



May 8, 2022

Dear Chancellor and Members of the Board
re: Censorship at Ryerson University and other problems

We note with disappointment the announcement of the name change, but our concern in writing now is failures in the process by which the decision was reached, notably—new to us—and perhaps to you—that the university engages in censorship. Yet, the Standing Strong Task Force announced a “thorough, open and transparent” process of consultation (p. 7), a point made several times in the document.

One of our members, Professor Lynn McDonald, contacted Dr Lachemi (on February 27, 2022) to ask for access to the briefs received, and was informed at a meeting set up by his executive assistant, Michael Forbes, with Rachel DiSaiao and Michael Baker, held on April 5th, that the briefs would be made available through the Archives, but only after a lengthy process of “redaction,” our word, “censorship.” That is to include all names of those submitting, even those of persons and organizations who did not ask for secrecy, plus further “redaction” of “racist” content. It was troubling to learn of racist content, but how can it be countered if it cannot be considered and assessed?

Perhaps it is time to consider provincial legislation to ban censorship at institutions of learning.

We continue to be concerned about the toxic atmosphere at the university. The “going forward together” statements are hypocritical. Students who are pro-Ryerson say that they are shunned if they say anything favourable to him or oppose the name change. Students, faculty and staff remain as uninformed about Ryerson’s considerable merits, including his having lived with Ojibway people, learned their language, been named a “brother” by an Ojibway chief, and supported their land claims. The Task Force report included many positives, but they were relegated to Appendix D.

The plaque, erected in July 2018, beside the Ryerson statue, would have been seen by everyone over the three years it was up, by some every day. It made the monstrous claim that Ryerson was “instrumental in the design and implementation of the Indian Residential School System,” when the Task Force itself admitted he was not the “architect.” The plaque included the words “unthinkable abuse and neglect, to medical experimentation, punishment for the cultures or languages and death,” its aim “cultural genocide.” Horrors, yes, but Ryerson supported the voluntary, bilingual schools that Indigenous leaders themselves wanted and had nothing to do with the system put in place after his death.

If people had known how pro-Indigenous Ryerson was, they would have been comforted in seeing his statue on campus, instead of being hurt, as so many were.

We urge:

- That the Board require the president to reverse the university’s censorship policy and facilitate timely access to submissions (with exceptions as deemed appropriate).
- That the Board require the president to apologize for the placing of the plaque with fallacious accusations against Egerton Ryerson and begin the process of redress by making known Ryerson’s pro-Indigenous work.
- That the Board require the president and all officials at RU to discontinue references to Egerton Ryerson as if he were implicated in the residential school system.

signed by 66 Friends of Egerton Ryerson