

Making fast work of Ricardo Duchesne

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A metaphorical auto da fé, a textbook case of academic mobbing, was enacted at the University of New Brunswick in late spring of 2019.

On 18 May, Huffpost published a 2000-word hit piece that claimed to expose sociologist Ricardo Duchesne as a "white supremacist professor teaching at a public university." The article, by Nick Robins-Early, said Duchesne's writings "are filled with racist conspiracy theories" and that his talks are "celebrated by neo-Nazis." Yet "despite his extremist views and what other academics describe as shoddy scholarship and unsound methods," Duchesne continues to enjoy the "badge of legitimacy" afforded by his faculty position "while the university's leadership is unable or unwilling to intervene."

The article was not actually an exposé, in the sense of revealing something hidden. Duchesne is a prolific scholar. He has published dozens of articles in readily available academic journals. His 500-page book, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*, published in 2011, is in the libraries of all major universities. Duchesne has promulgated his views also in about 150 contributions to the website of the Council of European Canadians. He makes no secret of his ideas. He spells out complex arguments, adducing evidence, citing relevant scholarship, and adding counterarguments against opposing views.

The Huffpost article was a rallying cry for action against Duchesne, a simplistic characterization of him as a public enemy and a call for his elimination from UNB. Dozens of faculty there heeded the cry. On 29 May, Huffpost followed up by publicizing a letter signed by more than 100 UNB professors: "We therefore explicitly condemn Duchesne's racist positions on multiculturalism and immigration. Cloaking these views in academic legitimacy is an abuse of his status as a professor at UNB." Reports on the letter in the main Canadian broadcast and print media (CBC, CTV, Globalnews, Globe and Mail, National Post, Toronto Star) added fuel to the fire.

Academics and commentators from across Canada and beyond piled on. The Canadian Historical Association issued a statement of solidarity with Duchesne's adversaries at UNB: "We share the signatories' concerns about Duchesne's [sic] views and like them, distinguish between the important principle of academic freedom and indefensible and potentially dangerous arguments." The UNB administration placed the mobbing target under official investigation.

The academic voices questioning the incursion on Duchesne's position were few. Mark Mercer, president of the Society of Academic Freedom & Scholarship, wrote a letter of concern to UNB president Eddy Campbell, then posted the letter and related materials on the SAFS website. David Solway wrote a trenchant defense of Duchesne's scholarship, and I wrote a letter of doubt to the 25 UNB professors who initiated the collective statement there against Duchesne (links at left). On the other hand, quite a few of the hundreds of comments on CBC Radio's discussion of the conflict (The Current, 22 May) were sympathetic to Duchesne. This was more an academic mobbing than a public one.

It ended fast. As late as 30 May, Duchesne was quoted as saying he had done nothing wrong and had no intention to resign. The prospect loomed of five or ten torturous years of disciplinary proceedings, sanctions, appeals, and adjudications. But then on 4 June, UNB announced that Duchesne had given notice of early retirement.

Thereby this case of workplace mobbing had the single most common outcome among all the cases I have studied: the target's ostensibly voluntary exit. Duchesne said he plans to continue his work as an independent scholar, to answer questions like "why European civilization was far more creative than all the other civilizations combined," "why all European-created nations are being forced to diversify themselves through mass immigration," and "why the mainstream media never allows any critical thinking about the mandated ideology of diversity."

Why Duchesne was mobbed

I have not studied this case in enough detail to identify all the factors that precipitated it. The obvious major one is the content of his writing and teaching,

the ideas he stands for. Without apology, he challenges the postmodern mentality (click here for my description) dominant in sociology and other social sciences, with its associated cultural relativism, disenchantment with Western civilization, and enthusiasm for multiculturalism, weak borders, and immigration. His colleagues' statement against him did not say his views are empirically false. The argument there was of the postmodern kind, that his views may be personally offensive: "We are deeply concerned about the negative impact that his public statements may have on all students in his courses, and especially Indigenous and racialized students." To see the conflict surrounding Duchesne as a battle in the current culture war is altogether reasonable.

Against the background of other mobbing cases I have studied, I would hypothesize two additional explanatory factors. First is the envy of excellence. First on my checklist of mobbing indicators is: "By standard criteria of job performance, the target is at least average, probably above average." A quick search for Ricardo Duchesne on Google Scholar shows a degree of scholarly productivity that I would guess excels that of at least three-quarters of UNB faculty in the social sciences. To judge by ratemyprofessors, Duchesne excels in the classroom. It would be interesting to compare Duchesne, in scholarly stature and appreciation by students, to the 100 colleagues who signed the statement against him. My guess is that he would fare very well.

Having looked up Duchesne on Google Scholar, I spent a few hours perusing his work, studying in particular articles from 15 to 25 years ago, in order to grasp the transition he reports having made in his own career, from the standard leftist critique of European civilization to defense of it. I found it reassuring to follow the intellectual development of this independent-minded sociologist, charting his own path in what appears to be an honest search for truth – the value on which every university rests. Whether one agrees or not with where that path has led Duchesne, one must admire him for how he has taken evidence and reason as his guides, chronicling his journey chapter by chapter, book review by book review, article by article. I noticed also that in discussing others' work, he rarely gave wholehearted assent or dissent, but was instead critical in the truest sense, distinguishing those ideas he found praiseworthy from those he could not accept. I believe anybody who spends time tracing Duchesne's intellectual career with an open mind, would find his curriculum vitae a kind of exemplar of a genuine scholar's life.

The other explanatory factor that may be relevant to Duchesne's mobbing is one I discovered by accident many years ago. It had not occurred to me earlier that having a foreign accent would increase a professor's risk of being mobbed. From a young age I thought accents in an academic setting were like styles of clothing, largely irrelevant to the work of teaching and learning. I did not think anybody would hold a foreign accent against a colleague, so long as his or her speech were intelligible. I was wrong. I found so many cases of foreign-accented professors being mobbed that I put first on a list ([click here](#)) of conditions that heighten the risk of being mobbed: "Foreign birth and upbringing, especially as signaled by a foreign accent." This point is relevant to the present case, as I learned when I heard Duchesne speak on a Youtube video. His English, while altogether fluent and understandable, is delivered in a marked Spanish accent, reflecting his origin in Puerto Rico. One of the reasons he was mobbed may be that he came across as too much of a foreigner to the colleagues at New Brunswick who ganged up on him, notwithstanding their professed allegiance to multiculturalism.

Comparison to the mobbing of E. A. Ross

Ricardo Duchesne was not the first critic of multiculturalism and advocate of reduced immigration to be run out of a professorship. In 1900, E. A. (Edward Alsworth) Ross, a member of the founding generation of American sociologists and an early president of the American Sociological Association, was forced to resign his position at Stanford University on account of the anti-immigration views he strongly voiced in academic and public media. Ross then joined the faculty of the University of Nebraska, and later the University of Wisconsin, where he remained until retirement with much honour in 1937. A comparison of Duchesne's mobbing to Ross's sheds light on how times have changed.

So far as I know, Duchesne does not ground his own scholarship in Ross's, may never even have read his work, but Duchesne's view of the world is uncannily similar to Ross's a century ago. Ross was well-travelled. He went to France and England and studied for a year in Germany before completing his PhD at Johns Hopkins in 1891. But he had a keen sense of national autonomy and was proud of and devoted to his native country, the United States. The standard of living in America by that time was far higher than in southern and eastern European countries, not to mention those in Asia and Africa. Unsurprisingly, thousands of

people from poorer countries wanted to immigrate to the United States. Ross was opposed to admitting them. In the preface to his book on immigration, *The Old World in the New* (1913), Ross said he did not

regard America as something to be spent quickly and cheerfully for the benefit of pent-up millions in the backward lands. What if we become crowded without their ceasing to be so? I regard it as a nation whose future may be of unspeakable value to the rest of mankind, provided that the easier conditions of life here be made permanent by high standards of living, institutions and ideals, which finally may be appropriated by all men. We could have helped the Chinese a little by letting their surplus millions swarm in upon us a generation ago; but we have helped them infinitely more by protecting our standards and having something worth their copying when the time came.

It was this kind of thinking that got Ross in trouble, but in an altogether different quarter than in Duchesne's case. The founder had died by the time Ross started teaching at Stanford, but Leland's wife Jane chaired the trustees and claimed stewardship of the institution they had endowed. Jane found Ross's opposition to Chinese immigration outrageous. The Stanford family fortune derived in great part from Leland's Central Pacific Railroad, which had imported thousands of poor Chinese for cheap labour. Jane eventually demanded that the university president fire Ross. The president resisted, putting his own job at risk. He counted Ross a personal friend, and believed he should be free to teach what he believed to be true. Foreseeing no end of trouble if he tried to stay, Ross (like Duchesne 119 years later) resigned.

Ross's ouster was thus a case of administrative mobbing. The eliminative campaign originated in the university's governing board and came down through the hierarchy of authority to the president. The Ross case reflected the political landscape in America throughout the twentieth century, where the capitalist class was generally more in favour of immigration, seeing it as a way to keep wages low, than the working class (and Progressive intellectuals like Ross who identified with ordinary Americans), which generally saw immigration as a threat to workers' bargaining power vis-a-vis employers.

So widespread among American professors was anger over what happened to Ross at Stanford that that university's reputation remained poor for many years,

and no small number of prominent scholars refused appointments to its faculty. The Ross case is cited to this day as the main inspiration for the founding of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915, which continues even now as a major guarantor of academic freedom for professors in the United States.

Duchesne's case, in striking contrast, was one of lateral or collegial mobbing. Had it been up to the board of governors and senior administration at UNB, Duchesne might well have kept his job. The hostility toward him arose from his peers, his colleagues especially in sociology and history but also in other fields. This, too, reflects the larger political landscape, markedly different now than in Ross's time. Over the past 30 years, in both Canada and the United States, policies welcoming immigrants have become key objectives of the postmodern left, who are commonly now called progressive. So far as I am aware, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), this country's counterpart to the AAUP, did not lift a finger to defend Duchesne's academic freedom.

The takeaway: has Duchesne got it wrong or right?

Maybe the lesson from Duchesne's ouster is that Euro-Canadian civilization is not so special as he thinks it is, for all its blather about academic freedom and similar lofty values. Break a taboo and pay the price. Nothing special about that. Happens everywhere. Taking obvious pleasure in Duchesne's ouster, leftist academic Crawford Killan wrote in *The Tye*: "How UNB dealt with him will have consequences across Canada's whole political spectrum. He wasn't the first such dissident academic, and he won't be the last."

Yet in a backhanded way, this mobbing case supports Duchesne's claim of the superiority of Euro-Canadian civilization. He lost only his professorship, not his life. News from Saudi Arabia last week was that the government plans to put three dissident scholars to death.