

staff were arrested and physically beaten and one university staff member¹ failed to have his Fiji work permit renewed. Another academic, a Fiji national, has taken up a position at an Australian university after he was detained and severely beaten following his scathing review of General Rabuka's self-justifying book *No Other Way*. Other Australian universities have been beneficiaries of ex-USP academics who find the atmosphere of Fiji inhibiting of academic enterprise on campus. Vice-Chancellor Caston's statement (see box) is a historic and inspiring one and he, and the academic staff of the University of the South Pacific, deserve the sympathetic attention and support of the Australian academic community. Their position is indeed a precarious one if university ideals of free speech and unfettered enquiry are still to be pursued in the South Pacific.

Ron Witton

Austimner NSW

1. Dr Robert Robertson, joint author of *Fiji: Shattered Coups* (Pluto Press, 1988) and now head of Social Sciences, Bendigo CAE.

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LETTERS

The real role of tenure

I am writing in response to the article by S.V. Rao and W.W. Bostock which appears in Volume 32, No. 2 of your publication and is entitled "The Place of Tenure in Efficient Academic Organisations". While I find it objectionable that the authors seem to accept uncritically an undefined notion of efficiency as being applicable to the academic world, my major criticism of their article is more basic. The authors of this piece accept without analysis the idea that Academic Freedom is a good to be preserved and that the way to achieve this preservation is through the mechanism of tenure for academics.

While I might well agree that Academic Freedom is a goal and a good to be pursued I find it difficult to accede to the notion that tenure necessarily leads to such freedom or that it is prerequisite to the practical exercise of such freedom. The authors fail to recognize or analyse the real nature and role of tenure within the University as it operates today. Universities operate and survive within a culture and a society which itself functions through the replication of inequalities and hierarchies. Tenure within the University does little more than reproduce, at the level of both the reality and the ideology of the institution, those very same structures of inequality.

Thus, we have a system in which the hierarchy of tutor, lecturer and professor (and the various gradations within these levels) is strengthened by the distinction between the tenured and the non-tenured. The role work and stature of the academic are not measured by neutral or objective criteria but by the position which he/she holds in the hierarchy.

Moreover, the idea that Academic Freedom is assured by the replication of such hierarchical structures and roles is absurd. Tenure and promotion are based themselves on criteria which operate on the very same principles which serve to preserve and promote inequality. Scholarship is, of course, the most obvious example. If the criterion for tenure is contribution to scholarship, and one works within a discipline and an institution which are hierarchical in nature, then the only recognizable contribution to scholarship which one can make is one which will serve to reproduce these evils. The investment of the institution, the discipline and the individual is such that no other result can be expected. Rather than promote freedom, tenure simply promotes the continued reproduction of the accepted orthodoxy and

with it the continuation of oppression. The solution seems quite clear. Abolish tenure or grant it to everyone. But in the meantime let academics come out from behind the very effective ideological curtain of "Academic Freedom" and face the fact that our so-called freedom is freedom in the service of oppression.

David Fraser

Tenure and academic freedom

The need for academic tenure is commonly justified by the need to protect academic freedom.¹ In the many cases of dissent by academics which I've studied, I can certainly affirm that tenure has been crucial in protecting some of them from dismissal.²

On the other hand, there are many academics who do research or speak out on controversial issues who are not tenured. How is tenure essential to their academic freedom?

Furthermore, it can be argued that the process by which academics gain tenure actually discourages the exercise of academic freedom: to make themselves suitable candidates for appointment and promotion, many scholars avoid rocking the boat in any way. The many years of being cautious in order to get a permanent post ensure that most tenured academics hardly know what it means to undertake research or to speak out in a way threatening to powerful interest groups.³

My conclusion is that the relation between tenure and academic freedom is much more complex than commonly stated. I present here a few notes towards a reformulation.

In material terms, tenure is essentially protection of the employment conditions for certain workers. It is only to be expected that academics would use whatever means possible to establish and maintain their job security. From this perspective, 'academic freedom' is, in part, a rhetorical claim used to defend security of employment.

Earlier in the century, the American Association of University Professors actually renounced a wider definition of academic freedom in order to obtain tenure for its members. In the process of establishing a narrow construction of academic freedom, they failed to defend a number of the more radical or marginal academics. According to one analyst, to gain tenure, academics "effectively traded civil liberties for job security."⁴

The very process of establishing the social science disciplines has been analysed as one of defining scholarship to be separate from social activism.⁵ This process included a failure to defend prominent dissident scholars.

Academic freedom, I would argue, is related less to tenure than to institutional relationships. The greatest threat to academic freedom today comes from academic administrators, not from outsiders such as corporations or religious groups.⁶

Generally, the greater the degree of hierarchy and centralisation of administrative power, the less academic freedom. Administrators are often willing to act against dissidents who threaten corporate and government interests, due to a commonality of interests and personal links. Historically, when the academic community has come under serious threat from the outside, administrators often have taken the initiative in rooting out dissidents, leaving little meaning to 'academic freedom.'⁷

Administrators act most vigorously when they themselves are threatened by dissent from below. The sacking of Professor Sidney Sparkes Orr, who was a prominent critic of the running of the University of Tasmania in the 1950s, is the classic Australian example.⁸

Intellectual freedom is likely to be greater when society is less monolithic. Systems of countervailing power, such as trade unions versus employers, provide resources for academics to gain support for different types of dissent. Opportunities for other jobs are also important. Dissent is easier when alternative careers are available.

It is not hard to see that in the terms of this analysis, the Australian Government's Unified National System is likely to reduce the exercise of academic freedom. Hierarchy and managerial systems are being fostered within institutions. Academia is being increasingly tied to Government and industrial imperatives, with little countervailing power. Finally, amalgamations are reducing the diversity of institutions and hence the plurality of institutional locations which is more favourable to dissent.

Simply because tenure is being maintained (for the time being) does not ensure a maintenance of real opportunities and encouragement to exercise academic freedom. Even less do pronouncements by the Government provide any protection. It is the changes in institutional arrangements which are most important, and these pose obvious disincentives to dissent. The simplistic linking of tenure and academic freedom obscures the significance of these deeper changes.

Brian Martin

University of Wollongong

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Corporate management and the institutions of higher education — some comments

I write to commend the article by Bessant (*Australian Universities' Review*, 32 (2): 10-13) for making some valuable points on this most important topic, and to comment on some significant associated issues. His setting out of some key assumptions of corporate management styles and their limitations for institutions of higher education, and his noting of their abandonment in sections of the private sector are timely and constructive contributions.

It is useful to emphasise that corporate management styles are more appropriate where tasks and means of undertaking them can be clearly specified, where responsibilities can be directly assigned, and performances straightforwardly monitored. Conversely, it has serious limitations where outcomes are uncertain and/or means cannot be specified as in creative, imaginative and other forms of original work, and increasingly where more sophisticated forms of mechanical and social technology are used.

Again, corporate management styles attract particular kinds of personalities such as the more authoritarian with predispositions to operate dogmatically and autocratically. As managers, they can be effective in some situations but in others generate considerable

management, organisational and personnel problems. Then to retrieve situations they are prone to make recourse to increasingly desperate and even draconian measures such as the trivialisation of activity by establishing more specific objectives against which performance can be checked, and detailing procedures and regulations in order to focus effort more intensely on the trivialised objectives. Ultimately, considerable effort is misdirected into coercive, monitoring and policing activities. Use of such styles of managing in tertiary institutions tends to trivialise and stultify the activities of staff, produce frustration and alienation, and result in the decline of high quality productive activity.

In relatively protected or bureaucratically structured organisations, arrangements are prone to abuse with managers able to accrue considerable authority and then ignore the material, organisational and managerial conditions for which they are responsible and under which staff operate when monitoring their efforts, as with performance indicators. Indeed the provision of an ideological basis for authoritarian styles of operating appears to be a major attraction of corporate management theory for some managers.

Probably the most significant shortcoming of corporate management styles, however, is that they encourage restricted perspectives in the undertaking of tasks and the operation of organisations. This is evident in the schooling sector of education where it is recognised that concentration of effort on increasing the effectiveness of schools needs to be complemented with efforts directed to assisting the development of more effective families and students and to enable them to make more effective use of the opportunities provided by schooling.

Actually, when one examines the achievements of some of the world's outstanding tertiary institutions it is evident that their managers have been well aware of these considerations. Repeatedly such institutions have lifted their achievements by attracting more effective students and employing higher quality staff. Given those elements the central task of managers has then been to provide resources, facilities and opportunities for competent, imaginative people to get on with the tasks of teaching and learning, undertaking research and providing services to community and society.

Dr F.J. Hunt

Monash University