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Academic Freedom Under Fire: David Horowitz's Crusade for the "Academic Bill of Rights"

By John K. Wilson

In the latest installment of the culture wars, right-wing activist David Horowitz has written his own declaration of independence from political correctness: the "Academic Bill of Rights." Introduced as legislation in Congress on October 21, 2003 and proposed for several state legislatures, Horowitz's manifesto is the first stage in a carefully planned assault on academia. The American Association of University Professors called it "a grave threat to fundamental principles of academic freedom." Yet both the media and the politicians have overlooked the serious flaws in Horowitz's studies of alleged bias in higher education, and his own statements proposing to sharply narrow academic freedom.

In 2002, Horowitz launched his "Campaign for Fairness and Inclusion in Higher Education" with the slogan, "You Can't Get a Good Education If They're Only Telling You Half the Story." Horowitz demanded that administrators "conduct an inquiry into political bias in the hiring process for faculty and administrators" and the selection of commencement speakers and allocation of student fees. Horowitz also demanded that universities "adopt a code of conduct for faculty that ensures that classrooms will welcome diverse viewpoints and not be used for political indoctrination, which is a violation of students' academic freedom." While much of Horowitz's crusade against American colleges has been ignored, the "Academic Bill of Rights" has proven popular with Horowitz's allies in the Republican Party.

On October 29, 2003 the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee held a hearing on the alleged lack of "intellectual diversity" in American colleges. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), Secretary of Education for George Bush Sr., worried that "We've created in our country these wonderful colleges and universities with enormous freedom, yet on those campuses, too often all the discussion and thought goes one way. You're not honored and celebrated for having a different point of view." Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) declared, "There is a tremendous gap, a gulf between faculty on most of our college campuses and the mainstream American values."

Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) chaired the hearing, and plans other hearings on the alleged political bias of history textbooks and accreditation agencies. Echoing Horowitz's famous phrase, Gregg proclaimed, "How can students be liberally educated if they are only receiving part of the story?"

Arguing that college survey courses are being “squeezed out for trendy pet courses,” Gregg wants to dictate curricula. Earlier in 2003, Gregg introduced the Higher Education for Freedom Act (S.1515), which orders the Senate to “establish and strengthen postsecondary programs and courses in the subjects of traditional American history, free institutions, and Western civilization.”

Horowitz has made even greater inroads in the House of Representatives. At an October 21, 2003 press conference, Horowitz’s employees and student supporters stood with Republican leaders in Congress to introduce the “Academic Bill of Rights” as legislation. The bill, copied word-for-word from Horowitz’s text, proclaims “the sense of the Congress that American colleges and universities should adopt an Academic Bill of Rights to secure the intellectual independence of faculty members and students and to protect the principle of intellectual diversity.”

In June 2003, according to The Hill, Horowitz met with Kingston, vice chairman of the House Republican Conference, and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), and Kingston began drafting the bill. Horowitz also met with Majority Whip (and former college president) Roy Blunt (R-Mo.). Kingston’s bill has at least 19 co-sponsors so far, and with the powerful support of DeLay (the man who once blamed school shootings on the teaching of evolution) and the lack of Democratic opposition, it has a strong chance to be passed by Congress.

The Biased Research Behind the Academic Bill of Rights

Horowitz’s “Academic Bill of Rights” is based upon a series of deeply flawed studies cited by him and his supporters. According to Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.), the head of the House Republican Conference and chief sponsor of Horowitz’s bill, “At almost every American university, conservative professors are drastically outnumbered. And the number of liberal guest speakers outnumbers the number of conservative guest speakers by a margin greater than 10-1, limiting the opportunities for conservatives or anyone else who does not sing from the same liberal songbook.”

In fact, no one has ever done a study of the ideological views of guest speakers at any American college, but the “10-1 margin” is an almost mystical number to Horowitz and his supporters. Left-wing commencement speakers supposedly outnumber conservatives at elite colleges by a “10-1” margin according to Horowitz (counting as left-wingers Ted Koppel, Jim Lehrer, Cokie Roberts, Bob Woodward, Thomas Friedman, Judy Woodruff, Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, Claire Shipman, Charlie Rose, Keith Obermann, Scott Turow, David McCullough, Stephen Carter, Kofi Annan, Doris Goodwin, Steven Bochco, Henry Winkler, Steve Wozniak, and former Republican governor Lowell Weicker). Horowitz also routinely (and falsely) asserts that Democratic college professors outnumber Republicans by this “10-1” margin.

Kingston’s press release makes the claim that “some of America’s finest institutions of higher learning have no conservatives on staff,” a whopper of a tale that even Horowitz has never asserted. According to Rep. Kingston, “Most students probably graduate without ever having a class taught by a professor with a conservative viewpoint.”

Co-sponsor Rep. Walter B. Jones (R-N.C.) issued a press release that declared, “Statistics have shown that while campus funds are available for distribution to all on-campus organizations, funding is doled out to organizations with leftist agendas by a ratio of 50:1. Such biased financing results in a deluge of liberal speakers being invited to step up to their soapboxes far more often than those with a conservative bent.” This claim, like others made by Horowitz, is utterly false (Horowitz doesn’t even have a badly-designed study to support it, it’s simply his guess). There has been no accurate study of funding for campus speakers, and the notion that groups with “leftist agendas” receive 50 times as much funding as anyone else is nonsense. Repeating the mantra of David Horowitz, Rep. Jones declared, “This legislation is needed because you cannot get a good education only hearing one side of the story.”

Horowitz’s false statistics about academia are repeated over and over again in the media. The Wall Street Journal (9/19/03) declared in an editorial about his ideas, “Democrats outnumber Republicans by a 10-to-1 margin in a recent study of political affiliation at 32 leading American universities.” A Chronicle of Higher Education report (2/13/04) claimed that Horowitz “has conducted studies finding that at 32 universities he deemed ‘elite,’ Democratic professors and administrators outnumbered Republican colleagues by a ratio of more than 10 to 1.”

What Horowitz’s “studies” examined was a small proportion of faculty at elite colleges, looking only at the voter registration of professors in fields such as Economics, History, English, Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology. Horowitz intentionally selects the departments that he thinks have the most Democrats in order to distort the results, and his website advises students about which departments to investigate in order to provide the most deceptive figures. His researchers found that less than half of faculty in these departments could be identified as registered Democrats, along with a small number of registered Republicans, from which Horowitz creatively reports his deceptive 10-to-1 claims.

Take Harvard University as an example. Horowitz’s researchers looked at a couple hundred professors in a handful of departments, and found 77 registered Democrats, 11 registered Republicans, and 127 whose registration couldn’t be determined. But consider this: Harvard in the fall of 2002 had 1,997 faculty (plus 428 medical faculty). The 77 Democrats identified by Horowitz are less than 4% of the total. Horowitz has no idea about the party affiliation of the 127 faculty who couldn’t be identified, and no clue about the 1,780 faculty he never examined (including 208 faculty in Harvard’s business school, which is hardly a center of Marxist ideology). Horowitz doesn’t know how 95% of faculty at Harvard vote, and because of his biased sample, he has no basis to say anything about them. Horowitz’s studies only identify the political affiliation of fewer than half of the faculty in a small number of departments. Faculty who don’t bother to register to vote are probably not politically active members of the thought police, so Horowitz’s omission of them is a significant bias in his studies.

Horowitz’s supporters cannot be completely blamed for wrongly asserting that these surveys cover all faculty, because Horowitz is the source of this falsification. Horowitz’s own writings quickly omit all of the necessary qualifications on these studies. Horowitz

wrote on his website (9/3/03) about “a study conducted of 32 elite colleges by our researcher Andrew Jones which found that registered Democrats on these college faculties outnumber Republicans by 10-1.” In another article about his studies of selected departments, Horowitz also pretended that he had studied the entire faculty: “Two reports recently released by the Center for the Study of Popular Culture reveal that 93.6% of the faculty at Colorado University (Boulder) and 98% of the faculty at Denver University who registered in political primaries were Democrats, a distribution that clearly suggest a bias in the system of training and hiring academic faculty. A previous report by the Center showed that the average ratio of Democrats to Republicans on 32 elite colleges was 10 to 1 and in some schools was as high as 30-1.” Horowitz routinely claims that these highly selective “surveys” are studies of all faculty at a college, even though he has never conducted a scientific survey using basic random sampling techniques at any college.

Of course, it is probably true that Democrats outnumber Republicans among college professors, albeit not nearly to the extent that Horowitz claims. UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute surveyed full-time college faculty and found that in 2001-02, 5.3% called themselves “far left,” 42.3% “liberal,” 34.3% “middle of the road,” 17.7% “conservative,” and 0.3% “far right.” It’s not an equal balance of ideology, but the fact that 52.3% of college faculty are centrist or conservative suggests serious flaws in Horowitz’s claims.

But Horowitz offers no evidence at all of systemic discrimination against Republicans. He doesn’t, for example, compare the political affiliations of new Ph.D.s applying for jobs and those hired in a field. Party affiliation and ideology don’t always match (Democrat John Silber, president of Boston University, is one of the most conservative academics in the country), and there are many reasons why academics may tend to be Democrats. Most academics, especially at elite universities, live in heavily Democratic urban areas, and in many areas you have to register as a Democrat to have a meaningful vote in local politics. Some professors may be Democrats out of self-interest, because Democrats typically support greater funding for higher education.

But the most obvious reason for any political imbalance in academia is that well-educated Republicans generally are not interested in spending years getting a Ph.D. in order to qualify for a small number of low-paying jobs, a problem that is worse in the humanities and the social sciences where Horowitz claims to see the greatest discrepancies. More funding for higher education, if it led to more tenure-track jobs and better faculty pay, would attract more Republicans into academia and cause more professors to become Republicans as they grew wealthier. But Horowitz’s goal is not simply to increase the number of Republicans teaching Shakespeare; Horowitz’s explicit aim is to silence and intimidate the “left-wing ideologues” on college campuses.

Horowitz’s Attack on Academic Freedom

Horowitz’s interpretation of what should be banned on college campuses goes far beyond any mainstream concept of academic freedom. In a Sept. 30, 2003 speech in Denver, Horowitz declared that he was appalled to find anti-Bush views expressed on the office doors of some faculty in town. The Denver Post (10/1/03) reported how Horowitz

explained in a speech that the purpose of the Academic Bill of Rights is to ban professors from expressing their political views in the classrooms or their own offices. According to Horowitz, “There were hostile cartoons aimed at Republicans and conservatives. How does that make conservative students feel? We have arenas in which we can proselytize, but the classroom or the office where students come in for office hours is not one of them. That’s what the Academic Bill of Rights is. That’s why I drew it up. Faculty should save the world on their own time.” Horowitz also denounced Joan Foster, the president of the faculty senate at Metropolitan State College in Denver, for appearing at a rally criticizing him, arguing that it was a “betrayal of her professional role” for her to express her views in public.

If the purpose of the Academic Bill of Rights is to prevent political science faculty from putting political cartoons on their office doors and expressing their views in public, then it represents an unprecedented attack on academic freedom. Even Joe McCarthy might have hesitated before trying to ban cartoons.

In his op-ed for the Rocky Mountain News on Sept. 12, 2003, Horowitz admitted the conservative agenda behind the Academic Bill of Rights he’s pushing: “In the course of my visits to college campuses I became aware of problems that led to the drafting of this bill of rights. Among these were overt politicizing of the classroom (for example, one-sided faculty ‘teach-ins’ on the war on terror); faculty harassment of students — generally conservatives and Christians, but increasingly Jews; politically selective speakers’ programs and faculty hiring practices, which have led to the virtual exclusion of conservatives and Republicans from the university public square.” The Academic Bill of Rights is intended to force colleges to provide more conservative voices, and presumably would even ban any teach-ins by faculty that Horowitz might regard as “one-sided.”

Horowitz’s History

The “Academic Bill of Rights” is not David Horowitz’s first assault on higher education. After growing up in a Communist-influenced home, he was a leading campus radical in the Sixties before becoming disillusioned. Horowitz jumped from the far left to the far right just in time to profit from the Reagan Revolution, and he made a good living denouncing his former radical friends. Horowitz runs the oddly-named Center for the Study of Popular Culture, which he uses to denounce everyone on the left, from Noam Chomsky (“the most treasonous intellect in America”) to anti-war protests to academia. In the 1990s, Horowitz ran a right-wing publication called Heterodoxy that led the parade against “political correctness” on campus (Heterodoxy eventually morphed into his current website, www.frontpagemag.com).

But it wasn’t until 2001 that Horowitz made a big splash nationally. That’s when Horowitz turned his commentary against reparations from slate.com into a full-page advertisement for college newspapers. The ad was typical for Horowitz, declaring that African-Americans benefited from slavery, and wondering: “Where’s the gratitude of black America?”

Mistakenly thinking that a conference on reparations in Chicago was being held at the University of Chicago, Horowitz ran his ad in the Chicago Maroon, where it was ignored on the conservative campus. But at California State University at Northridge, the student newspaper refused to run the ad, and Horowitz knew he had a winner. Horowitz began placing his ad around the country, denouncing “censorship” whenever it was rejected. When some angry students protested against college papers running Horowitz’s ad and a few trashed newspapers, Horowitz was overjoyed at the attention it gave him.

The controversy also exposed Horowitz’s hypocrisy. Horowitz threatened public college newspapers with lawsuits if they refused to run the ad. And when the Daily Princetonian ran Horowitz’s anti-reparations ad but also wrote an editorial that condemned Horowitz as a publicity hound and promised to donate the money from his ad to the Urban League, Horowitz retaliated: “When I read the editorial, I told my office to put a stop-payment on the check.” According to Horowitz, “I was not going to pay for abuse.”

Horowitz does not tolerate criticism. In the fall of 2002 at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Horowitz reported in his blog (11/5/02), he came upon a woman with a sign denouncing him as “Racist, Sexist, Anti-Gay.” Horowitz wrote: “I didn’t regard this as speech so much as a gesture like kicking me in the groin. It seemed extremely perverse of her to be defending her right to slander me to my face. So then and there — in front of her and the university official — I ripped down her sign.” Congress is telling the world’s leading colleges to take lessons on academic freedom and diversity from someone who destroys signs that criticize him and then brags about it.

The Language of Horowitz

Horowitz is a brilliant manipulator of language. In fact, he’s written guidebooks for Republican Party activists on the tactics of rhetorical warfare. But his campaign “for” academic freedom may be regarded as his finest use of distortion to serve his political ambitions.

For years, Horowitz has led a crusade against academic freedom, aiming to denounce and undermine academia in America. But now he realizes that the best way to defeat his enemy is to use their words against them. Therefore, Horowitz has appropriated the language of academic freedom, diversity, and affirmative action in his efforts to destroy these things on college campuses.

Horowitz doesn’t believe in what he says about diversity and academic freedom and hostile environments. He only finds it politically useful to use the language of free expression to manipulate the debate. As he has admitted, “I have undertaken the task of organizing conservative students myself and urging them to protest a situation that has become intolerable. I encourage them to use the language that the left has deployed so effectively in behalf of its own agendas. Radical professors have created a ‘hostile learning environment’ for conservative students. There is a lack of ‘intellectual diversity’ on college faculties and in academic classrooms. The conservative viewpoint is ‘under-represented’ in the curriculum and on its reading lists. The university should be an ‘inclusive’ and intellectually ‘diverse’ community.” Horowitz’s rhetoric is a mix of savvy

manipulation and mockery. He uses “academic freedom” as his rallying cry to undermine academic freedom, and “intellectual diversity” as his justification for silencing diverse ideas he doesn’t like.

Horowitz does not believe that higher education should be a place of diverse ideas and dissent. To the contrary, he sees colleges and universities as mere training grounds for the corporate world. According to Horowitz, “the university was not created—and is not funded—to compete with other institutions. It is designed to train employees, citizens and leaders of those institutions, and to endow them with appropriate knowledge and skills.” Horowitz has a chilling vision of the university as a servile institution creating good workers who never dissent—a vision that, despite all of his complaints, colleges typically fulfill.

The media have reported on Horowitz’s campaign uncritically, as reflected in the headlines of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (10/22/03), “Bill Seeks Neutral Politics at College,” the Hill (“Kingston Backs Academic Diversity Measure”), the Associated Press (“Kingston proposes Bill of Rights for college campuses”), and the Washington Times: “Bill backs academic freedom; Republicans seek intellectual diversity at colleges.”

The Dangers of the Academic Bill of Rights

In all of his defenses of the “Academic Bill of Rights,” Horowitz repeatedly claims that critics cannot point to anything objectionable in the language of this Bill of Rights. But Horowitz misses the point: the question of enforcement is critical. An analogy can be made to journalistic ethics. We all want journalists to be truthful and ethical and fair. But we don’t want legislators to pass laws that try to prohibit “false, scandalous and malicious writing” (the words of the 1798 Sedition Act, one of the worst laws for civil liberties in American history).

There are many cases where wise ideas make for bad policies when enforced. For example, everyone agrees that campus speakers should provide “a legitimate educational experience or otherwise contribute to the University’s mission,” but Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington decided to require that administrators pre-approve campus speeches to make sure they meet these guidelines (after canceling a speech by a Planned Parenthood official and banning the play “The Vagina Monologues” last year). Ethical guides are perfectly appropriate when adopted by professionals and extraordinarily dangerous when imposed by universities or the government as punishable offenses. Although the current language of the Academic Bill of Rights is voluntary, Horowitz and Republican politicians intend to impose more conservatives on higher education. Rep. Kingston told CNSNews.com, “This will cause the colleges and universities to have a self-examination and maybe make some changes. But if they’re not willing to do that, we hope that the parents and the taxpayers of America will force it upon them.” Horowitz has written on his website, “We are appealing directly to the trustees and state-appointed governing bodies of these institutions as well.” He added, “We call on state legislatures in particular to begin these inquiries at the institutions they are responsible for and to enact practical remedies as soon as possible.”

Horowitz has repeatedly expressed his belief that universities cannot be reformed from within, and faculty and administrators cannot be trusted: "If there is to be reform, it will have to come from other quarters." His claim that the provisions of the Academic Bill of Rights will be purely voluntary, therefore, cannot be believed. "Unfortunately, we live in a time when we can't trust our professors, all of them," Horowitz has noted. "Only the actions of legislators will begin the necessary process of reform."

Horowitz has also met with college trustees in an effort to have them exert greater control over leftist professors. One supporter of Horowitz's Academic Bill of Rights is Jon Caldara, head of the right-wing think tank Independence Institute, who told the Rocky Mountain News: "Don't blame David Horowitz for this. Blame a bunch of pansy-assed regents who won't stand up and demand ideological diversity on college campuses."

Horowitz and his allies hope to pressure these "pansy-assed regents" to infringe upon the academic freedom of faculty, all ostensibly in the name of academic freedom.

The Academic Bill of Rights is an attack on higher education disguised as a defense of neutrality and academic freedom. But as Jonathan Knight of the American Association of University Professors noted about Horowitz's bill, "Academic freedom suffers when political figures start to insist that they must cultivate intellectual diversity."

Horowitz's National Crusade

The Washington Times (9/15/03) reported that Horowitz has spoken to Republican leaders in 20 states, and he claims that several unnamed states are planning legislation. Horowitz has also met with the University of California Board of Regents and the University of Oregon administration. According to Horowitz, "I first came up with the idea of an Academic Bill of Rights in the course of discussions with the chairman of the board of regents of one of the largest public university systems in the United States. The chairman was enthusiastic about the bill and assured me he would make it the policy of his institution. He was particularly encouraged because he could see no objection to its particulars that might be raised from any quarter." Horowitz accurately sees the pro-business trustees and legislators as his allies in the fight to squash liberal ideas. But he realizes that the traditional protections of academic freedom prevent his goal of intimidating leftist faculty.

Horowitz made a brilliant innovation: use the concept of student academic freedom in order to undermine faculty academic freedom. A Wall Street Journal editorial praising Horowitz noted (9/19/03), "Academic freedom has long been a battle cry on campus, but what makes this push distinctive is the student angle — a reflection, no doubt, of the increasing discomfort of conservative students, many of whom believe that they suffer in the classroom for their views." By asserting that students have equal claim to academic freedom with their professors, Horowitz would give students a powerful stick to wield over faculty. Any bias alleged by a student could result in professors being hauled before an ideological tribunal to evaluate their teaching techniques. Although this would pose a severe threat to faculty academic freedom, Horowitz justifies it by appealing to a new concept of student academic freedom.

Horowitz's Center for the Study of Popular Culture created a group called "Students for Academic Freedom" which claims to have established chapters on 100 campuses around

the country in order to “appeal to governors and state legislators to write The Academic Bill of Rights into educational policy and law.”

The Battle for Colorado

Colorado was the first state in Horowitz’s efforts to impose the “Academic Bill of Rights” on every college. Horowitz first proposed an Academic Bill of Rights at a July 2002 conference of the Association of Legislative and Economic Councils, where Gov. Bill Owens and Colorado Senate President John Andrews heard about it. In June 2003, Horowitz came to Colorado and met with 23 Colorado Republicans, including Owens and Andrews. After his meeting in Colorado was revealed months later, Horowitz defended it as nothing out of the ordinary: “My office had made an appointment with the governor, and I walked in the front door of his office to spend a half hour with him, a privilege of ordinary citizens.” While few “ordinary citizens” from Colorado get to meet with the governor, a far-right activist from California was invited to present his plan to help Republicans exert more control over academia.

Horowitz claimed in his Sept. 12, 2003 op-ed for the Rocky Mountain News, “I have no idea what Owens or Colorado legislators are proposing in their efforts to deal with the troubles on our college campuses.” In reality, Horowitz knows exactly what these top Republicans want to do. Christopher Sanders, a Republican staffer who helped arrange the June 12 meeting between Horowitz and the Colorado Republicans about the Academic Bill of Rights, told the Rocky Mountain News: “They had the discussion...on how to put teeth into it, to make them accountable to the legislature and the governor, how to create it in such a way that it was enforceable and that the schools had to do it, so it wasn’t just a nice warm-fuzzy statement...The discussion involved their funding on an annual basis, when their budget is renewed.”

Yet the Academic Bill of Rights that Horowitz is pushing declares, “Nor shall legislatures impose any such orthodoxy through its control of the university budget.” Horowitz is vague about the enforcement of his Bill of Rights, but he has publicly declared, “Personally, I hope it’s tied to funding.” Horowitz thinks legislators should intimidate public (and perhaps private) colleges that allow faculty to express political views by cutting government funding, in exact opposition to the words of his own Academic Bill of Rights.

Fearing Horowitz

Horowitz’s denunciations of liberals provoke fears that he wants to restrict academic freedom. Even some Republicans worry that Horowitz’s Academic Bill of Rights and crusade against leftists in academia goes too far. John Donley, a Republican and former state lawmaker who now teaches political science at a Colorado community college, told the press: “The far-right conservatives control the Colorado House, Senate and Governor’s Mansion, but that isn’t enough – they’ve decided they want to control our classrooms.”

Jesse Walker, associate editor for the libertarian magazine Reason, wrote about the Academic Bill of Rights: “As broad principles, these are solid stuff. As enforced rules, they open the door to, say, a biology student lodging an official complaint because her

professor gave short shrift to Creationism.” According to Walker, “In the ’80s and ’90s the anti-P.C. backlash began, in part, because students offended by putatively bigoted courses were responding not by debating their professors but by taking them to the collegiate equivalent of court. It would be an unpleasant irony if, in 2003, the anti-P.C. backlash ends with conservative students earning the right to do the same thing.” Walker concluded, “There’s no such thing as a perfectly balanced debate, and a heavy-handed effort to create one is more likely to chill speech than to encourage it. The most worrisome thing about Horowitz’s group is the sneaking suspicion that that’s exactly what they want.”

Horowitz responded, “Walker suggests that my Academic Bill of Rights could have ‘chilling effects’ on academic freedom. The missing context is this: What academic freedom?” Because Horowitz believes academic freedom already has been destroyed by left-wing faculty, he is unconcerned about any dangers legislative control over higher education might pose.

Horowitz imagines a brave new academic world where faculty are kept on a short leash. In his exchange with Walker, Horowitz wrote: “The Bill of Rights clearly recognizes that the teacher has the right to teach the course as he or she sees fit. The only limit to this right is article 5: ‘Exposing students to the spectrum of significant scholarly viewpoints on the subjects examined in their courses is a major responsibility of faculty. Faculty will not use their courses for the purpose of political, ideological, religious or anti-religious indoctrination.’ Having audited a course at one of the premier liberal colleges in the country, where a 600-page Marxist textbook on ‘modern industrial society’ was taught as though it were a text in Newtonian physics, I can testify that this is very necessary right to protect academic freedom in the contemporary university.”

In Horowitz’s vision of the Academic Bill of Rights, a professor who merely teaches a sociology textbook disliked by Horowitz is guilty of violating these rights and should be subject to punishment. As Walker put it, “I’m actually sympathetic to the idea that students should have more power on campus, but not this sort of power; not the right to lodge official complaints against professors for the views they choose to explore in class.”

Horowitz has a Messianic vision (“our tiny band of supporters of academic freedom approaches the coming battle with the campus totalitarians”) of his heroic campaign against liberal academics. The Academic Bill of Rights is just the first step in Horowitz’s campaign for ideological control of higher education in America. Once the Bill of Rights and its vague provisions are put in place, Horowitz will then expand his call for enforcement by legislators and trustees, using the Academic Bill of Rights to demand the firing of leftists who express political views in their classrooms, and forcing the hiring of conservatives. His allies will be able to sue colleges for breach of contract if the Academic Bill of Rights is violated by “one-sided” presentations or politically-minded faculty.

Horowitz wants to plant ideological time bombs on college campuses, first passing an innocuous-sounding “Academic Bill of Rights” in state legislatures and Congress, and then using these vague provisions to investigate professors for their textbook choices and to silence dissenters who dare to post political cartoons on their office doors.

The notion of the federal government attempting to impose Horowitz’s brand of conservative correctness on every college in the country is frightening. During the McCarthy Era, the enemies of academic freedom were sometimes explicit about their attack on academic integrity. Now the enemies of academic freedom are cloaking their assault on liberal professors in the rhetoric of student academic freedom. But although the attacks have become much more sophisticated, the aim is still the same: to purge left-wing and liberal ideas from college campuses.