

## IN MEMORIUM

John J. Furedy (30 June 1940 to 24 August 2016)

*Janice Fiamengo*

For those who care about the erosion of academic freedom at western universities, John's death extinguished a voice of rare courage and clarity. His example, though, lives on as a continuing inspiration. John Furedy was a Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, where, as he was proud to note on his webpage, he held the record for the longest consistent occupancy of a faculty office in his building (1967-2005). Colleagues recall him cycling to work, summer and winter, wearing one of his large collection of Hawaiian shirts, arranging the lunchtime bridge game as his first task on reaching his office.

He specialized in aspects of psychophysiology and psychopathology such as deception. He energetically denounced the "lie detector" (polygraph) as a dangerous fraud ("a psychological rubber hose" (see [www.antipolygraph.org](http://www.antipolygraph.org)), as well as many of the claims made for biofeedback, arguing for systematic as against pseudo-scientific evaluative methods. His representation to the Canadian Supreme Court against the admission of polygraphic evidence was influential in the decision of Justice McIntire to disallow such evidence in criminal courts (1987).

He also researched sex difference in human and animal cognitive function, with applications in, for example, smoking cessation programs. On these and other subjects of public import, he published over 300 academic papers and books. His lab received NSERC and other funding, enabling him to support undergraduate and graduate students and to travel extensively to present papers. He was honoured with the Gantt medal for outstanding contributions to psychology by the Pavlovian Society in 2000. Upon his retirement in 2005 (after which he and his wife Christine moved back to their home country of Australia), he was lauded for his commitment to high-level research in his field and to higher education generally.

It was this latter commitment that reached well beyond the bounds of psychophysiology. John was motivated by an enduring passion for the ideal of disinterested scholarship and free discussion, even of controversial or offensive ideas, in the pursuit of truth. He often referred to the fact that he and his family, having survived the Nazi regime, had left Hungary to escape Communist oppression and that therefore he was particularly sensitive to the "velvet totalitarianism," as he phrased it, that he detected in many of the speech codes and disciplinary procedures that he saw emerging at the University of Toronto and academia generally in the late 1980s. He spoke out against these from their beginnings until well after his retirement, contrasting the climate of fear developing on Canadian campuses with his own experiences at the University of Sydney in the late 1950s and 1960s, where he was privileged to receive a robust education in philosophy and psychology prior to speech-stifling political correctness.

In defense of freedom of thought and expression, John argued within academia against equity hiring and other measures that circumvented scholarly merit. John questioned the assumption that preferential hiring equated to "excellence" in universities. (See <http://www.safs.ca/newsletters/issues/nl74.pdf>). He repeatedly affirmed that university life should be about education through the conflict of ideas, not about indoctrination in approved thought. He charged that ensuring the "comfort" of various designated groups would ultimately destroy the academic enterprise (see: <http://www.safs.ca/newsletters/issues/nl18.pdf>). He held senior administrators responsible for the deterioration in freedom of speech in institutions of higher education. For that reason he jostled publicly with presidents of his own university, such as Robert Birgeneau (2000-2004) and David Naylor (2005-2013). He criticized what he saw as Naylor's willingness, in regard to the Danish cartoon controversy (2006) and other issues related to Muslim campus sensitivities, to "conform to political fashion rather than to adopt a principled and timely support of freedom of speech." He pointed out the parallels between Soviet totalitarianism and the soft totalitarianism of campus thought control, particularly its reliance on uninterpretable laws against "hate," the reign of unqualified pseudo experts, who determined what could and could not be said, and the demonization of dissidents. He also wrote many letters to national newspapers, particularly the National Post, on such matters as the absurd relativism of identity politics, the

repressive effects of Canada's hate speech laws, the biased reporting of the CBC (which he called "a paradigm case of intellectual masturbation"), Israel's right to self-defense, and the ideological corruption of the Canadian Supreme Court. He was always willing, it seemed, to put himself squarely in the line of fire for his principles, arguing tirelessly, with wit and zeal, over many years. "I love freedom and hate its suppressors," he quipped on one occasion in a letter to the Post about Canada's so-called Human Rights Commissions. "So sue me."

To this end, he was a founding Board member (1992- 2001) and President (1993-8) of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship. He believed SAFS, September 2016 SAFS Newsletter No. 74 3 regardless of size of membership, had an important role to play in Canada. He obtained support from the Donner Canadian Foundation in 1995 which greatly helped in extending SAFS' activities (see <http://www.safs.ca/newsletters/issues/nl09.pdf>, <http://www.safs.ca/newsletters/issues/nl16.pdf>). In 2001 John and Chris donated a fund in memory of John's father and mother which supported an academic freedom award and other initiatives of SAFS.

Among the issues he prosecuted as a SAFS member, together with members of the board (in particular Doreen Kimura, Peter Sued Feld and John Mueller) was the appropriateness of guidelines for ethics research boards that were being reformed in the 1990s. He supported ethical research, but opposed a "medical model" of research being applied to all human research, subjects having control over research outcomes, and non-specialists ruling on matters for which they had no expertise, such as detailed research design. (See: <http://www.safs.ca/newsletters/issues/nl14.pdf>).

John gave many papers and public talks warning against the incursions of political correctness into all aspects of university life and research, ridiculing and debunking the "purity platoon" at his own university (which sought to cleanse course materials of anything offensive to women or minorities), defending professors' right—indeed duty—to teach their classes as they saw fit, free from fear of frivolous student complaints—and advocating for both students' and professors' right to debate controversial subjects and to claim unpopular positions in wider campus discussions. (He always emphasized that academic freedom extended to students as well as faculty.) He obviously enjoyed debate, confident in his own intellectual abilities and equally confident that truth can only be found through free exchange of ideas, and must be zealously pursued.

In the same spirit of pugnacious and principled resistance to totalitarian correctness, he accepted in 2005 honorary appointments at the University of Haifa and Bar-Ilan University in Israel in response to what he identified as the anti-academic and increasingly anti-Semitic boycott campaign of the British Association of University Teachers and other academic bodies. John's fighting spirit shone as a beacon at a time of timorousness and repression on Canadian university campuses. When histories of velvet totalitarianism are written, John's valiancy should form a stirring chapter.

John Furedy's website is at: <http://www.psych.utoronto.ca/users/furedy/>

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