



Bill 213: Better for People, Smarter for Business Act

CUPE Ontario's Submission to the Standing Committee on General Government

November 30, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on Bill 213 – *Better for People, Smarter for Business Act*. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario is the largest union in the province with more than 280,000 members. You will find CUPE members working in health care, municipalities, school boards, social services, and universities. CUPE members provide the front-line services that help make Ontario a great place to live.

CUPE represents approximately 38,000 members working in Ontario universities. We represent academic staff – Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants and Sessional Lecturers. We represent administrative staff in department offices, skilled trades and blue-collar staff. We represent Librarians, Lab Technicians and IT Professionals. CUPE represents virtually every class of non-management employee at Ontario universities save and except for full-time faculty.

CUPE also works, through its Pink Triangle Committee, to create safer, fairer workplaces and communities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, intersex and queer Union members. Through political action and key events, we advocate for harassment-free workplaces and communities.

Although Bill 213 covers a variety of issues around the regulation of business operations in Ontario, our submission will deal only with those schedules pertaining to post secondary education. In particular we are concerned with Schedules 2, 25 and 29 which grant the title of “University” to three private Bible colleges and expand their degree granting powers to include a broad range of bachelor degrees, master and even doctorate degrees in areas well beyond the original scope of their organizations. Previously these institutions were allowed to grant degrees primarily in religious or theological studies. The institutions in question are: Canada Christian College and School of Graduate Theological Studies, Redeemer Reformed Christian College, and Tyndale University College. The legislation continues a general trend towards allowing private institutions that market in intolerance to set up shop, operate and grant degrees in Ontario. We are concerned that this legislation legitimizes anti LGBTQ hatred, disdain, and condemnation. We believe it should stop now.

Only the government has the right to grant the title of “University” to an educational institution and it’s a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. Universities not only build skills, they support the broadening of our citizens' horizons, build knowledge of the world, and foster understanding within and tolerance between communities. Universities do not advance a **single** point of view. That is antithetical to their purpose. Universities exist to allow a diversity of views and of individuals espousing those views. That is how we achieve greater knowledge and insight into our world. Institutions that fail to do that, (or indeed do the opposite) should not be granted the coveted title of “University” and the public credibility that goes with it.

We also want to address the idea of giving every institution that grants a degree the title of “University”. Virtually every College of Applied Arts in Ontario grants degrees in some areas, but they are not mistaken for Universities. The scope is broader than that. We are deeply troubled that this legislation gives highly religious, fundamentalist organizations the right to grant general degrees at the bachelor and master levels in arts and in sciences. Although we have concerns with such private monolithic groups being given the “good housekeeping seal of approval” from the government to grant **any** degree, it is one thing to allow them to grant degrees in religious or theological studies. It is a very different thing to allow them to grant general arts, science and education degrees. This is especially true given their history of intolerance to certain groups and their rigid adherence to biblical tracts over human rights and scientific advances.

Intolerance and Discrimination

The three colleges referenced in Bill 213 have a history of intolerance and discrimination, particularly against LGBTQ+2 persons. All three: Tyndale, Redeemer and Canada Christian prohibit students from being who they are while studying on their campuses, if who they are is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or two spirit.

Of the three bible colleges referenced in the legislation, the record of the Canada Christian College, is the most egregious. Schedule 2 grants the Canada Christian College the title of University and confers upon them the right to grant Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees.

A cursory review of the Canada Christian College reveals that this organization is an extreme social conservative political machine masquerading as a school. The money raised by the school (using its charitable status) is used to fund a number of socially conservative causes. They are heavily involved in American evangelical television stations that preach intolerance and hate.

Canada Christian College is led by Charles McVety, a long-time supporter of Premier Ford, who has expressed long-standing discriminatory Islamophobic, homophobic and transphobic views. The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council determined Mr. McVety made ‘malevolent, insidious and conspiratorial’ remarks about the LGBTQ2+ community, which led to the cancellation of his television show.¹ Mr. McVety has also made outlandishly Islamophobic statements and even hosted anti-Islam activists at the college².

McVety is also on record for promoting creationism and criticizing evolutionary biology.³ He has said that there is no evidence that the world is more than six thousand years old. These are alarming statements from the president of an institution that wants to confer Bachelor of Science degrees. A BSc that is based on creationism is worthless to Ontario students and should not be given credence by our government.

However just because Canada Christian College is the worst does not mean that it is alone. All three of these colleges discriminate against students who do not have a heterosexual orientation. A CBC report from August 2020 indicated that Redeemer College will discipline students for “any sexual behaviour that occurs outside a heterosexual marriage.”⁴ and that Tyndale University College has similar policies including making students sign agreements not to engage in sexual activities outside of heterosexual wedlock.⁵

Bill 213 would give Redeemer College the right to grant degrees in **twelve** new areas including the ability to grant **nine** new master’s degrees. Previously, Redeemer was not able to offer graduate programs. Under this legislation they will be. Unless amended, under Bill 213, Redeemer College will be able to grant new bachelor’s degrees in Early Childhood Education, Nursing, and Social Work. They will be allowed to be allowed to establish graduate programs and award master’s degrees in Accounting, Education, Science, Arts, Divinity, Social Work, Business Administration, Christian Leadership, and, -- ironically, given their world view is so singular -- in a program called “World View Studies”.

¹ [Canadian Broadcast Standards Council CITS-TV re Word.ca and Word TV](#), (CBSC Decision 08/09-2142 & 09/10-0383+), June 22,2010

² [Anti-Islamic political leader Geert Wilders comes to Canada](#), *National Post*, May 5, 2011

³ [Canada Christian College Facebook Video](#). May 2018. McVety’s comments start at 13.45

⁴ [“Private Christian university says no sex outside heterosexual marriage. LGBTQ alumni say that discriminates”](#) CBC News, August 4, 2020

⁵ [The covenant and the courts: Inside a Christian university’s law school crusade](#), *National Post*, March 8, 2018

Tyndale College would also have a vastly expanded ability to establish degree granting programs, especially at the graduate or master's level. Bill 213 provides for five new bachelor's level degree programs, two new master's degree programs and three new doctorate programs. The programs would be in Business Administration, Science, Music, Fine Arts, Education (at the BA, MA and PhD levels), Doctor of Philosophy, Honorary Doctor of Letters and a general Master's of Arts and Doctor of Letters. By granting these bible schools the status of "University", by expanding their degree programs, the Ontario government is legitimizing their message. It is outrageous to allow the expansion of the scope and influence of organizations that go directly against our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and are frankly discriminatory to some students based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. It is outrageous that a government that calls itself 'for the People', would consider granting more powers and ultimately public funding to institutions that seek to fuel hate and prejudices. At a minimum, the Ontario Government should be upholding our very own Human Rights code by declining to condone any organization that follows these practices.

Promoting private alternatives to public institutions undermines our Public System.

If that is not enough -- if human rights are not enough -- it is important for the Committee to consider the harms caused to our public universities and colleges by expanding the scope of these private institutions. We have a strong and robust public post secondary system and excellent universities across Ontario. Although our universities have been weakened by underfunding, they still provide excellent academic programs, conduct rigorous, important research and are vital to our economic and social well-being. Degrees conferred by one of Ontario's public universities will be recognized anywhere in Canada and much of the world.

By expanding the scope and legitimizing the operation of private institutions, this government is undermining our public post secondary educational system. Once these institutions are given the legitimacy of the "University" title, they will divert funds away from our public universities. While private institutions do not get general operating grants from the government, their students are eligible for millions in government subsidized student loans and grants. Their faculty are eligible for public grants as well.

So much of the funding for public universities is enrollment-based and government actions, such as Bill 213, take away absolutely vital funding for universities. International students, not necessarily understanding the difference between a public university and a private bible college that calls itself a university, may be duped into enrolling at one of these substandard institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a crisis in funding for our public universities who rely so heavily on international student enrollment for the funds necessary to operate. A number of our public universities, especially our smaller public universities, are in serious financial crisis. Diverting any international students away from our public universities should not be in the cards for the Ontario government at this time.

Both Redeemer College and Canada Christian College have a history of financial irregularities which included schemes whereby parents would make a donation to the college in lieu of paying tuition so that they could re-coup a portion of the money through charitable tax credits.⁶ This is nothing short of having the people of Canada subsidize the operation of these private institutions. Canada Christian College has “lent” out hundreds of thousands of dollars to its President Charles McVety and its Vice President, Ryan McVety.⁷ If these institutions were to become insolvent because of these corrupt financial practices, what responsibility would the government of Ontario have in the losses incurred by students? What liability would rest with the Ontario government if we pass this legislation legitimizing these institutions by giving them the University title and the ability to grant wide-spread degrees?

It is also clear that regardless of what is passed, these institutions will not and cannot provide the level of academic rigor required from our public colleges and universities. This is very likely to water down our Ontario “brand” and damage our province’s world-wide reputation for academic excellence. International students, unknowingly enrolling at one of these private universities, will discover too late that their degrees are close to worthless if they wish to pursue graduate or post graduate work at a reputable university, and that the tuition that they paid would have been better spent supporting our public university system. The Ontario government’s actions to legitimize these private colleges will undermine world-wide trust in the independent and advanced academic research and education provided in Ontario.

The push to drive a private market for post-secondary education in this province is damaging our public institutions. Our public universities and colleges already compete internationally. They compete for the best students, the best researchers, the best teachers, and the best research programs. The last thing our public institutions need, in addition to being underfunded, is also having a government-made private market undermining their standing around the world. What do these private institutions provide of any substance or quality that our public institutions could not provide for cheaper and at a higher quality? The answer is nothing.

⁶ [Redeemer settles \\$6-million lawsuit with families](#), *Hamilton Spectator*, February 29, 2020

⁷ [Redacted documents on Canada Christian College reveal \\$500,000 loan to school's head](#) *Globe and Mail*, October 29, 2020

CUPE believes it is harmful to Ontarians and to the Ontario economy to allow for the expansion of private, intolerant, fundamentalist organizations into our education system. This Bill, if passed in its current form, will legitimize discrimination and hate against groups of Ontarians because of their sexual orientation. It will drain resources from our public universities. It will weaken the Ontario “brand” and our reputation for excellence in university education.

Ironically, this aspect of Bill 213 goes completely against the overall goals of Bill 213. Watering down our education system, allowing for intolerance and discrimination will not be “Smarter for Business” or “Better” for Ontarians. It is the workers and students of Ontario who are going to pull this province out of this crisis. We will need all the resources, ingenuity and expertise of our public universities and colleges to accomplish this. Business will fail if we do not support our public universities and colleges.

High levels of education from our high-quality public institutions set Ontario apart from the world. It is Ontario's built-in competitive advantage. The government should recognize this and support the workers and students of this province -- not through throwing public money away on private colleges -- but, by lowering the barriers to public, high-quality, and made in Ontario higher education.

We are urging you to remove these schedules from Bill 213 prior to passing it into law.