

Robert Dawson (Saint Mary's University)

Editor, CMS Notes

The great Oscar Wilde, during his time in Reading Gaol, is said to have commented "If this is the way Queen Victoria treats her prisoners, she doesn't deserve to have any." *Se non è vero, è ben trovato...*

Prisoners have little choice, but others can sometimes vote with their feet. In the years leading up to the Second World War, many German citizens — many, but not all, Jewish — reacted to the intolerable conditions developing there under the Nazis by emigrating. Canada, to our shame, did little to help. Among the refugees and migrants were many notable scientists: the countries that took them in, the United States in particular, were the richer for doing so.

In the 1950s, the United States was in the grip of McCarthyism. Universities were one particular target of the "Red Scare," and a number of American intellectuals decided that their country was no longer a hospitable or safe place to live and work. Some moved to Canada, among them the mathematicians Lee Lorch and Chandler Davis. This time, America's loss was Canada's gain.

Today we see, almost daily, stories from south of the border describing government attacks on academic freedom. Universities are being bullied into suppressing free speech on campus; research programs are being shut down because some twenty-year old coder thinks he has found a red-flag word in a project description. (Don't laugh too hard... in the 1990s Randy White, Reform MP for Fraser Valley West, read that somebody had been given a research grant to study "Lie theory." Mr. White reckoned that there was quite enough "lying" going on in the world without NSERC's help, and denounced the research grant as a waste of taxpayers' money. The United States does not by any means have a monopoly on the ultracrepidarian and underinformed.) Important work on epidemiology and vaccine development is apparently being obstructed to please the anti-vax movement.

Will we see another wave of American academics hoping to move to Canada? News stories suggest that the movement has already begun. But in science as in so many other areas, the United States has long been a world powerhouse, a role that the Trump government is today putting at risk. If Canada can potentially attract some leading American scientists who are no longer getting the support of their own government, by providing a better working environment, it might be a good thing, one worth some judicious investment on the part of our government.

Let me be clear: there are others with far stronger humanitarian cases for entry to Canada. This would not be a refugee program — absolutely no funds should be diverted away from assisting the truly desperate for this. Rather, it would be a business decision, a way to strengthen our universities and research institutes. If some top researchers can no longer work effectively in the US, and could do so here, should Canada seize the opportunity? No doubt there are arguments against this as well, but it's probably a debate worth having.

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Canadian Mathematical Society — 616 Cooper St., Ottawa, ON K1R 5J2, Canada