

FACULTY MATTERS

Views and News of Douglas College Faculty Association Members
Number 15, Fall 2020

Shaping the Future

Kim Trainor on COVID & the Climate Emergency

As we move towards the winter solstice, as the light withdraws and we lose a few more minutes each day, on the cusp of another COVID-19 lockdown, I've been thinking about energy. In particular, for a long poem sequence I'm writing on resilience in the face of climate change and the sixth mass extinction, I've been thinking about mitochondria and chloroplasts, tiny energy-producing organelles.

In my haphazard research, stitched between Teams meetings and Zoom classes and the construction of new course shells on Blackboard, I've recently come across a beautiful organism called *Elysia chlorotica*, the eastern emerald *Elysia*, also known as the emerald sea slug. It's found all along the eastern seaboard – from Florida and Texas to as far north as Nova Scotia – in salt water marshes and tidal creeks, in shallow waters at a depth of no more than two feet. Unfurled, the emerald *Elysia* has roughly the appearance of a linden leaf, its short neck and horns like stem and petiole. As its name suggests, it is a brilliant emerald green. The colour comes from the food it eats, primarily an algae called *Vaucheria litorea*; these slugs are kleptoplasts, thieves, by any other name. The *Elysia* uses its radula (a kind of tongue with tiny teeth, like a rasp) to penetrate the cellular walls of the algae and suck out the chloroplasts – think bubble tea – which then line the slug's diverticula and synthesize food from sunlight, carbon, and water. Recent research suggests that the interchange is more complicated than this relatively simple picture, and that some form of horizontal gene transfer can take place, with algal genes found within the slug's own chromosome, capable of repairing the chloroplasts (which degrade over time). These algal genes are then passed on through the slug's germ line. This is unusual. Maybe we're seeing *Elysia chlorotica* evolving, a slow metamorphosis from animal to plant. Can we humans make a similar solar transformation? We're running out of time ...

Declaring "War" on Carbon

Initially, the arrival of COVID-19 had a positive impact on our carbon footprint: as cities around the world shut down, large reductions in flights, and in daily car trips led to a drop in CO₂ emissions on the order of close to nine percent world-wide in the first six months of 2020 – a decrease of 1,551 million tonnes of carbon. In northern India, the Himalayas were visible in the distance **Shaping ... continued on p3**



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BRIEFLY NOTED



Bill Archibald, enjoying his retirement

This summer, August 31, saw the retirement of not one, but two previous Secretaries-Treasurer of the Faculty Association, William (Bill) Archibald, and Elizabeth (Liz) Hicks; Liz continues as a member of the Operations & Finance committee. Current Secretary-Treasurer Jennifer Kirkey thanks them both for their help in the transition. She has big shoes to fill.

Jennifer Kirkey
Secretary-Treasurer



From the Archives. Atrium of New Westminster campus, mid-February, 2008.

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for the first time in a generation and in Glacier Bay you could hear the humpback whales singing. People dusted off their ten-speeds and took to the bike lanes. We also learned it was possible for society to turn on a dime: mass mobilization for contact tracing, elaborate health protocols, a complete conversion to online meetings and teaching. It wasn't necessary to fly somewhere to take a holiday; Mountain Equipment Co-op ran out of camping supplies.

Seth Klein, an adjunct professor in urban studies at Simon Fraser, frames our failure so far to address climate change, not as primarily technical or scientific, but as rooted in a simple lack of political will. In his just-released book, *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*, he draws on examples from the Second World War to illustrate the ability of Canada to transform overnight when faced with an emergency. If the point needed further reinforcement, COVID-19 has made it crystal clear. Resources are found, agencies are created, communities act. The Douglas College community has also come together and transitioned to online delivery in less than a week's notice. As faculty, we have had a steep learning curve: Zoom, Blackboard, Microsoft Teams, Skype, LearnCube, Google Classroom, LiveWebinar, Kaltura, Vizualizer, Moodle, Prezi, Canvas, Slack, Loom ... Some days I have so many wires and connections attaching me-to-the-laptop-to-the-Internet-to-my-virtual-invisible-students, that when I finish teaching and unplug I feel like the embryonic Neo born out of the Matrix, splashed onto the floor of a resistance cell.

Costing Things Out

We repeatedly forget and remember our materiality and the materiality of information itself. It takes energy to fire neurons just as it takes energy (and releases CO₂) to send and receive files, to conduct online classes, to post materials online. Our laptops connect to physical servers in data centres linked by miles of wires, switches, routers, and undersea cables, all powered by gas and

petroleum and coal. The carbon footprint for conducting a single Google search has been estimated at anywhere from 0.2 grams (by Google itself, which says it is carbon neutral, but achieves this through the purchase of carbon offsets) to 10 kilos (if you include the energy used to manufacture the equipment used to conduct the search). Scale this up:

Although the energy needed for a single internet search or email is small, approximately four billion people, or a little over half of the global population, now use the internet... The carbon footprint of our gadgets, the internet and the systems supporting them account for about slightly less than four percent of global greenhouse emissions, according to some estimates. It is similar to the amount produced by the airline industry globally.[§]

These emissions are expected to double by 2025 – and this was before COVID-19, when time slowed and so many turned to the internet to carry on. It was estimated way back in 2009 that the average Australian internet user produced the equivalent of 81 kilos (179 pounds) of carbon dioxide per year.[†]

Despite the emissions figures associated with the internet, online teaching and learning, in combination with virtual meetings, are part of a diverse toolkit that will help us to continue to cut our CO₂ emissions. New delivery platforms, despite their drawbacks, allow us to cut our carbon footprints associated with travel. One 2017 Dutch study observed that there is a strong connection between switching to online or hybrid models and “strongly reducing carbon emissions.” Although Douglas College is “carbon neutral,” as all public institutions are required to be since 2010, this is undoubtedly because our carbon accounting focusses on HVAC-related emissions, thereby implicitly discounting emissions generated by internet, travel both domestic and global, food, and materials such as hardware and paper. Like Google, we also rely heavily on the purchase of carbon offsets to buy our neutrality.

Moving Forward

The newly minted Faculty Association Climate Emergency Action Committee has met twice so far, and identified goals in line with the college's new 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. Theme Three of the plan, “Social and Environmental Responsibility” lists as one of its objectives – “Contribute to sustainability goals through education, processes and practices.” With this in mind, three of our main goals for this year are:

Developing a Sustainable Learning Hub ...

... on the Douglas College website, like as those already in place at UBC, SFU, TRU, and Camosun College. The Hub would provide important student and community outreach, encompassing everything from the latest research and student-led projects in green technologies and initiatives, to listings of relevant course offerings and credential programs such as Building Energy and Resource Management (BERM), and our associate degrees in Environmental Science and Environmental Studies. This Hub would articulate the college's vision for a green and sustainable future.

[§] Sarah Griffiths, “Why your internet habits are not as clean as you think.” BBC: *Smart Guide to Climate Change*, March 2020.

[†] Anne Quito, “Every Google search results in CO₂ emissions. This real-time data viz shows how much.” *Quartz Magazine*, May 2018.

The DCFA Climate Emergency Action Committee Needs You!

REPS NEEDED

from the following areas:

- Commerce & Business Administration
- Science & Technology
- Library Services
- Community Studies

Developing a micro-credential or certificate ...

... in Sustainability, such as TRU's Leadership in Environmental Sustainability certificate.

Establishing a Climate Emergency Speaker Series ...

... to debut in February. This series will showcase thinkers, scientists, politicians, activists, artists who will address the climate emergency and related ecological issues.

Importantly, we will also be advocating for the new college building at Eighth and Royal to be a green building, "net zero energy ready;" a net zero facility generates all of the energy required to run a building through the course of the year on site, just like the Emerald sea slug. We will also be asking the Faculty Association to formally declare a climate emergency, in line with the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators' recent declaration; this is anticipated as a first step in asking the College to do likewise. It's worth pointing out that thousands of Colleges and Universities have already done so in the Global Universities and Colleges Climate Letter that commits signing institutions to a number of goals, including: going carbon neutral by 2030 (2050 at the latest); devoting more resources to action-oriented climate change research and skills creation; and increasing the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curricula, campus, and community outreach programs.

Last year I approached the LLPA Dean Manuela Constantino about the possibility of Douglas College signing this commitment, but this was shortly before the disruptions of COVID-19 hit. We can still sign on and step up our commitment to sustainability as outlined by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainability, as defined by the UN means "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." COVID-19 can be an opportunity to reconsider and restructure our energy-use patterns, as

instructors, and within our institutions. As the organizers of the Global Climate letter assert, "What we teach shapes the future."

NOTE: This article, which required approx. 54 Google searches and three to four intermittent hours on a MacBook Pro, might have released 109G of CO₂ to write, if you don't include the carbon footprint of the laptop's construction and transportation. Calculation based on an estimate of 0.5G of CO₂ per Google search and four hours on a laptop, estimated to produce an average of 60 kilos of CO₂ per year. But wait, you say, we have clean electricity in BC. Yes, but consider: BC holds back hydro to import cheaper electricity from places such as Montana and Wyoming. As Sarah Cox (in the *Narwhal*) points out, "British Columbians have no way of knowing if the electricity they use comes from a coal-fired plant in Alberta or Wyoming, a nuclear plant in Washington, a gas-fired plant in California or a hydro dam in BC." 

Ask A Steward

Melanie Young Tells What's True, False (& Maybe)

More on the roles and responsibilities of Selection Committees, for those who might have missed out on the Special Topics meeting in September.

⇨ *Members of a faculty Selection Committee can be appointed by Deans.*

FALSE

Members of Selection Committees must be elected by the Department/Discipline/Program (**Article 5.01B**).

⇨ *The Collective Agreement requires the Selection Committee to elect a Chair every year.*

TRUE

⇨ *The Selection Committee is only required to meet when there is a selection process.*

MAYBE

If the other work of the Committee (the non-selection work) can be done without a meeting (e.g., by email) then that might be sufficient. It's important to be aware that the Selection Committee has more responsibilities than just the selections process, and that work must be done every year, whether or not there is a selection.

⇨ *A Dean can do an emergency contract hire when the contract list is exhausted.*

TRUE

But only in very rare situations, and in consultation with the department Chair/Co-ordinator unless they are unavailable. **Article 5.05B, II (4)**, says a Dean can do this when "time does not permit" the usual hiring

process to be followed. In most cases I'm aware of, when the contract list is exhausted, the work would be offered to a regular faculty member on an overload basis, at contract rates. It's unlikely a new contract faculty member would be given work without the approval of the Selection Committee, but it is possible.

⇨ *A Selection Committee can offer a regular position to an external candidate even if they do not meet qualifications, on the understanding they meet qualifications within a specified time.*

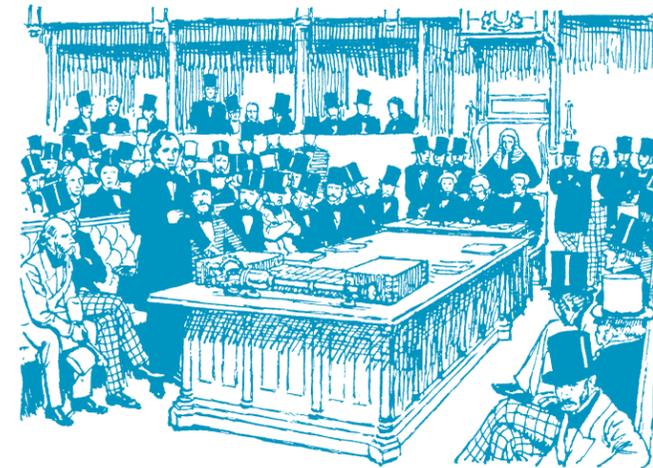
TRUE

Even though this isn't included in the Article on External Selection (**5.05A IV**) it's actually common practise in post-secondary institutions (e.g., someone who has not completed their doctoral thesis). It's important in this case to include the requirement (and the deadline) in the Letter of Appointment. 

ANALYSIS

Unbalancing EdCo

Dorritta Fong on How Changes to EdCo's Bylaws Could Restrict Faculty Input



I'm exhausted. I'm wrung out. I'm overloaded. And I suspect many of us feel the same, that we don't have the free time or mental space to worry about anything other than getting through the semester, and certainly not to read 67 extra pages of dense bureaucratic text. It's completely understandable. I didn't want to read the Education Council (EdCo) Bylaws, and I'm an EdCo representative. But when I did read the proposed revisions, I felt a jolt of particular incensed energy to do something about them, because there are a host of problems with the proposed revisions to the EdCo bylaws.

How EdCo Works

Since it may not be immediately obvious why EdCo matters, it's important to clarify its role in the college. Briefly, the Education Council is a governance body of the college, required under BC Law, and enshrined in the 1996 *College and Institute Act*. The council is solely responsible for setting policies about educational matters such as exams, academic standing, academic standards, and curriculum content. It advises the college Board about educational policy on issues such as implementation and cancellation of programs, and it has joint approval authority with the college Board on such issues as whether courses from other institutions are equivalent to courses at the college. This remit of EdCo goes in two directions. Downwards, so to speak, its work and decisions directly affect our classes, and (for that very reason) in the "upwards" direction its membership is tilted in favour of faculty. Of the 20 places on EdCo required by statute, exactly half (ten) are reserved for faculty. Of the remaining ten, four are students, four are appointed by administration, and two are elected by support staff. While faculty do not have a voting majority on EdCo, they nonetheless constitute – as a specific aim of the *Act* – the largest single group. In short, the statute is unambiguous that the preponderance of interest for EdCo belongs to faculty, with other stakeholders having a lesser interest. This is hardly surprising, given that the point of an Education Council is to deal with educational, rather than broadly administrative matters. The *Act* also specifies (§3: 24-1) that EdCo "must make bylaws for the conduct of [its] business." The current EdCo Bylaws were written in 2004, but since that time, some references, for example, to defunct committees, had become dated, and so

the bylaws needed revision. In October 2019, an Ad Hoc committee was formed – with the same membership proportions as the full Council – to revise the bylaws. In September 2020, a draft was presented to EdCo, along with a timeline that Council would hold a final vote on accepting it in November 2020.

Rush to Judgement

Several faculty representatives at EdCo were critical of what seemed a short timeline – a little over two months. To begin with, they

thought, faculty as a whole had not been informed in a timely manner, and had not been given adequate consultation time about the revisions. They pointed out too that the brevity of the timeline strongly implied that there was no expectation of getting feedback from faculty before pushing the revisions through. Moreover, as noted above, during term-time, because of the pressure of work, many faculty simply do not have the time to make themselves properly informed; such difficulties are compounded, this semester in particular, because of the pandemic, and the difficulty of getting together for discussions. Finally, faculty members on EdCo pointed out that no compelling reason had been given *why* the bylaws needed to be approved this term, and thus, EdCo should allow a few more months so that faculty could digest and properly respond to the draft revisions.

To all this an administrator replied that the time given was fixed, that there had been sufficient consultation during the process, and feedback had been invited. The administrator continued by declaring that people in academia are always busy, and that faculty requesting additional time was much the same as a student asking for an extension on an assignment. Naturally enough, this announcement was not well received, with one faculty member saying that such a comparison was in itself disrespectful, especially considering that this semester in particular, faculty are working under unprecedented burdens, having been overwhelmed with learning to teach in a completely new mode. To understand the proposed revisions would require a hefty chunk of reading in the middle of term. Many have therefore not been able to find the time to read the materials.

At the October meeting, when faculty once again said not enough time was being provided for faculty consultation, the college President said that there was no expectation of a broader consultation, any more than usually with EdCo

matters. In other words, the suggestion was that allotting time for faculty consultation was not the way that EdCo normally works.

I disagree.

Treating a request for more time for faculty to inform themselves and to provide feedback as if it were like a request from a lazy or a disorganized student is not only disrespectful, it misstates the case. The analogy doesn't hold for the simple reason that a student's assignment has consequences for that individual student's mark in that individual class. The EdCo Bylaws will shape and affect our own teaching, our future colleagues' teaching, our students, our future students, our classrooms, and the College for a long time to come. The analogy trivializes both the process and the work of EdCo itself.

Can more time be allotted to consider such far-reaching changes? Of course it can. In November 2019, when deciding about an entrance standard for English 12, in order to seek more feedback EdCo voted to delay the vote to March 2020, and therefore gave time to all the FECs to consult and vote. There is no need to vote in the next few months about the proposed revisions. The current bylaws have been working adequately for the last sixteen years; why should we suppose they will somehow fail in the next few months?

Process & Substance

In a meeting in early November, faculty members said they were getting very mixed responses about the proposed revisions to the Education Council Bylaws. They said they heard either no responses, calm complacency, or, anger that these changes were being pushed through in the middle of a pandemic. The wide variety in responses may seem odd, but is explained by the combination of process and substance. The issues of process I have touched on above, and will simply note here that the proposed changes are so far-reaching – in my opinion, they seem designed to neutralize the function of EdCo – that they absolutely demand broader consultation, through faculty/staff/student forums, through being placed on department agendas for feedback,

through having sessions in FECs and by whatever other means will create a thorough consultative process.

There are also serious substantive issues. When the Ad Hoc committee was formed, its terms of reference said that its "Scope of Work" would be to

The revisions undercut the centrality and authority of faculty in EdCo decisions, and shift the balance of authority toward Administration

"update the EdCo Bylaws and the Standing Committees to be consistent with the *College and Institute Act*" and "update the EdCo Bylaws and Subcommittees' [terms of reference] to be consistent with desired governance practices [emphasis added]." If this is so, the proposed bylaw revisions fail at the first fence because some of them are not "consistent with the *College and Institute Act*." The revisions decisively undercut the centrality and authority of faculty in EdCo decisions, and shift the balance of authority away from faculty toward administration. If greater administration control of Education Council is "the desired governance practice", then the revisions achieve that aim; but that still will not bring them into agreement with the clear intent of the statute – that EdCo be, to an extent, independent of administration and that faculty play a central role in its work and its decisions.

As I read them, the revisions seek to remove the independence of EdCo and make it over into a mere creature of the administration. They do so in a number of ways:

- ❑ a new "Executive" committee, which gives the college President undue influence;
- ❑ reduction of the role of EdCo's Chair;
- ❑ control of membership;
- ❑ elections control;
- ❑ redefining majority votes.

I'm going to take a look at each of these in turn, and then offer a brief summing up.

Who's in Charge?

The first two items on the list are bound together because the new Executive committee would be empowered to set the agenda for EdCo, a task currently in the purview of EdCo's Chair (a faculty member). The creation of such a committee splits EdCo into two distinct parts, essentially creating a cabinet form of governance, to which the larger portion would stand in the relation of a sort of captive legislature, rubber-stamping cabinet decisions. Putting the college's President on the Executive committee in essence renders EdCo subservient to administration; and even if individuals, that is, those proposing these revisions, do not intend for that to be the case, creating this structure allows it to happen. When we add to this a further proposed revision, to make the EdCo Chair a non-voting member, it seems clear – at least it does to me – that these revisions aim to transfer power from the full council to the smaller Executive committee.

The larger problem here is the language of the *College and Institute Act*, which says (§3:18): "The chair of the education council must be elected each year by and from the voting members of the education council," which means that making the Chair a non-voting member violates the terms of the statute. While the revision is given the benign-sounding title "Neutrality of Chair," its effect is to reduce the number of faculty votes on EdCo from ten to nine, making it easier, in theory, for

faculty views to be over-ridden.

The proposed revision also seeks to tie the hands of the Chair with its requirement that s/he not "take positions" on matters before the Council either in meetings or elsewhere, without being specifically mandated to do so. One would hope, of course, that all EdCo Chairs would act fairly and impartially both in meetings and in the larger context of college life, and would not represent their own views as emanating from the Council. The need to maintain a distinction between an individual's view and her/his official position is one that any chair must balance, and the EdCo Conflict of Interest Guidelines provide clear and thorough direction. And if the Chair of EdCo is not allowed to speak for the Council, who is? And where would any "mandate" to so speak come from? The revisions do not specify. Along with everything else, the rule is potentially a violation of academic freedom, and it absurdly treats the Chair as being inherently in a conflict of interest position whenever s/he speaks.

Get Thee Gone!

One of the odder proposals is a bylaw which allow elected EdCo faculty representatives (but not other representatives) to be removed from Council for missing three meetings – but not EdCo meetings, rather, meetings of Standing committees. I must confess, the point of this rule escapes me. It seems to me that if there are issues with an EdCo member failing to attend their Standing committee meeting, it should be up to the Standing committee itself to deal with that, or bring it to the attention of the EdCo Chair. Automatic removals, in my opinion, are clearly contrary to the spirit of the *Act*, which says that these are *elected* members; and it is a foundational notion of democratic bodies that elections – whether for parliaments or housing co-operatives – ought not to be undone by mere administrative fiat.

On this note, it's worth pointing out that previous versions of the bylaws stressed the importance of attending meetings because the primary responsibility of members is to cast a vote that has been informed by discussion at the meeting. One of the proposed revisions would allow proxy voting, that is, it would allow an EdCo member to have another voting member cast a vote, even though absent for discussion around a particular issue, that is, it would give one member two votes. Proxy voting contravenes the spirit of a collaborative process where members hear from the presenters and discuss matters, bring the items to their constituent groups for feedback, and return the following month for further discussion and, ultimately, a decision.

Registering Alarm

Another set of proposed revisions wants to seat the college's Registrar as a non-voting member of EdCo. Since the *College and Institute Act* clearly sets out who the members shall be and the number of total members, the addition of the Registrar needs discussion, and would need EdCo's assent.

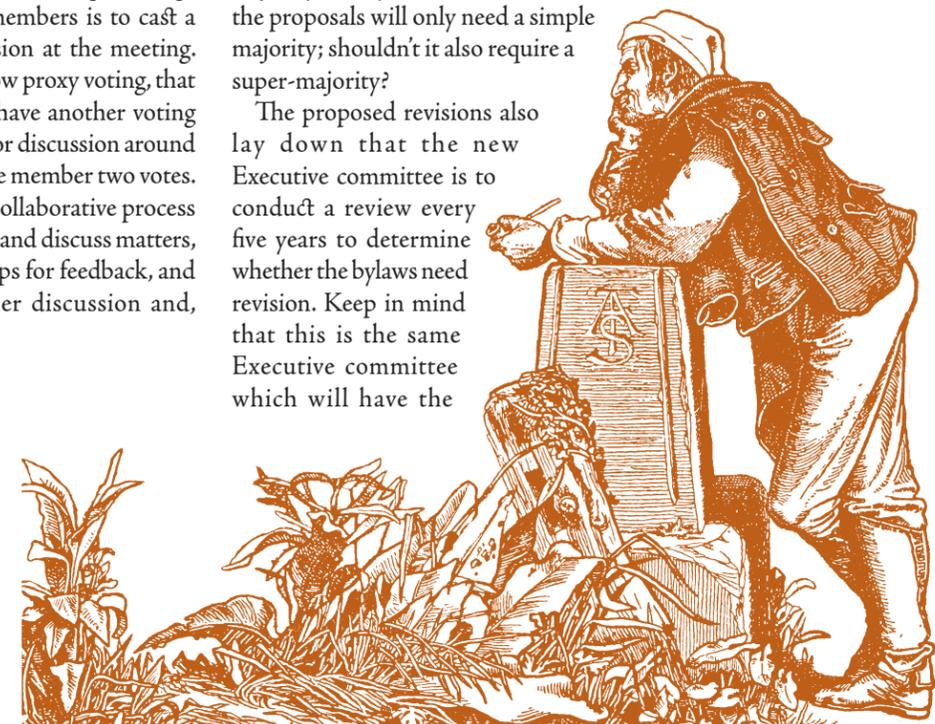
The Registrar pops up in another proposed revision, again under a benign-sounding title, "Terms of Office": "The college registrar, as authorized by the *College and Institute Act*, shall make rules for and conduct elections for the election of members (the election rules)." However, what the *Act* actually says (§3:17-2), and what's been omitted here, is that Registrar can only set up election rules "after consulting with the chief officers of the representative groups." It is notable that the consultation requirement is nowhere to be found in the proposed revision to the bylaws.

The new bylaw goes on to say that "Faculty members elected to the council serve a two-year term and may be elected to further terms"; but then it tacks on the phrase – "according to the election rules." The addition of that phrase gives the Registrar the power to decide how many terms a faculty member may serve, and in effect creates a blanket provision to alter and amend the ways in which members come to be on the Council. If EdCo wants to set term limits for its members (the *Act* does not mention any) that is their decision to make. The proposed bylaw, however, gives the Registrar the ability to change the rules, to add or subtract terms, to do whatever they choose. With a mere comma and a phrase, the revision fatally confuses election rules with term limits, and given that term limits are currently under litigation, it seems to me both reckless and an instance of potential bad faith to put forth any such changes.

Majority Rule?

Currently, most items at Education Council pass or fail on a simple majority vote (11/9). Proposed revisions seek to change this, for some items, to a so-called super-majority (13/7). But the first – and who knows, perhaps the only – result of this would be to make it virtually impossible to ever again revise the EdCo bylaws. This is because bylaw revision is defined in the new bylaws as a matter requiring a super-majority; and yet the current vote on the proposals will only need a simple majority; shouldn't it also require a super-majority?

The proposed revisions also lay down that the new Executive committee is to conduct a review every five years to determine whether the bylaws need revision. Keep in mind that this is the same Executive committee which will have the



college President as one of its members. In practical terms, therefore, once these bylaws are adopted, faculty, who are supposed to constitute half of all EdCo voting members – now reduced to nine because of the Chair’s having become a non-voting, non-speaking member – will only with difficulty be able to achieve enough votes to revise the bylaws, and thus the diminution of faculty authority will be made permanent.

A Long Road

The revision of the EdCo bylaws has been an arduous and difficult process, with the eight members of the Ad Hoc Committee (four faculty, one staff, one student, and two administrators) meeting every two weeks for nearly a year. The Committee put in a great deal of work, and I appreciate the labour involved in the product. However, this revision is but a draft, and in examining the proposed draft revision, the current bylaws, and the *College and Institute Act*, I believe that there are multiple sections that need changes in response to feedback. This indeed, should be the proper process for any complex set of bylaws. Given the response from faculty who opposed the timeline of voting in November, and who expressed concerns about the process, the EdCo Chair decided to hold four special EdCo meetings in October and November, so that members could discuss the substance of the revisions. The special meetings have been framed as being

consultation, but they are not, because those who attend may only observe; that isn’t consultation. To the credit of members of EdCo, the discussion at these special meetings has been vigorous and engaged. The meetings have been working through a list compiled from the emails sent to him by individual faculty members and the Faculty Association forum, and during the debate on these issues, some consensus has begun to emerge about items that must be removed, and others about which final agreement is not clear. Such discussion is good.

However, all of this had been purely discussion, with the EdCo Chair saying that he had been taking notes, and would produce a new draft toward the end of November; but this really only highlights another problem in process. The draft revision was written by an Ad Hoc Committee, and now, after discussion, the Chair has assumed the right to revise the draft by himself. So now a new draft has been written by the EdCo Chair and has been sent out to EdCo members for discussion at the December meeting, and already some EdCo reps have stated that it does not fully address many of the changes that were discussed. The EdCo Chair has said that we will vote on the revisions in January. I say again: in my opinion this process is not acceptable. In the first place, no single member of EdCo should be entrusted to implement all the revisions, and in the second, EdCo should not be expected to vote on an entire draft all at once, as

doing so would make EdCo’s vote necessarily an absolute acceptance or rejection of the entire revised draft, and that is a problem; there are still many changes that need to be made, including for example, clearly explaining the duties of the EdCo Chair, reinstating the specific references to Faculty Education Committees (FECs), and stipulating the Terms of Reference for Standing Committees. The EdCo Chair has individually put in changes, and the second revision to the EdCo Bylaws reflects many of the thoughtful discussions that have happened, but approving the entire package of revisions will not allow for further careful consideration and additional feedback on the new draft by either EdCo members or by faculty in general. Approving the entire package of revisions will not allow for careful consideration and additional feedback on the changes the Chair has put in to place from notes and memory.

A better process would be to work through the proposed bylaws, section by section, and approve them, section by section. By this means, any really problematic sections would go back for further revision. The same process would also allow the non-problematic areas to be quickly approved, so that careful and thoughtful revisions will emerge from the discussions.

All of this is still in process, so it will be necessary to pay careful attention to this new written draft that has emerged, and it is essential that faculty continue

to give feedback about the new draft.

Late Breaking!

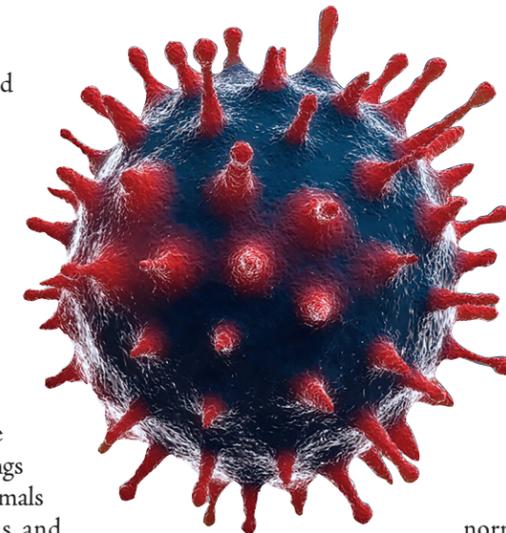
EdCo has just received a newly revised draft of the Bylaws as a “Notice of Motion”, and this means that EdCo is to take feedback from constituents, and vote on it in January. In the EdCo meeting, held on Monday, December 14, some faculty representatives said that they had not heard any feedback from their areas, some said that their faculty were satisfied with the consultation, and some said that their faculty wanted more time for reading, considering, consultation, and then feedback. The decision at the end of the discussion is that EdCo expects faculty to read the information over the Christmas holidays and send feedback by email, and then EdCo will vote either to accept or reject the revision in the January EdCo meeting. Note that with the new revision, faculty now have 101 pages of information to read and process about the EdCo bylaws. The Chair of EdCo has worked hard and made many changes

to this newly revised draft, so that many of the concerns that have been expressed have been dealt with; however, there are still many areas that need to be clarified, edited, and plainly explained.

A vote in January on this new draft does not allow for any further changes, and means that solicited feedback from faculty over the holidays cannot realistically be incorporated into the substance of the vote in January. So, while this new draft is a great improvement and reflects the dedicated and hard work of EdCo, this does not adhere to the requirement in EdCo’s current Bylaws under the “Rules and Procedures”, §4.2 that “Discussion and decision(s) will have proceeded on the understanding that constituencies have had adequate opportunity to consider the item and to provide direction to the representatives.” Please consider whether you feel that you have had “adequate opportunity to consider” the revisions to the EdCo bylaws, and if not, please write to me *and* your EdCo rep, and also the Chair and Vice-Chair of EdCo. jm

Getting Through the Pandemic

Jasmine Nicholsfigueiredo With Some Ideas for Easing Faculty Workload



COVID-19 has certainly changed our world in ways we could not have imagined at the beginning of 2020. We moved to remote teaching in the space of one week, struggled to find suitable technology, and then struggled some more to make it all work. Our homes became our offices and the line between work and home life became indistinct; at times, it felt as if we were “living from work.” We struggled to run our classes and meetings while our children/ spouses/small animals walked through our dining rooms and interrupted to ask where we’d put the salsa, whether we’d remembered to buy the oranges, or to beg for a doggie treat. Our cats curled up on our keyboards and disconnected us from our Zoom office hour. The family circus swirled around us while we tried to structure a “normal” day in an abnormal world.

Added to this mix is the worry of how our loved ones are doing, especially our elders, and those who have health complications. Throw in the dizzying learning curve of new technologies, Zoom fatigue, and the ups and downs of weekly, sometimes daily, COVID announcements, and it can become a struggle to get through the day. We have all faced mental health pressures; our spirits, at times, dropped. We worry about our families, friends, colleagues, and all the people out there who are struggling to stay afloat mentally, physically and financially.

While we certainly feel grateful to continue to have employment that can be carried out from our homes, at the same time, this new world has forced faculty to adapt at a challenging pace. This has been an unprecedented time, and while it is true that with several promising vaccines, an end is in sight, at the same time, we are in a holding pattern that will remain for much of 2021.

For faculty to survive this “new normal,” substantive changes need to occur. What are some modifications that can be made to help faculty? Are there things that College and University administrators can do to help their faculty survive and remain resilient in this exhausting time? I have spent some time talking with faculty, other Union Presidents, and Managers, about ways to help ease Faculty workload, and the ideas that have been suggested are interesting. Below, are some ideas to consider; some seem viable and easy and others not so much, but all of them have been shared with the aim of finding ways to help ease faculty workloads in these trying times, for our shared goal of making things better for faculty, and by extension, for students.

Scaling Change

I’ve been thinking about changes we can make to help keep ourselves both sane and productive, and thinking about them

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on three levels – small-scale and local; medium-scale and slightly broader; and starry-eyed.

For a start, because the workplace is more or less camping out in our home spaces, how about setting a couple of boundaries? Management should consider concluding meetings with faculty by 6PM at the latest, and perhaps all of us could refrain from sending evening/weekend emails, unless the matter is truly urgent. Or think about the way we've been thinking of COVID as a sort of one-year interruption to our "normal" lives. Why not make that a little more concrete by, for example, declaring a one-year hiatus on faculty having to do post-probationary reports? Do faculty really need to add a lengthy written report to their workload? Reflections on a pandemic year might be better left until the storm has passed. In the same spirit, why not extend the recall rights of laid-off faculty from two years – which is what it is currently – to three years?

Faculty have met the challenges posed by the pandemic in large part (along with many other occupations and workplaces) by greatly increasing their use of and reliance on technology. So why not have faculty requests for technology and programs go to one central body? Right now, faculty have to try to figure out which fund they need to access and who to go to about the fund – centralizing might be a way to streamline things for faculty. Again, given the unique pressures of this year, and the six to eight months coming before we can expect a return to

anything like normal life, why not have faculty teach the same set of courses for both of their terms of work? If divided amongst three terms, then try to adhere to something similar. Even a simple change, such as switching a four-hour course that meets twice a week to a three-hour course that meets once a week can create more work and pressure for an online teaching schedule.

Waiting for "Normal"

Eventually, of course, "normal" will arrive, but until then, some medium-scale changes might also help faculty. For example, why not build in a one-week reading break for all three semesters? These one-week breaks would give faculty, and students a week to catch up on marking, creating, posting, and so on. Yes, this would have to go EdCo and the Registrar's office for approval, but it could be a viable option. As well, working from home means that almost all of us have had to create a home office. The college could help faculty offset some of the costs involved by automatically generating for each faculty member a T2200 form (a "Declaration of Conditions of Employment" form) which makes each employee eligible to deduct employment expenses from their income. Currently, these forms have to be requested individually; generating them automatically would speed things up. The college might also consider pausing unnecessary update work, i.e., paperwork. For example, chairs and co-ordinators are required to do a year-end review/report. If the government does not require it for Douglas this year, this might allow our overworked chairs/coordinators to skip this year (and give them some respite).

Dreaming Big

I know from talking to faculty that some longer-serving members have been seriously considering retirement in response to the ongoing crisis. Along these lines, not just our college, but institutions across the province might consider offering early retirement incentives for those who are finding the transition to online teaching too overwhelming at this late stage in their career. The BC Teacher's Federation has suggested that one way to reduce faculty workloads – which have ballooned enormously over the last six months – is to simply reduce class sizes. Reduced class sizes would fit with the second of the themes in the Strategic Plan (Responsive Learning Environments) where the college aims for "campus physical spaces to create safe, healthy and effective environments for students and all employee groups." Is a reduction in class sizes something administrators might consider? Alternatively, how about, for the next two semesters, have faculty teaching loads reduced by one course for the year?

All these ideas certainly offer possibilities, and they could help create a healthier and more sustainable work-life balance for faculty.

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New PD Funds, New Guidelines

Melanie Young, VP Stewardship, Explains

In the last round of bargaining, the Faculty Association was able to unlock provincial funding to create the Supplementary Professional Development (PD) Fund. To make the most of this right that we have bargained for, it is important that, PD Committees create criteria for the fund that will allow for maximum use of the funds within the agreed limitations.

In the case of the Supplementary PD Fund, the agreement says (Article 9.02G) that the fund is for "eligible PD projects/activities that lead to direct and tangible benefits to students." Because this is a new fund, there may be disagreement between the employer and the Association about how the phrase "direct and tangible benefits to students" is to be interpreted in specific cases. This is in some ways a work in progress, something that will be negotiated over time and through practice.

As well, there may be differences between faculties. Though it can be useful to have some cross-faculty standards, the Collective Agreement clearly states that each faculty committee has responsibility for drawing up the guidelines for their faculty (Article 9.02E). So there may be differences, as different faculties and departments have different needs.

Eligibility is a matter to be decided by the guidelines created by each PD Committee. Once the committee has created their guidelines, they use them to decide which applications to recommend. They then pass those

recommendations on to the responsible Administrator for signing.

It's important that each PD Committee decide on what is right for their faculty, within the limits agreed to in the Collective Agreement, and keeping in mind the wording (direct and tangible benefits). Please note that should the Responsible Administrator choose *not* to sign, then the Chair of the PD Committee must be informed immediately and given a reason (Article 9.02E). When this happens, it is important to contact your steward or a Table Officer, so that there can be follow up if necessary.

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Freeing Up Bandwidth

Carrie Keen on "Active Listening"

On November 10th and 12th, UBC Health Promotion and Education, SFU Health Promotion, and BCCampus hosted *Thriving Beyond Campuses: A Dialogue Series Connecting BC Post-Secondary Schools* as part of the COVID-19 Mental Health project. Participants shared perspectives on how a trauma-informed approach can effectively create some relief from the current demands on our cognitive "bandwidth".

It's no secret that everyone is running on limited bandwidth these days. Students are no exception, and like it or not, instructors will invariably get caught up in students' craving for certainty. Good news: it's not too difficult to free up some mutual bandwidth.

Listening from a trauma-informed perspective means thinking "what happened to you?" rather than "what's wrong with you?" Note: that's listening, not asking – active listening is a technique that can be borrowed from the best therapists, without assuming the role! Listening from the perspective of "what happened to you?" does not make an instructor vulnerable; it frees up mutual bandwidth by making student interactions relatively easier to regulate.

Try it – your students and your Self will thank you.

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REVIEW

Who Needs 'Em?

J.P. Henry Tries to Hold Back the Tide of Needless Books

It's surely a mug's game to complain that books are made which don't need to be made, given the abundant evidence that they will continue to be churned out, as publishers search for each year's elusive best-sellers. One could, of course, wag a disapproving finger and cite scripture – "Of making many books there is no end" – except that that phrase turns out to be a mis-translation of the Preacher's more anodyne and (slightly) less pessimistic – "Writing books involves endless hard labour." And who could argue with that?

So why persist in making books that don't need to be made?

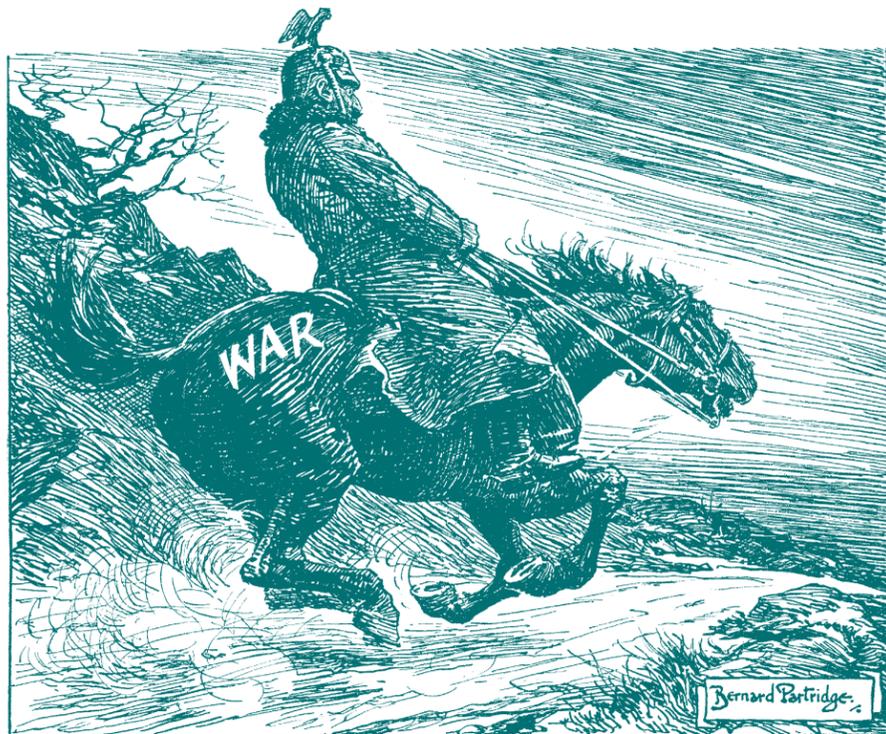
Should we blame the publishers? Always on the scout for a sure-fire success, they are like the movie studios continually hunting for a hit. That's why, in fact, there are so many movie sequels (*Rocky XIII: Retirement Home Smackdown*, anyone?), and so many films based on best-selling novels, better yet, on best-selling series' of novels (*Harry Potter and the Post-Doc of Doom?*), because the studios believe that the audience for such films is pre-sold, and that therefore, the sequel or the continuation will be a success. All that has to happen is for readers to show up in disguise as movie-goers. Simple, right? And as with the studios, so with the publishers, who would rather gamble on a book with an (apparently) pre-sold audience than gamble on something new. And I should be clear that I'm not blaming the writers or the publishers. Rather, it's the wish of both to satisfy the desires of readers – or at any rate, The Reader as publishers conceive that figure: as a simple creature, happy to be spoon-fed more of the same; but at the same time as a wayward creature, liable to turn on you in an instant and bite your hand, transforming your proud printings into additional tons of dead weight heaped on the already groaning remainder tables. The motivation of the publishers seems clear, and that is, not so much to make money (though that's always nice), but rather to not lose too much money, for it is a fact that most hardback books from most publishers do not turn a profit.

The motivation of the writers is probably also fairly simple, and it is something which authors, even humble self-publishers, are well-known for: Vanity. Ever since *Ecclesiastes*, Vanity has had a bad press, but the truth is that it is an indispensable quality which writers must have to some degree, in order to write at all. Indeed, if the Preacher is correct, that "Writing books involves endless hard labour," why then, without a dose of Vanity – the belief that one is capable of the work, and that, once done, others will be interested in reading it – it's likely no books would ever be written. But that portion of writerly Vanity which publishers appeal to is, I believe, more social than individual, an appeal to their standing much more than an appeal to their sense of whether a given project, a given book, is worth the labour the writer has to invest, where perhaps a different book, one prompted by the writer's own Vanity, their own self-direction, might be a better choice.

Cashing In?

So much by way of introduction. Herewith, an example of what is, in my opinion, a completely unnecessary book, Margaret MacMillan's (2013) *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914*. I chose this one partly out of annoyance at having spent good money to buy it, but mostly out of my feeling, as I finished it, that it hadn't arrived in my hands as a result of the writer's genuine desire, but more likely because of the publisher's desire to cash in on an earlier, and unexpected success.

So can we accuse Margaret Mac-Millan, professional historian, of cashing in? Well, the book was issued in October 2013, just in time for both the Christmas retail rush and for the presumed spike in interest in the First World War that



A cartoon from *Punch* published in 1917. At this point in the war, the imputation that the Kaiser is trying to restrain his mount was probably intended as ironic.

would begin in 2014, the centenary of the war's start. As well, between January and August of 2014, MacMillan wrote four brief pieces about the War for the *Guardian*, each of them functioning, essentially, as advertisements. Reader, would you like to know more about Margaret MacMillan's views on World War I? Lucky you, she has a current volume available for purchase.

So why did MacMillan write the book? A dozen years earlier (2001) she had written a well-regarded – indeed a fascinating book – on how the victors had hammered out the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I: *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*. The book charted how decisions were made, how deals were brokered, and looked briefly at the consequences of those decisions over the eighty years that followed. From the publisher's point of view, what could be better than a second book to parenthesize the war, the first book dealing with how a peace was made, and the second with how a peace was lost. This was indeed my first guess upon reading the book, that it owed more to the publisher's desire than to the author's, and, checking the "Acknowledgements" in MacMillan's book, I found this:

Five years ago I did not intend to write a book on the outbreak of the Great War; the path had been too well-trodden and I had other projects under way. When Andrew Franklin of Profile Books put the idea to me, I resisted – and then spent the summer thinking about it. So I owe him perhaps a small grudge but a much bigger thanks for getting me involved in an enthralling project. Without him and his wonderful team at Profile ... this book could not have taken shape.

A tiny bit depressing, but alas, par for the course in this sequelizing world.

Fine People

My main problem with MacMillan's book, however, then and now, is that it suffers from a bad case of "both-sides-ism," that is, the journalistic notion that there must always be two sides to any difficult question, and that we will always find equal portions of right and blame on each. But that isn't really the case, is it? To cite a well-known example, it simply wasn't true that in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017 there were "fine people on both sides." If you're a Nazi and a racist, you're just not a fine person, meaning,

in broad terms, that there was a preponderance of blame on the one side and a preponderance of right on the other. So in dealing with the question of who amongst the major powers was most responsible for starting the war, MacMillan inclines to the view that there were fine people on both sides, even though the evidence she presents shows that it was Germany above all which continually took actions that made war more likely, and Germany which allowed the final crisis in July of 1914 to balloon into war because its Junker generals believed it was their last chance to smash France and Russia.

MacMillan repeatedly draws our attention to the truism that what one actor does (say, Britain, trying to build dreadnoughts faster than Germany could build dreadnoughts) can look very different to an actor on the other

side, that defensive measures on the one side can look like acts of aggression on the other. The problem is that this tends to absolve Germany of the utter folly of its ambition to dominate Europe, and thus reduce the other powers, particularly France, to subordinate status. Since the other nations were never going to sit still for that, pursuing the policy meant pursuing war, meant welcoming it, in fact.

In 1918, the victors were in no doubt about where the responsibility for the war lay. The Versailles Treaty included a clause (**Article 231**), which said that "The Allied ... Governments affirm, and Germany accepts, the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which ... [the Allies] have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by aggression of Germany and her allies [emphasis added]." The clause quickly became notorious as the "war guilt" clause, but as MacMillan showed in her earlier volume, the assignment of responsibility was included by the Allies primarily as a way to set a legal basis for reparations (**Article 232**), that is, the money that Germany was required to pay for having caused immense losses and damages in the process of violating

the sovereignty of its unoffending neighbours, especially Belgium, which suffered a brutal four years of occupation. Even though the Austrians swallowed the same two clauses without a murmur, the Germans didn't want to, and only signed the Treaty because the Allies threatened them with occupation, or even a renewal of hostilities. In the event, the new Weimar government almost immediately began to decry the clause as unfair, even going so far, as Donald Kagan noted, as to create a section in the Foreign Office – the *Kriegsschuldreferat* – "to direct and finance propaganda to prove that Germany was not responsible for the war and, therefore, that the treaty was unjust."

Surprisingly, this latter view – that Germany was not responsible and the treaty unjust – became the dominant one in the interwar period, supported by the notion that the European nations, all of them, had been sleepwalkers tumbling into the abyss of war mostly because they had tied their own hands in a series of mutual assistance treaties. Thus, Germany wasn't any more responsible than England and France. In the 1960s, a conservative German historian, Fritz Fischer, upended this consensus by doing detailed work in the Wilhelmine archives to show that Germany had wanted to dominate the continent and that it pursued this goal for two decades preceding the outbreak of war. Fischer, some historians thought, went a little overboard in accusing the Kaiser's government of being able to formulate and then stick to a nefarious master plan for such a long period of time, but if we take Fischer's thesis to indicate an enduring attitude within Germany's ruling elite (and there is abundant evidence of this, much of it cited by MacMillan herself), then it explains why Germany did nothing to halt the crisis in 1914, and everything it could to egg it on, up to and including its pressuring the Austrians to deliver a swingeing ultimatum to Serbia, which it knew would trigger Russian mobilization and thereby trigger its own plans to invade France. By getting the Russians to mobilize first, the Germans hoped to create a figleaf of justification for their actions.

It seems to me possible that MacMillan's views on this may have been influenced by some of the revisionist historians of the 1980s, who thought that Fischer had gone much too far (and that anyway, he was a conservative). In a late Cold War context, demonizing the other seemed like a poor strategy, given the nuclear stakes, and so in looking at the causes of the First World War, they arrived at the notion that responsibility for the war rested with the Entente powers, chiefly Britain, for imagining Germany as a demonic other, and therefore not doing more to appease Germany's needs. As one of the revisionists put it: "perhaps the proper lesson is not so much the need for vigilance against aggressors, but the ruinous consequences of refusing reasonable accommodation to upstarts [like Germany]." This seems an odd way to respond to aggression, though historically it has had at least one proponent, the hapless Neville Chamberlain.

"Intelligent" Leadership

The problem with all this is that it elides an important component of the actual context in which the people of 1914

viewed their world and their choices – and this in spite of MacMillan's *pro forma* warning to us that we must strive to not look at the past through twenty-first century eyes. For radicals and progressives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of the chief enemies of progress was aristocracy. While MacMillan canvases in detail the nascent (and really very tiny) peace movement of the pre-war years, she almost completely ignores the anti-monarchical and anti-feudal side of the opposition to the governing élites. Why? Maybe because, in its focus on class, it seems a little too, well, a little too Marxist, perhaps even a tiny bit vulgar. In any event, while she recognizes the power which an idiot like Kaiser Wilhelm had, she is reluctant to judge him as the narcissist and bully that he was, and tends to assume that because he occasionally was up to his duties as head of state he ought to be accorded some deference; and so she does, at least in terms of the way he is – along with all the other flannelled fools and entitled idiots – presented in the book. Thus, she tells us, early on, that Wilhelm was a "complicated and bewildering character," and a little later that he was "intelligent with an excellent memory." How are we to square this with her judgement that Wilhelm "thought of himself ... as a master of diplomacy and insisted on dealing with his fellow monarchs, often with unfortunate results. Sadly," she continues, "he had no clear policies beyond a vague desire to make Germany, and himself,



Another *Punch* cartoon, this one depicting the entente cordiale of 1904. While not an alliance as such, the entente was widely viewed as a pledge of mutual support against Germany. When Germany tried to split the entente by blowing up the first Morocco crisis (1905), it only strengthened Anglo-French relations.

important." I don't think "sad" quite conveys the magnitude of the disaster of having someone serving in an important office who is impulsive, belicose, not exceptionally bright, and in many other ways unsuited to the job.

MacMillan implies that it was having a fool at the top which led to German foreign policy being "too often incoherent" (an odd phrase, and not really true, given the underlying consistency; I think she might mean "confusing," for the other European powers), but by applying the both-sides-ism yardstick, she is able to avoid drawing out the obvious corollary, that it was this leadership which was a precipitating factor of the war. Perhaps war would have erupted anyway, at some point, without Germany acting as a constant disruptive force in Europe; but that constancy, and that disruption virtually guaranteed that war would happen, thus, the Kaiser and his entourage must bear a great deal of the responsibility for the catastrophe. That, and the aristocratic system which put not just one weak man or fool at the top of the decision-making tree, but many of them, Wilhelm's cousin, for instance, Tsar Nicholas of Russia, or Bülow, the German chancellor until 1909. Of Bülow, MacMillan tells us that while he had "not initially been an enthusiast for [German] colonies, he rapidly came around to include them as part of his vision," but she neglects to clearly mention why he did so, and that was, to fawn on and flatter and please his master, the idiot with the crown.

A curious leitmotiv in MacMillan's descriptions of these ministers and lords is "intelligent"; nearly all of them, in her accounting, turn out to be "intelligent," but then she will typically add a list of qualities and behaviours which show them to be anything but "intelligent." In the end, the epithet becomes almost empty of content, and as I went farther into the book, I began to bristle each time it came up, suspecting that I was in for another round of genteel fibbing. Good manners and good taste are not necessarily markers of intelligence, yet MacMillan several times runs these categories together; one gets the feeling that if some particular aristocrat had a collection of paintings, or could write a book on fly-fishing, why that is enough to qualify them as "intelligent."

Navy? What Navy?

To some extent, MacMillan also mis-represents the arms race of the first decades of the century, when Germany and Britain engaged in competitive battleship-building. In Germany's case, this was to create a powerful navy from scratch, and in Britain's, it was to make sure that its home fleet was not outgunned by the burgeoning German fleet. In the minds of Wilhelm and his top advisers, she tells us, making Germany a player in the community of nations meant "having a blue-water navy, capable of projecting German power on the high seas, to protect German trade and

investment and, importantly, German colonies, both the existing ones and the ones to come." Yet just a few pages later, she contradicts this by noting (accurately) that the German warships were built with cramped crew quarters and short operating ranges, that is, specifically *not* built to protect trade and colonies on the far side of the world, but mainly to project power in their local area, the North Sea. The clear implication of those design choices, not lost on the British, was a German desire to cripple the ability of the British home fleet to either operate independently (say, blockade the continent, a traditional strategy) or to assist any continental allies it might have. German naval policy was thus not just idiotically stupid, but a criminal folly, gambling the lives and prosperity of its citizens to satisfy the half-baked ideas of a vainglorious and stupid prince.

Men like Selbourne and the Kaiser were the residual legatees of an ancient mafia-style protection racket

Aristocracy was not, of course, an exclusively German handicap. Of William Palmer, Earl Selbourne, MacMillan says that he was "one of the more competent First Lords of the Admiralty in the period before the war," but leaves it to the reader to draw the obvious conclusion that many aristocratic commanders and politicians, because they gained their positions through birth or connections, were for the most part not particularly competent – Haig, for example, who surely tried his best but was simply not up to the job, and who then doctored the record to remove a number of blots to his copybook. Instead she keeps telling us how "intelligent" selected aristocrats were. Men like Selbourne and the Kaiser were the residual legatees of an ancient mafia-style protection racket, which the progressives and radicals of the time fully recognized as such and fought against, but which latter-day

writers tend to gloss over, as they also tend to downplay the situational – if not actual – narcissism which being placed in high position, with little real accountability, and surrounded by fawning "lessers," is likely to engender. "King," after all, is just another name for a dictator, and dictators have more in common with gang bosses than with democratic politicians.

Inconceivable Stupidity

In short, while MacMillan's centenary volume covers the ground, it provides no additional insights into the war or its causes, nothing particularly striking which goes beyond accounts which had been published in the previous fifteen years. Worse, from my point of view, is that she seems to go out of her way to suggest that nobody in particular is to blame for starting the war, by presenting a picture of the responsible statesmen as, for the most part, "intelligently" doing their best according to their lights. It wasn't their fault, poor chaps, that tragedy struck them.

Except that that isn't true.

There were any number of outrageously irresponsible statesmen who led the charge, mostly German and Austrian,

but with a huge assist from the Serbians and their patrons the Russians (with the British and French fumbling behind), many of whom were if not outright idiots, then at least not incredibly bright or far-seeing, and who gambled they could get away with whatever the latest scheme was because, as aristocrats, for most of their lives they had seldom had to deal with the consequences of their follies, either personal or political. Nevertheless, the fact that aristocrats on all sides were often foolish and unqualified cannot in itself absolve Germany from its responsibility for pursuing war and then rushing to embrace it at almost the first decent opportunity that presented itself.

MacMillan spends a few pages looking at the non-aristocratic Henry Wilson, Director of Military Operations for the British Army, because it was mainly his doing that Britain actually had an Expeditionary Force ready to go to France in the late summer of 1914. Wilson came from a not particularly well-off Irish gentry family, and had made his way in the Army through ability, to the point where, at the end of the Boer War (1902), he was being actively scouted by several generals to be their chief of staff. Why? Because he was competent, a rare enough quality in the British Army at that time to make him stand out. MacMillan reports, as if an amusing anecdote, the insulting nickname his fellow officers gave him ("the ugliest man in the British Army") but neglects to tell us, first, that it wasn't really true, as numerous photos attest, and second, that he acquired it as a result of a combat wound to his face. In short, the nickname is the kind of downward looking insult which aristocratic officers were likely to stick onto someone who had gained his place by skill rather than, like Haig, through the old-boy network and connections at court.

MacMillan also manages to omit some of Wilson's sharper opinions of his "betters." After the meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defense in August 1911, Wilson's impression of Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Minister, and Viscount Richard Haldane was

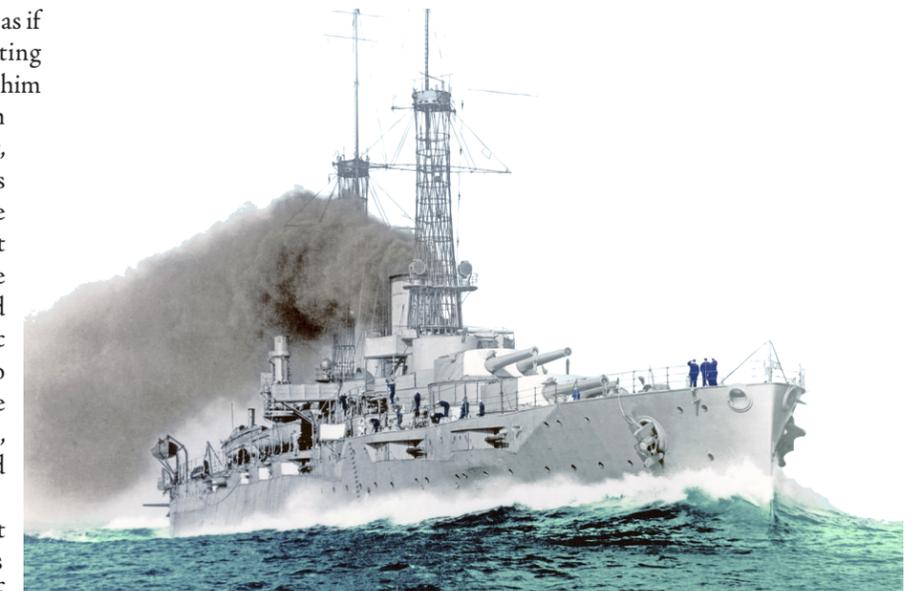
distinctly unflattering. The meeting had been called in the immediate aftermath of the Agadir Crisis to discuss various hypothetical continental war scenarios. In his diary, Wilson recorded himself as unimpressed by "the grasp of the situation possessed by Grey and Haldane, Grey being much the most ignorant & careless of the two, he not only has no idea of what war means but he struck me as not wanting to know ... an ignorant, vain & weak man quite unfit to be the Foreign Minister of any country larger than Portugal." There is also this opinion of Wilson's from the year previous:

As commandant of the British Army's staff college in 1910 ... [he] asserted the likelihood of a European war, and argued that Britain's only prudent option was to ally itself with France against the Germans. A student ventured to argue, saying that only "inconceivable stupidity on the part of statesmen" could precipitate a general conflagration. This provoked Wilson's derision: "Haw! Haw! Haw! Inconceivable stupidity is just what you're going to get."

Presumably, he knew whereof he spoke.

If MacMillan had been able to give more credence to the objections of the progressives and radicals of the era, their conviction that aristocracy was at the root of many of their societies' problems, perhaps she might have been able to offer us a sharper – though inevitably briefer – appreciation of the personalities and processes that led Europe into the catastrophe of the Great War. As it is, she mostly epitomizes a mass of received opinions, which she then boils down into a sort of historical pabulum, easy to digest (if you don't inquire too deeply into how it was cooked), but ultimately unsatisfying.

Truly, this was an unnecessary book. Should we be hard on books like this? Probably not too hard, because even the least necessary of books, the ones that owe their existence purely to the desire and vanity of the publishers, rather than the writers, even those books are read and enjoyed by many. Decrying the amusements of others ill-becomes us, in one sense, even though I feel a duty, in another sense, to warn readers away from such books by telling (what I see as) the truth about them: that they are meritricious at worst, and mere door-stoppers at best. A waste of perfectly good trees, so to speak.



What some of the fuss was about – a dreadnought. The USS New York, underway on 29 May 1915. She assisted the British fleet in the North Sea from December 1917 until the war's end. After being used as one of the ships in the 1946 atom bomb test at Bikini Atoll, she was sunk for target practise in 1948.