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Colleagues.

Having just returned from overseas I have been forced to read the whole of Ass. Prof Steele's latest collection of pompous, self-obsessed rantings which are (as usual) as ill-informed as they are mischievous.

My colleagues have dealt adequately with Steele except in three matters of fact, to which I'll return.

Before doing so, however, I wish to make an offer, and it's this. If Steele can get 20 signatures of Branch members demanding it, I will call an election for the position of Branch President and I'll nominate for election against whoever else is inclined to do so. This will leave Steele and his fellow crusaders for justice, free speech and academic values to run in open election against me, and any other member of the Branch Executive who decides to follow my lead.

I make this offer in order to provide Steele with the chance to do something for his colleagues other than simply practicing his personality via the medium of electronic flatulence. This, in itself, would be a novelty. I also do it in order to encourage him to state what he would do to restore the confidence of members -(which he feels to be lacking at present)- in the Union Executive.

In short, I'm not asking Steele to shut up since I regard that as something of which he's incapable. I am, however, asking him to PUT up, in spite of my strong doubts that he's capable of that either.

In relation to the matters of fact.

(1) I have not made a complaint regarding Ass. Prof. Schuster to the University Management. Steele's statement that I have done so is, typically, based on muddled conjecture. The truth of the matter is that a complaint was, in fact, made to Management about me by none other than Ass Prof Schuster. The reason that Steele's fellow campaigner for free speech made this complaint was in order to try and institute disciplinary proceedings against me over an email which I'd written and to which Schuster took exception. Perhaps Steele might like to leap to MY defence in this matter.

(On second thoughts, NO. PLEASE don't.)

(2) The 'kangaroo court' to which Steele objects is set up in accordance with what's laid down in the Award. Assuming that Steele knows what an industrial award is, he can read it and discover just what the functions and limitations of a Disciplinary Tribunal are, and why it's vitally important to the interests of union members that the union is represented on it.

I can say from bitter experience that these procedures are by no means perfect but they are a considerable improvement on what existed previously: and, if Steele wants to contact me privately, I can give him some

very succinct detail about what might have happened to several people still in employment on this campus if the current award procedures had not been negotiated by 'the union'. ('The union' meaning, in this instance, people who are prepared to do more than posture in public about their heroism in defence of academic ideals). I might also point out that the current interim log of claims for the next round of enterprise bargaining contains notice of our intention to secure further improvements in these procedures. Our ability to secure these improvements depends crucially on the unity and mutual trust within the branch which a lot of people have worked hard over a long time to build.

(3) In relation to Steele's account of his brush with the Library staff, it's not normally my practice to discuss personal cases in public but as it's his own case and he's already aired it, I feel justified in doing so in this instance.

The facts are that several junior female librarians claimed that Steele had verbally abused them and Steele claimed he hadn't. The University Management took the view that they believed the librarians, which was not entirely surprising given the fact that there were, as I remember, four of them and Steele had no witness to support him. Management also found it hard to credit Steele's contentions that four completely unprovoked people had suddenly decided on a conspiracy of 'perjury' against him and that he was such a gentleman that he would never throw an abusive tantrum simply because he couldn't get his own way. Both of these contentions may have been true, of course, but this is not the point. Rather, the point is that colleagues should ask themselves how much success they would have anticipated had they been in my place, and attempting to advocate Steele's case.

I am unsure what more I was supposed to do about this matter than what I actually did, which amounted, in fact, to spending large amounts of time arguing (successfully) with Management that, if any penalty was to be imposed, it should be a minor one. (And I might say that, in spite of his fatuous attempts to portray himself as a latter-day Spartacus, your man wasn't exactly crucified).

The reason I don't know what the nature of my dereliction in relation to this case is supposed to be is that Steele has never had the guts to raise the matter with me personally. Long distance character assassination has ever been more his style.

In conclusion I'd like to point out that: (1) the Branch Executive don't receive pay or perks; (2) the Executive is elected by the branch; and (3) Executive meetings are entirely open and any financial member of the Branch is not only entitled but welcome to attend any such meeting in the capacity of non-voting participant observer.

Happy holidays and a good New Year to all my colleagues. Michael Morrissey
President
UWASA