



Montréal, March 5, 2009

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

350 Albert St.
P.O Box 1610
Ottawa, ON K1P 6G4

To members of the Governing Council

SUBJECT : Targeting – where will it end – a new form of « censorship by obligation »

Sir/Madam,

Since the new federal budget was unveiled and adopted on January 27, 2009, there has been widespread and strong reaction to those budget measures affecting funding of university research, which representations, however, the government has ignored. On the contrary, some measures have been implemented post-haste, notably the decision to target funding to business-related research for grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

For many years now FQPPU has protested the growing tendency on the part of governments to directly impose their own priorities for research on academics and universities. FQPPU believes that politicians in no way possess the necessary knowledge and legitimacy to set research priorities and above all to predict which research areas are the most likely to produce benefits for Canadian society.

The federal government has not only kept provincial transfer payments for higher education at the same inadequate level as previous years but has also, through its policies, systematically shown a narrow view of the contribution that higher education and research make to society's development. In its directives to granting agencies in the last several years, it has instituted mandatory research fields related to its political and economic goals. In short, the Canadian government continues to demonstrate its profound misunderstanding of the research process and discoveries, the most important of which only become apparent in the long term and sometimes in unexpected ways. By doing so, it puts at risk the foundation of scientific research in Canada.

For SSHRC, the imposition of « business-related » as a criterion for the award of grants in the humanities and social sciences is especially worrying and constitutes a precedent which must be protested. Under cover of adding a single selection criterion, this policy forces grant applicants to reformulate their projects to increase their chances of success, thus creating a new kind of censorship – censorship by obligation. We are astonished that the SSHRC Governing Council has acted on this directive without showing any resistance to such simplistic targeting. The recent publication of Andrée Lajoie's *Vive la recherche libre !* (Liber, 2009), deploring the ever-shrinking proportion of funding available for independent research, raises a red flag concerning this tendency which has reached a new « peak » with SSHRC's apparently meek implementation of this government directive. Already, jury members for grant applications are faced with a dilemma – should they comply or not with a criterion which they judge to be completely unacceptable.

We urge you to respond to these measures imposed by the government and to defend freedom of research in our universities.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important issue, and with my best wishes,



President

P.S. Reminders : petition and letters of protest :

NDP Petition: <http://nikiashton.ndp.ca/sshrc>

ACFAS letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper :
http://www.acfas.ca/acfas/media/pdf/Lettre_premier_ministre_Harper.pdf

CAUT letter to Prime Minister Harper regarding increasing funding for Canada's research granting councils (Feb 12, 2009) :
http://www.caut.ca/uploads/20090212_Harper_FundingResearch.pdf