questions that I received from the admittedly select community groups with whom I spoke reinforced what I have come to know over the past number of years: support for UNB Saint John had slipped among its former community advocates, perhaps not in any deliberate way but we had dropped from the community's radar. Somehow I think we had become remote. Although our students and a number of our faculty are connected as individuals to the community, the institution as a collective entity was perceived in many quarters to have drifted from its local moorings. And in Saint John, a small community of even smaller communities, our campus cannot afford this perception for a host of historical reasons.

What I discovered as I met with various people is that we, at UNB Saint John, were vulnerable and we didn't even know it. The government, I am sure *unintentionally*, helped us to grasp this fact. After all, the government had received a recommendation to shut down the campus, suggesting just how tenuous our relationship to the wider community was perceived to be.

None of us – the administration, the community relations staff, the faculty or the students – were hired to “Save UNB Saint John.” But at some level that is what many of us were doing in the fall term of 2007. To be sure there were missteps which deserve greater scrutiny at a later date.

UNB Saint John was ‘saved,’ at least for now, thanks to the visible efforts of the students and faculty who took to the streets at the immediate risk of interfering with their work for the long range goal of preserving a university. Their success in galvanizing sufficient numbers from the greater community to join in condemning the recommendation of the PSE report spoke to the emerging recognition of UNB Saint John's role within the city. The political implications of so many bodies at the rallies in Saint John and the rally in front of the Legislature were not lost on local MLAs. As one told me, “you cannot ignore a few thousand people in the street.”

At the same time, faculty engaged in defending UNB Saint John's existence and relevance to the city had to acknowledge that arguments about access to opportunity and building a broadly based source of intellectual capital for the city are not enough. The idea of a university, any university, is still relatively new in Saint John. And so the professoriate, and the entire campus community, must bring the campus to the city in a renewed commitment to campus outreach. In a city that is still getting used to having a university it is too easy to be targeted as elitist and irrelevant. In a city where only one generation has reached adulthood with a university in its midst UNB Saint John's faculty must be a

proactive presence. We can never forget that the idea of a university is still relatively novel in Saint John. The provincial government reminded us of this on September 14, 2007.

Disciplining the Academic Body: Disciplining Academic Bodies

Chris 'Nob' Doran

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Although economists may sometimes take the 'free market in labour' for granted, social historians, like myself, understand that such a conceptual space had to be constructed and created. For example, in England in the 1830's, governments had to 'discipline' members of the working classes to forsake their customary 'poor laws', and to grudgingly transform themselves into 'free labourers' instead. And the panoptic 'workhouse' was established as the major administrative mechanism for helping create the 'docile bodies' desired by this new industrial economy. And when the New Brunswick PSE reforms were first proposed in 2007, this image of 'disciplining' was uppermost in my mind. Moreover, when I started reading further on this subject, I soon discovered that similar university reforms had not only been proposed in England in the 1990's, but that these reforms have, in fact, been instrumental in 'disciplining' many of the bodies within contemporary universities.

For example Shore and Wright(1999) argue that the audit system and its concern with 'quality assurance', introduced within the UK higher education in the 1990's, works in a disciplinary fashion, similar to the one that Michel Foucault had identified in his theorizing on 'power/knowledge'. And following Foucault's advice, they seek to show the power relations hidden within the 'scientific rationalities' being used to shape 'university reform'. Specifically, they attend to the introduction of 'audit culture' into the UK university system.

First they identify how consecutive Conservative governments started to re-shape universities in line with their general intent to re-shape 'the social'(560) and move it in a neo-liberal direction. This began, in the early 1990's, with the articulation of a new 'imaginary'; a new vision for universities. A white paper (1993) entitled "Realizing Our Potential" first suggested that universities needed to have greater links with business, and that they should be more responsive to 'industry, commerce and government departments' (Shore and Wright 563). Another white paper, "Higher education: a new framework" (1991) recommended the 'objective' discourse of 'quality assurance' as the central mechanism for aiding in this reform, while a new central agency, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was proposed as the mechanism for linking together the government's new concern for 'quality' with its more traditional concerns with university 'funding'.

Yet, as Shore and Wright succinctly point out, when one searches for the foundations of this scientific discourse of 'quality assurance', we discover its 'ignoble origins' in American attempts in the aftermath of World War II, to break the strength of organized labour in Japan, and create a 'flexible',

acquiescent, and compliant workforce in its place. This science, known as ‘total quality management’ (TQM) by its proponents, has the supposed intention of ‘changing the culture of the workplace’ so as to improve quality throughout. Yet, as Binns points out, for proponents of TQM, there is

a discrete silence surround[ing] the conditions under which TQM was imposed upon the workforce in Japan: viz those of foreign military occupation after a humiliating national defeat involving the use of atomic weaponry, all this on top of an extended period of indigenous right wing military dictatorship (1992:51).

In other words, it was a discourse which emerged from an international power attempting to create a ‘docile’ labour force in a conquered territory. It certainly was not a discourse which emerged from impartial scientific reflection and analysis.

Nevertheless, the discourse of ‘quality assurance’ remained of central importance in the UK. In fact, it constituted itself as a pivotal mechanism for these university reforms. Academics were now to produce a ‘quality’ education for their students, who, in turn, were now to be understood as consumers. And these mechanisms from the world of ‘business’ via American military domination, were intended to be of considerable assistance in this task. But Shore and Wright are not content to simply point out the ‘ignoble origins’ of this discourse of quality assurance. They also point out how this new form of disciplinary power implicitly employs the Foucauldian techniques of ‘inspection, discipline, and normalization’ to help accomplish its goals.

Most obviously, the new central agency (the HEFCE) quickly went on to establish a network of inspectors (‘composed of senior academics and HEFCE officials’ (564)) who would visit, observe and then grade university departments with regard to their ‘teaching’ (the teaching quality assessment – TQA). And as the panopticon principle predicts, people will behave differently when being watched. Thus academics not only started to ‘teach’ to the inspectors, rather than to their students, but they realized that the ‘teaching’ that counted, was that which was going to be made ‘accountable’. So, Shore and Wright point out certain unintended consequences of this new ‘inspectability’, such as instructors looking to “perform” in the literal sense of the word, for the inspectors.

Disciplining was also explicitly present within this newly established system from the beginning. For example, ‘unsatisfactory departments were to be given 12 months to remedy their position, after which they would have their core funding and their student places for that subject withdrawn (565). Thus the ‘teaching quality assessment’ now joined with the already-existing ‘research assessment exercise’ (RAE) in being based on a funding system which punished those departments experiencing problems, rather than supporting or encouraging them (565). And over time, this ‘disciplining’ started displaying a more subtle side to it. That is, over time there emerged a number of pedagogic agencies whose task was to help ‘correct’ and ‘empower’ those academics whose

teaching ‘quality’ was in need of improvement (e.g., UCOSDA – the Universities and Colleges Staff Development Agency, ILT – Institute for Learning and Teaching). Finally, at the individual level, disciplining also emerged with regard to those individual professors who didn’t adopt a team approach to these new policies. Thus one professor who publicly disagreed with his university’s own claims with regard to the ‘quality’ of its teaching, found himself being formally disciplined, and told that what he had done constituted grounds for dismissal (568), suggesting that more traditional notions of ‘academic freedom’ are being eroded under this new system.

With regard to normalization, Shore and Wright draw attention to both the construction of the original ‘normative grid’ (560) and the subsequent ways in which ‘individuals are encouraged to constitute themselves in terms of the norms through which they are governed’ (560). They claim that with the introduction of this audit culture, experts were required to develop ‘the new expert knowledge that provided the classifications for the new normative grid’ (560) because audits ‘do as much to construct definitions of quality and performance as to monitor them’ (quoted in Shore and Wright 570). Then, every university ‘had to transform itself into an auditable commodity’ (Shore and Wright 570)

In the case of the TQA, this resulted in a flurry of bureaucratic activity throughout universities. New ‘quality assurance officers’ and ‘monitoring committees’ were created to review all areas of university life, in a desperate attempt to invent ‘auditable structures’ (570)

And once this grid was more firmly in place, individuals then started constituting themselves in line with these new norms. Thus, both the TQA and the RAE employed a ‘competitive ranking’ system (565) so that departments and individuals could not only see how they ranked against others, but they could make adjustments to their behaviours, in response. ‘League tables,’ traditionally used to show how well professional football/soccer teams were doing during the course of a season, were now adapted to show how well different universities were doing. As Shore and Wright illustrate, these new audit norms work by:

Adherence to selective performance indicators to produce a quantifiable score that is then used as the basis for pitting department against department and institution against institution. Thus a pecking order is created between those departments ranked as 3, 4, 5 and 5*. (569)

And similar things start happening informally at the individual level. Researchers, they claim, now start seeing others in terms of their research ranking along this normative standard (569), thereby creating a new, and different, pecking order in the process.

Obviously, Foucault’s thesis on ‘disciplinary power’ has provided Shore and Wright with a tremendously insightful way of ‘making sense’ of these university reforms, and as I read through their analysis, I asked myself if I wanted to allow our university system to follow in these footsteps, because

there seemed to be many similarities between the New Brunswick proposals and the UK reforms. And even though the worst of these disciplining mechanisms (the transforming of UNB Saint John into a polytechnic) has disappeared, a significant portion of the original recommendations still remain. And so I am left with a rather worrying problem. Just as the new 'industrial economy' of the 19th century desired 'docile bodies', disciplined by the administrative mechanism of 'poor law reform'; perhaps we are facing a similar future. The new 'knowledge economy' desires 'docile academic bodies'; to be disciplined by the new administrative mechanisms contained in the PSE reforms.

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My Crash Course on Neo-liberalism: The New Brunswick Post-Secondary Education Issue in Context

Greg Marquis

In the summer of 2008, months after the dust had settled over the PSE battle in Saint John, I heard a colleague at St. Thomas University, in a conference organized around the theme of the Graham government ‘Self Sufficiency’ agenda, refer to *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* by David Harvey. As an historian who attended grad school in the 1980s, my first reaction was “has neo-liberalism existed long enough to have a history?” After I read, and re-read, Harvey’s 2005 book, I realized that it had. Suddenly, the various policies of the provincial Liberals began to take on an ominously-connected pattern. Other clues were the recurring presence of neo-liberal cheerleaders, such as Frank McKenna, former New Brunswick premier and now deputy chair of the Toronto Dominion Bank Financial Group, and the editorial position and reporting in the Irving daily newspapers, the Saint John *Telegraph Journal*, the Fredericton *Daily Gleaner* and the Moncton *Times and Transcript*. New Brunswick was in the midst of a neo-liberal revolution, and most of the public and single-issue protest movements, could not see the forest for the trees. The basis of the neo-liberal revolution as described by Harvey, is lowering corporate and income taxes in favour of higher consumption taxes, reducing the public sector including expenditures on health, education and welfare, minimizing government regulations and generally promoting a ‘competitive’ investment climate that undermines organized labour.

In the specific area of post-secondary education, neo-liberalism promotes increased corporate influence, commercialization, university-business partnerships, increased government control through ‘quality assurance’ review and budgetary decisions and the undermining of traditional university governance and the role of faculty unions or associations. Under the ideology of neo-liberalism in its starkest form, the market, not democratic processes, should dictate the role of the university. This philosophy and these policies are gaining ground in much of the Western world. An OECD Education Directorate official has proposed the following for Europe:

Europe’s universities will have to evolve so that their leadership and management capacity matches that of modern enterprises. Appropriate strategic, financial and human-resource management techniques should be introduced to ensure long-term financial sustainability and meet accountability requirements. And the university system itself must be governed by bodies that reflect a much wider range of stakeholder interests than the academic community. (Schleicer 2006).

What was being recommended for Saint John, an industrial, service and port centre which had lost nearly a third of its population since 1971, was even worse than subservience of the local university to government or corporations; the university itself was to disappear.

The involvement of business types, and not ‘university types,’ in the advisory committees for the Miner-L’Écuyer Report should have been a warning sign. The second warning sign was the relative silence of the Irving newspapers in reporting the issue. One of the more bizarre journalistic episodes was a laudatory article on the several Liberal MLAs for the Saint John area, including the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, just as the crisis broke. A third warning sign was the low profile- or absence-of the influential Saint John business community from the debate. There were almost no ‘suits’ at the rowdy meeting at the Delta Hotel where Miner and L’Écuyer attempted to present their views. At a gala business banquet to fete the ‘contributions to education’ by a prominent member of the Irving family, Frank McKenna earned a few laughs by repeating the old adage about academic politics being so petty. The implication was that defenders of UNB Saint John- to borrow a phrase from another Canadian politician, Stephen Harper- were self interested ‘ivory tower academics,’ blocking the province’s road to Self Sufficiency. A representative of the Board of Trade, well into the crisis, eventually issued a somewhat lukewarm statement in defence of UNB Saint John.

Despite the rhetoric about accessibility and improving ‘opportunities’ for students, the PSE proposals seemed to be about limiting opportunities for students from St. Stephen to Sussex, by closing or truncating the role of UNB Saint John. New Brunswick had ‘too many universities’; there was shortage of skilled workers and the provincially-run community colleges had been starved of resources. In its earlier discussion paper Miner and L’Écuyer seemed to suggest that too many ‘Arts graduates’ were completing university (conveniently oblivious to the dominance of Arts, Humanities and Social Science graduates in other regions of Canada). They also had wondered if university governance, such as senates and other collegial processes, was now outmoded.

In order for the province to meet its rendezvous with destiny, UNB Saint John was to be sacrificed and its budget and physical plant, presumably, were to be transformed into a so-called polytech. The term was confusing, and public discussion was not helped when supporters of the idea drew comparisons to Cal Tech or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. More revealing was a letter to the editor from a trucking industry representative declaring that UNB Saint John, where students worked hard to pursue degrees in Arts, Business, Computer Science, Science, Health Sciences and Nursing, should be turned into a trucking school. One rumour was the staff at the local community college was expecting to move to the presumably closed university campus as early as late summer of 2008.

Students, professors, staff, alumni and their families breathed a sigh of relief in October and UNB Saint John, after several weeks in ‘battle mode,’ attempted to reclaim a normal academic routine. But the government had not dropped its neo-liberal agenda. It appointed a so-called working group,

consisting of university presidents and community college principals, and the deputy minister of PSE, Nora Kelly. Despite traditions of inclusion and collegiality, there was little attempt by the presidents to first seek feedback from their university communities, and Premier Graham excluded student leaders on the theory that they were not ‘stakeholders.’ At this point New Brunswick has 25,000 university students and thousands of community college students. Somewhat worrisome from the point of view of UNB Saint John was that it had no separate representation at the table, although it is as big as St. Thomas and Mount Allison universities.

Fall 2007 turned to the winter of 2008, and other controversies dominated the media. But in the eyes of this observer, the ways in which government, the business community and the Irving media responded to these public issues were related to the still-unsettled PSE issue. Two of them were labour disputes, involving relatively few public sector workers, and the third had echoes of the PSE fight: a dispute over early French Immersion (EFI) education. A labour dispute at St. Thomas University, which began when the administration became the first in Canada to lock out its faculty, turned into a struggle of larger significance when the Irving media began to demonize the strikers for persisting with their legally-protected right to strike and bargain for the best possible collective agreement. One editorial called them “arrogant.” When the public sector union representing provincial jail guards and custodians in community colleges went on strike, the Irving media could not use ‘anti-elitist’ stereotypes to undermine blue collar workers, so it resorted to arguments surrounding ‘the good of the students.’ Previously, an editorial in an Irving paper, attacking possible militancy amongst the province’s public school teachers, had suggested that they could be replaced with Canadian expatriates teaching in Korea. Oddly enough, the same media which ‘defended’ the interests of students in the St. Thomas and community college strikes, were silent on the fate of 3,000 students, including several hundred from foreign countries, at UNB Saint John in the fall of 2007.

The final example of neo-liberal chill in education was the announcement by the provincial Minister of Education that EFI would be phased out in Canada’s only officially bilingual province. Parents and supporters fought back, and launched a court challenge that managed to win some concessions, but not defeat the overall policy. The Irving press, arguing that EFI somehow lowered overall literacy rates, supported the Graham government’s policy and on more than one occasion chastised the provincial Ombudsman who had raised concerns about process. Although clothed in language of ‘sharing’ and ‘accessibility,’ Irving newspaper editorials seemed fixated on cutting costs and delivering ‘a good basic education.’ Defenders of EFI for the most part fought a single-issue campaign on themes such as the spirit of bilingualism or parental rights, and could not see how the policy fit into the larger neo-liberal puzzle. The same government that was ‘reforming’ PSE and EFI,

for example, was proposing corporate and personal income tax cuts and an increased reliance on consumption taxes (endorsed by Frank McKenna) that threatened not only low income earners, but the ability of the province to pay for health care and social programs.

The report of the working group of university presidents, community college principals and the deputy minister of PSE was released in June of 2008. The *Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education* contained many of the original ideas and much of the rhetoric of *Advantage New Brunswick*, although the controversial polytechs were watered down to Institutes of Applied Learning and Training that would complement community colleges and universities. Faculty, particularly in Saint John, were perplexed. Premier Graham announced that each university and community college would have to appear annually before a legislative committee and submit a yearly business plan and a five-year strategic plan to a new central PSE administrative agency. Either consciously or unconsciously resorting to OECD-type rhetoric, Graham warned that unless the PSE sector was made the servant of workforce expansion and training, New Brunswick would “risk falling behind.” The government also promised to ‘clarify’ the roles and mandates of the province’s four public universities, whose main rationale, thanks to the collaboration of their own presidents, had become “to create the type of skilled labour force our economy needs.” In neo-liberal rhetoric, ‘economy’ and ‘market’ are code words for the needs of big business. In other words, the educational aspirations and goals of New Brunswick students, and the out-of-province students who form about 30% of enrolments, no longer mattered. Other code terms are “relevance,” “accountability” and “us”, which again mean what is in the best interests of business. The government, in the interest of capital, was now deciding what was best for the citizens. For example, it would be best that students enrolled in applied programs, and did not move away from New Brunswick after graduation. This was my final lesson of my crash course on applied neo-liberalism: the latter, despite the rhetoric of the free market, depends on government intervention, direction and the use of public resources to underwrite private capital.

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