

**ReConforming Our Universities:
The Campaign for an
Academic Bill of Rights,**
by David Horowitz,
Washington, DC: Regnery
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Campaign Chronicle

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David Horowitz's latest in a series of books on the corruption of higher education by radical politics is an account of a campaign that he began in 2003 to persuade universities to adopt an Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR). The ABOR is a brief declaration consisting of eight points based in large part on the venerable 1915 statement by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Its most important provisions are first, that both faculty hiring and grading of student work be based on merit alone without regard to political or religious beliefs, and second, that

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“exposing students to the spectrum of significant scholarly viewpoints on the subjects examined in their courses is a major responsibility of faculty.” These two provisions would effectively prevent instructors from using their courses for purposes of political indoctrination.

Horowitz's earlier book *Indoctrination U.: The Left's War Against Academic Freedom*, written in 2006, already included the text of the ABOR and a brief account of what had happened up to then, but he now gives us an updated and altogether fuller account of how the ABOR has fared.

Two previous books by Horowitz were attempts to document the extent of the problem of politicized higher education: *One-Party Classroom* (2009) and *The Professors* (2006). The former documented political indoctrination in one hundred-fifty courses on representative American campuses, the latter profiled one hundred professors who, though plainly political ideologues rather than scholars, hold prestigious posts on elite campuses. The aim of Horowitz's new book is not to document the extent of the problem, but rather to chronicle his attempt to deal with it through the ABOR. Yet paradoxically, it ends up being the most convincing

documentation yet of how serious the problem is, and it is his opponents who give us that documentation. The inevitable objection to *The Professors* and *One-Party Classroom* was that one hundred-fifty courses and one hundred professors constitute a small fraction of 1 percent of the total: how representative are they? There is a perfectly good answer to this objection. These cases are tolerated even after they become well-known, and are not corrected. Nevertheless, the idea that cherry-picking the worst cases doesn't prove very much won't easily go away.

What Horowitz's ABOR campaign has done is to force the other side to declare itself. It says, in effect: very well, if the problem is really as insignificant as you say it is, you should have no trouble in subscribing to some very simple, innocuous language that says that hiring and grading should be free of political discrimination, and courses should carefully analyze complex issues rather than simplify them through omitting everything that might impede proselytizing for one side. Horowitz's opponents faced a choice whether to accept or reject his language. In retrospect, one can easily see what their best move was. Language close to that of the ABOR already exists in many places

throughout the academy. The 1915 AAUP statement is incorporated by reference in the regulations of countless universities but is routinely flouted everywhere, because administrations are afraid to enforce it. It would have been easy enough to add the ABOR to these already existing statements, to go on ignoring all of them, and to keep insisting that there was not a problem. Horowitz's opponents lost their heads and made a foolish strategic mistake: they attacked the ABOR with great ferocity. Rather like the shrewd old Zulu king in the classic movie *Zulu*, Horowitz had in effect drawn their fire so that it could be seen how much of it there was and where it would come from. And the fire came thick and fast from everywhere: from professional associations that represent almost all professors in a particular discipline like the Modern Language Association of America or the American Historical Association (AHA), from the American Civil Liberties Union and the AAUP, from unions and from the Democratic Party, as well as from individual legislators, faculty, and administrators.

That fire was frenzied, wildly inaccurate, and utterly incoherent. The ABOR was attacked as totalitarianism, mind policing, thought control, affirmative action for Republicans, and (what else?)

Nazism. The opposition was hysterical and out of control. Only the American Council on Education (ACE) kept its head, agreeing to adopt a slightly watered down version of Horowitz's language and then doing nothing to enforce it, thus successfully burying the issue by seeming to hand Horowitz a victory. The other organizations by contrast made the fateful mistake of allowing Horowitz to smoke them out and make them show just who and how many they are, what they are doing, and how vehemently they insist on being allowed to continue doing it. This was a genuine victory for him, and a huge one.

All of the empirical research of *The Professors* and *One-Party Classroom* could not do what Horowitz's ABOR campaign has done. It proved beyond any shadow of doubt that (1) a significant number of American professors will not accept any restriction on their ability to use political criteria in faculty hiring and firing as well as in student grading, or their use of the classroom to indoctrinate; (2) this is indeed what they are currently doing; (3) though probably not a majority, they are at least a strong enough minority both to control professional associations and to intimidate administrators into letting them do what they want to do; and (4) left-wing politicians know that the

campus is being used for their benefit, and bitterly oppose any attempt to change that. We know all of this because that is what his opponents foolishly admitted to in their panic over Horowitz's ABOR campaign.

Understandably, Horowitz himself is disappointed that his campaign did not achieve its stated goal—to get the ABOR adopted across the country. That is what he set out to do, and it didn't happen. Correspondingly, he is inclined to see the ACE's shrewd concession as a victory. But though there is some justification for his reaction here, at a deeper level the results are the other way round. After years of denial that there was a problem, and of pooh-poohing one egregious example after another as unrepresentative and anecdotal, the political radicals finally let themselves be maneuvered into openly nailing their colors to the mast, and showing the extent of their power, numbers, and ambitions. Never again can it plausibly be said that there is no problem of politicized higher education, and for this we are all greatly in David Horowitz's debt. His earlier books worked toward the goal of documenting the scope of the problem, but this one is the clincher.

The ironies here are too many to count. For example, the AAUP originally earned a position of respect in the American academy

through the work of its Committee A, which protected so many academic teachers against political persecution. Yet now it uses the prestige gained through that noble work to do exactly the opposite—to protect political corruption of the American academy. And no disciplinary body of faculty was prouder of the training it gave its Ph.D.'s in the careful use and characterization of sources than the historians, yet now the AHA willfully misreads a document that explicitly bans political criteria as implementing “the imposition of political criteria.” Most comic of all is the claim that the ABOR asks for affirmative action for Republicans. Calling for all decisions to be made on merit alone would certainly be an odd way to ask for affirmative action—isn't that exactly what anti-affirmative action legislation does? Readers of this book cannot fail to be impressed by Horowitz's conduct of the campaign for the ABOR. He is patient, flexible, thoughtful—and never gives up. He is always seeking out common ground and trying to find a mutually acceptable compromise. This is not at all the rigid ideologue that some of his detractors see him as.

Horowitz laments the fact that he didn't get help from people and groups who might have been

expected to help, and there is some truth in this. And yet elsewhere in the book he himself puts his finger on a factor that goes a long way to explain why this might have happened. As he talks about the beginnings of the campaign for ABOR, Horowitz concedes that he is “a poor candidate to lead a campaign for academic reform” because of his high conservative public profile. This is no trivial point. Reform of higher education will only succeed if it is understood to be about the sharply reduced quality of a higher education corrupted by politics. But it will not succeed if it can convincingly be portrayed instead as a partisan attack by the political Right on the generally left-leaning professoriate. When a spokesman for academic reform is also a conservative Republican who is highly visible in national partisan politics, as Horowitz is, it becomes much easier for campus radicals to shift the emphasis away from the question of educational quality and towards partisan political motivation.

And so it's not hard to understand why some of those who are involved in the movement for higher education reform would want to stay well clear of high profile partisan politics so that they can have a better chance of keeping the emphasis of

their own efforts more firmly on educational quality. But a decision about how best to deploy one's own efforts has nothing to do with the quite separate question of appreciating what David Horowitz has managed to do in spite of this handicap. On that question, I'll repeat what I said in the blurb that I wrote for the back cover of

Indoctrination U.: "Everyone who cares about a genuinely liberal college education...will be grateful for David Horowitz's tireless, relentless, and above all well-judged efforts to rescue it from the intellectual trivialization and monotony of radical politics. Nobody else has done so much or been so effective."