

# A Peace Proposal for the War of the Sexes

By Ramsay Cook

(Reprinted by permission from the *Globe & Mail*, May 10, 1990)

Angered by the daily sight of poverty and starvation in eighteenth-century Ireland, Jonathan Swift modestly proposed that babies be sold for food. "A young, healthy child, well nursed," he claimed to have discovered, "is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout."

Of course, Swift was trying to make a point - that it's foolish to remove one injustice by committing another. It's a lesson we're still learning.

Take, for example, universities' attempts to resolve the pressing problem of employment equity for women.

Their goal is worthy, but some of them are threatening to adopt Swift's recipe - eat the children, or at least some of them.

The problem is simple enough. In the past decade, a growing number of women have acquired doctoral degrees and, quite naturally, want to teach in universities - traditionally a male domain.

In time, retirement is expected to create a situation like that of the expansive 1960s: more jobs than qualified applicants, especially Canadian ones. But that is still nearly a decade away. Meanwhile, competition for scarce teaching posts is fierce.

This competition is doubly dangerous because it threatens to become a battle of the sexes: young women competing with young men to replace the old men basking in the peace of tenured self-satisfaction. The young men are in a difficult position. Most admit there are serious imbalances between men and women in the universities. Yet they, too, have invested heavily in preparing for academic work. Must they pay the price of past injustice?

The way some universities are trying to even up the balance sheet in a hurry suggests that they will. The various employment-equity and affirmative-action programs seem to share only one, albeit laudable, goal: the appointment of more women. Some institutions take special steps to ensure that women candidates are considered seriously. Others have decided to fill all vacancies resulting from retirement with women. No men need apply.

In my own university, some departments have decided that male candidates will need the support of at least 60 per cent of the search committee, or the position will go to the leading female candidate. This means, on a short list of four, the winner could be fourth.

With such programs, many universities believe that equity will soon reign. But will it? Like Swift's proposal, some of the programs create new employment inequities in their attempt to erase the old ones.



Discrimination against women has been replaced by discrimination against men. Not all men, just young ones.

The old men who presumably did the discriminating won't be asked to contribute to the process. Nor will the women who were unfairly treated in the past, be compensated, except by the considerable satisfaction of seeing more younger women appointed.

So, the debts of the fathers will be paid by the sons. Small wonder there is a distinct aura of self-satisfaction surrounding the mainly male, mainly middle-aged, mainly tenured professoriate.

But the problem of discrimination remains. Why? Because, in the discussion of employment equity, no one has dared question that most sacred of academic privileges: tenure.

Tenure largely explains the scarcity of positions for young people, women or men.

It guarantees that, once a professor is judged a qualified scholar by his peers - and it usually is "his" - he will never again be asked to prove his worth.

Originally, tenure served an important purpose: it guaranteed a scholar's freedom to pursue his research and his thought free from the fear that unorthodox conclusions might jeopardize his livelihood. Tenure guaranteed academic freedom, the very essence of university life.

However, that principle has been corrupted. Tenure today, for most members of the academic profession means job security, freedom from anything but minimal performance requirements.

There is no requirement that new books be read, new lectures written, research conducted and results made public. Tenured professors cannot even be required to attend departmental meetings.

They just have to keep their heads down. As author Russell Jacoby remarks acerbically in his book, *The Last Intellectual*: "For many professors in many universities, academic freedom meant nothing more than freedom to be academic."

But what has tenure to do with job equity? A great deal. Tenure guarantees permanence, and now that compulsory retirement has been virtually abolished that is a long time indeed.

But why should tenure be unconditional? Why should it not depend on continued levels of performance at least equal to those required to achieve tenure in the first instance?

Periodic judgment by peers is no threat to academic freedom. Academics enjoy a second privilege denied most other professions - regular, paid sabbatical leave - so it would surely be fair and logical to require that regular tenure hearings coincide with sabbatical leave. Or, to minimize committee work, tenure renewal could take place every 10 years - about twice in the career of every tenured professor.

Such reviews would be especially useful in the cases of professors who achieved tenure under regulations much less systematic than those currently in effect in most universities.

...A Peace Proposal, p. 4

## Letters to the Editors

We feel that the new column in the *Newsletter* on the activities of the members is a good one, and enjoyed reading the first and second. We would urge, however, that its name be changed to something like "News from the Historians" or "News about Historians".

As you know, members of the Canadian Historical Association are to be found in faculties of medicine, education, schools of planning, and other locations within universities. They are also employed by archives, museums, schools, historic sites and other public and private institutions and agencies. Some are even in private practice. A wider umbrella title would make all of us feel more welcome as members of the Association.

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**We would like to publish letters we receive from our readers. Please send us your comments. We appreciate receiving feedback concerning the articles that appear or should appear in the *Bulletin*.**

## Editorial Policy

The *CHA Bulletin* is published quarterly by the Canadian Historical Association. Notices, letters, call for papers and articles of two pages or less, double-spaced, are welcome on topics of interest to historians, preferably accompanied by a translation into the other official language. Deadlines for submission of articles etc. are the following:

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We reserve the right to edit submissions. Opinions expressed in articles etc. are those of the authors and not necessarily the CHA. Direct correspondence to: Bulletin, Canadian Historical Association, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N3; FAX 613-567-3110.

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## CHA Announces the Winner of Its 1989 Ferguson Prize

The Wallace K. Ferguson Prize, consisting of \$2,000 for the best book published in 1989, in a field other than Canadian history, was awarded by the Prize Committee to Professor Modris Eksteins' *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys). The Committee felt that the book combines an original and bold approach towards the use of sources with a panoramic vision of the state of the world on the eve of, during, and after the Great War.

Reaching beyond traditional sources and wedding cultural and political history in unexpected ways, Professor Eksteins offers a striking synthesis of Europe's twentieth century cultural history and, perhaps most startlingly, a new vision of Nazi Germany as an avant-garde artefact. Graced by a lively, highly readable style, the book is a remarkable piece of cultural history which is likely to challenge the more traditional views of twentieth-century culture.

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from page 3

Most academics fulfil their responsibilities conscientiously, but no one would claim that all do. Periodic appraisal would provide a strong incentive for improved performance. It would also ensure that more posts would become available than could be easily filled by young women, thus making discriminatory employment practices unnecessary.

Given the anticipated shortage of qualified scholars by the end of the century, it is critical that none of these young people be lost. Making places for them now would contribute directly to the revitalization of potentially moribund institutions, where unconditional tenure sometimes protects mediocrity and conformity rather than promoting excellence and originality.

Equally important, the adoption of such a modest proposal could prevent the threatened war of the sexes which, like all unjust wars, will be fought by the young

after their elders declare it. Better a war of workers against drones. That, at least, would be a just war.

**The Editors would welcome comments from readers.**

## Sustaining Members Get Tax Break

CHA members can reduce their taxes and help the association by becoming Sustaining members (\$100.00). In order for the CHA to issue a tax receipt for the 1991 taxation year, we must receive your donation **before December 31, 1991** otherwise your tax receipt will be issued for the following year. Members may also make donations to the Association and an income tax receipt will be issued. (Institutions are not eligible for the sustaining membership category.)

## Miscellany

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada announces the publication of a new booklet *SSHRC Grants: Guide for Applicants*. This guide covers SSHRC Time Release Stipends, Strategic and Research Grants Programmes. A separate guide for fellowships is also available. The booklets are available, along with application forms from Communications Division, SSHRC, P.O. Box 1610, 255 Albert Street, Ottawa, ON, K1P 6G4; 613-992-0691.

The Social Sciences Federation of Canada and the Canadian Federation of the Humanities have jointly published a new booklet: *Understanding Copyright, A Practical Guide for the Social Sciences and Humanities* prepared by Brenda Wilson and Peter Burpee. The guide is available from either association at 151 Slater Street, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5H3.