

Chapter Six

Jeffery Klaehn

Power Over Principle, The Costs of Dissent: An Interview with Brian Martin

BRIAN MARTIN has been involved with issues of dissent and whistleblowing for twenty-five years and has extensive experience with social movements. He has a Ph.D. in theoretical physics and now works as a social scientist at the University of Wollongong, Australia. He is the author of numerous books and articles in diverse fields including nonviolent action, dissent, scientific controversies, democracy, information issues, and strategies for social movements (see <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/> or email: bmartin@uow.edu.au).

Jeffery Klaehn: You have a background in mathematics, yet you've published a voluminous number of articles, book chapters and papers about the suppression of dissent, in relation to a wide array of subjects and fields. How did you come to be interested in dissent?

Brian Martin: It was a gradual process.¹ After finishing my Ph.D. in theoretical physics at Sydney University, in 1976 I got a job at the Australian National University in Canberra and became active in Friends of the Earth. I also became friends with the staff of the Human Sciences Program at the university, who taught a critical social and personal approach to ecology. There was a lot of hostility to Human Sciences among old guard scientists on campus. You have to remember that in the 1970s environmentalism was still new and seen as quite radical, whereas today lots of corporations paint themselves green.

In 1979, Jeremy Evans, one of the key figures in Human Sciences, was denied tenure. This was widely seen as an attack on the program. I became involved in the campaign in support of Jeremy and the program. Bit by bit I found out that there had been other scientists and scholars who had come under attack because of their environmental views. I began documenting cases of suppression of environmental scholarship.

JK: Was there anything in your experience that predisposed you to become involved?

BM: Yes. My first job at the university was in the newly formed Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, as a research assistant. I toned down my views somewhat

but even so I came in conflict with senior people there because of my orientation on environmental activism. My contract wasn't renewed for the next year—a possible case of suppression, but there wasn't really enough evidence to prove anything. Luckily I obtained a research assistant job in the Department of Applied Mathematics where I was more protected. As long as I fulfilled my duties, no one cared what I did or said about environmental or political matters.

JK: How would you define the suppression of dissent?

BM: I was one of the editors of a book titled *Intellectual Suppression* published back in 1986. We characterized suppression of intellectual dissent as having two key features:

First, a person or group, by their public statements, research, teaching or other activities, threatens the vested interests of elites in corporations, government, professions or some other area. Typically this is by threatening profits, bureaucratic power, prestige or public image, for example by providing support to alternative views or by exposing the less attractive sides of the powerful group...

The second feature of suppression cases is an attempt by a powerful individual or group to stop or to penalise the person or activity found objectionable. This may involve denying funds or work opportunities, blocking appointments, blocking tenure, blocking promotion, blocking courses, blocking publication, preventing free speech, dismissal, harassment, blacklisting, and smearing of reputations. These are examples of what we call *direct suppression*. *Indirect suppression* occurs when people are inhibited from making public statements, doing research and the like because of the implied or overt threat of sanctions or because of a general climate of fear or pressures for conformity.²

JK: What are the points of impact, on individuals and society as a whole?

BM: There's obviously a major impact on the dissenter. A second major impact is on those who are aware of the suppression. Many of them will be frightened and less likely to dissent themselves, at least if the dissenter appears to lack support. Crushing of a dissenter can send a powerful message about the likely fate awaiting anyone unwise enough to follow suit. The impact on society can be massive: essentially, suppression neuters one of the vital feedback systems that keeps organizations from becoming corrupt. Lack of attention to dissent sometimes has spectacular consequences, such as the Challenger disaster or the collapse of Enron, but more commonly simply perpetuates a degraded situation.

JK: What sustains your interest in suppression?

BM: After I published my first article about suppression of dissent,³ and obtained some publicity, people started telling me about other cases of suppression. The more I wrote and spoke on the topic, the higher my profile became and the more people contacted me. I started off looking at attacks on environmental scholars and then gradually started studying various other sorts of cases. Suppression is an engrossing topic. It's a great way to probe the exercise of power, because the fangs are out in the open. Another thing is the people. Dissidents are some of the most fascinating individuals you can meet. They are challenging the system, which means they are thinking in original ways or acting courageously. A lot of them go through hell as a result. It's also very satisfying to do something in support of dissidents. I often think that if just one person is helped, then it's worth the effort.

JK: How pervasive, in your view, is suppression of dissent today?

BM: Journalists often ask me this and I usually put on my academic hat and say no one really knows. No one has done a survey of suppression in even a single organization, much less in society. What I can say is that suppression is much more common than most people realize. Most cases are never publicized.

JK: Can you give any figures?

BM: In Whistleblowers Australia, the most active group is the New South Wales branch, which has weekly meetings to support whistleblowers. Cynthia Kardell, the branch president, might hear about hundreds of cases in a year. Extrapolating to Australia gives a figure of maybe a thousand whistleblowers at any given time. The same rate in the U.S. would give a total of maybe 15,000. This is very rough, but it's still an underestimate of suppression, because a lot of people are suppressed and are too embarrassed or intimidated to tell anyone, or have no convenient outlet for their story.

JK: Where do you go to find out about suppression?

BM: You can go into just about any organization—corporation, government department, church, union, even environmental or feminist groups—and discover stories of suppression. The first people to contact are known dissidents. They have their own stories and, because they have a profile, they are contacted by others who have difficulties. In addition, sometimes there are experienced organization members who know a lot about the unsavory history. On the outside, the organization might seem to be well functioning, but by digging deeper you can find out about all sorts of corruption and suppression.

JK: One of the themes of this book is to illuminate the myriad ways in which power, hegemony and ideology work within various contexts in contemporary society. You've

stated that self-censorship is a more serious problem today than external censorship. Could you please explain your thinking here and elaborate?

BM: Self-censorship is more insidious—it's harder to identify and harder to oppose. When censorship is blatant, some people may acquiesce but others may be provoked to resist. External censorship is seen as a violation of the norm of free expression. It allows opponents the opportunity to organize resistance, develop strategies, try them out, and learn what works and what doesn't. Self-censorship is, in many cases, the internalization of external pressures and expectations. It doesn't seem like a violation of free expression, but rather appears to be free expression itself. Because it is so often an individual choice, or occurs within organizations, it gives less of a target for organizing resistance.

JK: Do people know when they are self-censoring?

BM: Sometimes people realize they are censoring themselves, but it's easy to deny or forget. Journalists learn from experience what sorts of stories are regularly rejected by their editors, and usually stop submitting them sooner or later. Eventually their news sense may incorporate their editors' values, taken on board as their own. But it's not just journalists—everyone is susceptible to the same process. We start out as children learning what pleases adults, and this modifies self-expression, beneficially in many cases! The general process is that external power shapes a person's expression, and the person adopts this constraint, then treats it as if it were a personal choice and forgets about the role of external power. This isn't always bad, but it can be.

JK: What are the central ideological principles militating against economic and social equality today, in your view?

BM: This is a big question! I think the main way inequality is sustained ideologically is through its very existence: reality leads to ideas that justify it. There is a psychological theory showing that most people believe the world *is* just—not merely that it *should be* just.⁴ When a blatant injustice occurs—such as poverty or police shooting protesters—it threatens belief in a just world. For some people, this inspires personal and collective action. But many others, indeed most of us at least some of the time, maintain a belief in a just world by rationalizing these events, for example by blaming poor people for their poverty or assuming that the protesters were violent and threatening. Another rationalization is that there's really no injustice involved: the police were restrained, no protesters were killed, and poverty is in decline. Yet another is that courts and governments are dealing with injustices, so we don't need to worry about them. These sorts of rationalizations are easier when the injustice is at a distance. When it's close at hand—when it's your friend who was shot or your caring relative who is poor—then the challenge to a belief in the just world is stronger, though it can still be maintained.

JK: To what extent do you believe suppression of dissent occurs within the social sciences? You've commented in various articles on the extensive feedback you've received over the years that you've been writing and publishing on the suppression of dissent. I'm wondering how much feedback you've received from people within the ranks of the social sciences.

BM: Suppression of dissent certainly occurs within the social sciences. My guess is that the level is about the same as in most other areas. There haven't been any comparative studies. What can be somewhat different is the mode of expressing dissent and the methods of reprisal. A dissenting member of the police might report corruption or question policing priorities, and suffer harassment, demotion, punitive transfer, dismissal, physical attack, or even be framed for a crime. In most bureaucracies, the same sorts of dissent can lead to the same sorts of reprisal, except that physical attack is uncommon except in the police, military, and where organized crime is involved—or in countries where these groups are used by elites to repress critics. Social scientists also can speak out about corruption or organizational priorities, like any other employee, and suffer the same sorts of reprisals.

JK: Are there any special features of suppression in the social sciences?

BM: Social scientists can also dissent by challenging dominant ideologies. Marxist scholar Bertell Ollman seems to fit this category: he was denied an appointment at the University of Maryland after intervention by the university president.⁵ It is certainly possible for scholars to be attacked because they've expressed challenging ideas in scholarly publications. But in my experience it's far more common to be attacked for participation in or support for actions. Joining a student strike, signing a petition against the university president, or writing popular articles are enough to get you into trouble even if your scholarship is quite conventional.

JK: Does being radical in research and teaching as well as involved in local activism make one a special target?

BM: It can. One scholar who fits this profile is Dharendra Sharma, when he was a science policy researcher in the School of Social Sciences at Jawaharlal Nehru University. In 1983, he openly criticized the university administration for its crackdown on protesting students. He was convener of a group that organized conferences and petitions challenging the government's nuclear policy. Also in 1983, Sharma published a book that was fiercely critical of India's nuclear establishment. The book seems to have been the trigger for attack: in violation of university regulations, Sharma was transferred to the School of Languages, without even being given a reason.⁶

Back in the 1980s, there was a U.S. publication called *Zedek*, the journal of the Social Activist Professors Defense Foundation. It reported numerous cases of radical and activist professors who were fired or denied tenure. I'm sure the same sort of thing continues at roughly the same level, but there seem to be few who are keeping track of the phenomenon.

JK: What about suppression within the peer review system?

BM: Research has been done giving reviewers papers that are identical except that the conclusions are written to say that the findings either support or conflict with conventional wisdom. The reviewers were more likely to reject the papers that conflicted with orthodoxy; the usual reason they gave was poor methodology, though the methodology was identical!⁷ This suggests the enormous scope for spurious rejection of challenging writing, as well as rejection of applicants for jobs, tenure, or promotions. There is a lot of contingency in this process. In some departments, radical ideas are welcome or tolerated, whereas in others the limits of orthodoxy are tightly drawn. Likewise, journals and editors vary enormously. Due to a combination of censorship via peer review and self-censorship, reading the most prestigious journals can give the impression that the scholarly world is pretty far removed from everyday problems. But I think this is misleading. There's actually quite a lot of support for progressive social change among social scientists, especially among research students. Some are undertaking participatory action research or other approaches that link research to pressing social problems.⁸ Sure, the obstacles can be great, but I think it would be unwise to concentrate on difficulties without noting what's happening that's positive.

JK: In *Understanding Power*, Noam Chomsky touches upon the experience of a PhD candidate at MIT who encountered serious (political) difficulties with her doctoral dissertation. These problems, which threatened her ability to remain within the program and secure her degree, were attributable to the nature of her thesis, which argued that corporate interests influenced news coverage of South Africa. I would encourage all potential graduate students to read this account. To what extent do you believe such experiences are commonplace today?

BM: No one really knows, but such experiences are undoubtedly more common than many people would imagine. I've heard of a number of cases over the years. I was told by a well-known figure in my field (social studies of science and technology) that while he was a Ph.D. student at MIT, his program chair told him that if he ever pursued his proposed research topic, the chair would ensure that he never obtained a job anywhere. (He did the topic anyway.) A social science student I knew was pressured not to study suppression because the very term "suppression" supposedly revealed bias. There are also students who

are sabotaged at various stages in their studies, from the beginning to the very end. These overt cases, though, are relatively uncommon, because most students learn very soon and very well to play safe and not risk having problems. Jeff Schmidt in his superb book *Disciplined Minds* describes how budding professionals learn how to orient their intellectual interests to the topics assigned to them, something he calls “assignable curiosity.”⁹ Even when topics aren’t formally assigned, most students learn to stay within the parameters implicit within their milieu. In some tolerant environments, this is not a major constraint, but many are not so lucky.

JK: In your essay, ‘Academic exploitation,’ you state that exploitation is a symptom of political power differences within the academy. Could you briefly overview for the reader the key points of your thinking? What are some typical forms of exploitation?

BM: There are plenty of cases in which a supervisor uses work produced by a graduate student without giving appropriate credit. Sometimes the student has a bright idea and the supervisor writes an article incorporating the idea. Sometimes the student does all the research and writes an article, and the supervisor—who has contributed little or nothing—is co-author or even sole author. There are lots of variations. Sometimes it’s an undergraduate student essay that is exploited by a teacher. Sometimes an academic gives a talk and takes full credit for a student’s work.

JK: Who are the prime targets for exploitation?

BM: Students, certainly. Also research assistants and spouses (mainly wives). Junior staff can also be exploited by senior academics. Taking advantage of someone else’s work can happen in all sorts of variations. Power makes it easier to get away with. A student who plagiarizes from a book is vulnerable: if caught, there can be severe penalties. But a scientist running a big research laboratory who gets his name on most of the papers produced in the lab is seen as behaving normally: exploitation is institutionalized.

JK: In my view, accounts of institutional victimization are not likely to be publicized within the media, barring rare exceptions, precisely because social institutions tend to be mutually supportive. Do you agree?

BM: The media are actually more receptive to stories of victimization than most people imagine. The media do have ties with dominant groups, but journalists are after stories that interest readers and viewers. Scandal and corruption are widely seen as good stories, and in many cases this can outweigh links with powerful groups. Stories need to fit the usual news values such as local relevance, immediacy and conflict. If dissidents work at it, they have a good chance of breaking into some media because their stories involve human interest, conflict, and abuse of power. If dissidents can collect

convincing evidence and experts to provide credibility, they have a better chance of gaining publicity. There are no guarantees, but I would say that on balance the mass media are more likely to help dissidents than alternative routes such as filing grievances, lobbying politicians, or going to court.

JK: So why don't we hear about more cases through the media?

BM: The biggest barrier is that victims themselves don't want publicity. They are embarrassed and humiliated and don't want others to know what has happened to them. Sometimes they have accepted what perpetrators say about them and blame themselves. Sometimes they believe that official channels, such as grievance procedures or courts, will provide the solution. Lawyers typically advise avoiding publicity. Having talked to hundreds of whistleblowers, the majority don't consider seeking publicity, and most of who do are novices on how to go about it. They send massive packs of information to journalists, or approach high-profile television shows that are the least likely to run stories simply because of time restraints. Increasing the skills of dissidents to promote their causes is the single most important step.

JK: Accounts illuminating potential and real costs of dissent for young scholars striving to make their way through the doctoral system are extremely rare. In my view, this is not because psychologically brutal experiences occur infrequently, but because news of such cases very rarely make it beyond particular institutions within which the key players are situated. Your thoughts?

BM: I would agree that most experiences of dissent being suppressed are never known beyond the organization. Perpetrators obviously don't want these stories publicized, but neither do most victims. Even for those who do want to tell their stories, there is little to prepare them to communicate effectively. Many set out to write books, but this is a major enterprise and the potential audience is not large. Writing a short account is often more effective, but the person in the middle of the events is so engrossed with a multitude of details that it is really hard to clearly articulate the essence of the story.

JK: To what extent does the academy itself operate as a system of power, in your view? How does it operate in relation to other systems of power?

BM: I take the view that power is involved in all social relationships. From this perspective, academia certainly is a power system. What's interesting are its particular features. Within academic organizations, hierarchy serves as one power dimension. University presidents, deans, professors, adjunct faculty, gardeners, and cleaners have different capacities to get their way on a daily basis and in relation to what policies and practices prevail in the university. The teacher-student relationship is hierarchical

too, though with a different set of rules. Among academics, the disciplines, from physics to philosophy, operate as power systems, with control over knowledge and entry to the discipline being key arenas of struggle. Academia as a whole can be considered a profession, similar to and intersecting with other professions such as law and medicine. Professions are systems for controlling occupations. Academia plays a key role in licensing new entrants to other professions, as well as to academia itself. Then there are systems of power pervasive in society, including patriarchy, capitalism, and the state, each of which plays a significant role within academia.

JK: How can struggles over knowledge be understood as power struggles?

BM: There are many connections between knowledge and power. There are power struggles over what areas are funded and investigated, with the consequence that much more research is done into diseases of the affluent countries than diseases common in poor countries and much more research is done into making deadly weapons than making peace. There are power struggles over what counts as knowledge, such as over the nature of terrorism or biological evolution. There are struggles over who constructs knowledge: is knowledge the exclusive domain of professionals or can citizens play a role in creating and validating it? Knowledge claims are regularly used to bolster or challenge systems of power. That's an enormous area.

JK: How would you characterize academic power structures to those unfamiliar with universities and university culture? How does power shape knowledge, in this context?

BM: There are lots of factors. Funding influences what knowledge is developed, which means that corporate and government priorities help shape the evolution of research fields. Then there is the self-interest of academics: jargon and esoteric topics serve to protect scholars and research fields from outside scrutiny, from the public but more immediately from other academics. These two sets of pressures often conflict: funders of research usually want practical findings, but that makes academics dependent on outsiders. Academics pursue more theoretical and esoteric directions because that gives greater peer recognition. There also are many specific pressures and encouragements. One energy researcher might be funded by the coal industry. Another might have personal links with environmental groups or just be responsive to environmental concerns expressed in the general culture, and decide to investigate renewable energy.

JK: You've commented that education legitimizes social inequality.

BM: As well as being centers for the creation of knowledge, universities are centrally involved in disseminating knowledge to students through teaching. Much of this work serves to maintain and justify economic inequality through giving degrees to students

who follow the rules; the degrees in turn enable them to obtain better jobs. It's well known that most things learned in tertiary education are not useful for practical purposes: nearly everything a worker needs to know is learned on the job. Universities train students to be individualistic and competitive in acquiring knowledge, whereas the key to the most productive workplaces is teamwork and cooperative learning.

Schooling at all levels trains students to be acquiescent: to succeed, they have to be obedient and reliable and harness their energies to externally imposed tasks. This is the so-called "hidden curriculum." Most students seem to learn it pretty well, but there are always some who continue to resist.

JK: In your essay, 'Stamping Out Dissent,' you write that "The expression of dissenting views may not seem like much of a threat to a powerful organization, yet sometimes it triggers an amazingly hostile response." Could you discuss this further and give your impressions of why this might be the case?

BM: When there is apparent unanimity in an organization, individuals are reluctant to raise anything that seems to go against the dominant view. They are worried that their ideas are off beam and that they will look foolish. But if a single person openly questions orthodoxy, this can open the gates for others to do the same. The situation is changed from unanimity to contestation, from monologue to dialogue. If the ideas raised by dissidents resonate with widely held norms, such as about honesty, fairness, openness, or environmental protection, then there is potential for a major change. A simple act of dissent thus potentially poses a major challenge to organizational elites: both their power and their monopoly on ideas are under threat. This helps to explain their hostility to dissent.

JK: You've argued that 'academic freedom' should be viewed as relating more to institutional relationships than tenure. The conventional view is that tenure exists to protect academic freedom.

BM: The normal justification for tenure is that it protects academic freedom. It certainly does that sometimes. I've known outspoken academics who wouldn't have lasted long without tenure. But tenure also is a job condition: a benefit for those who can achieve it. Academics, like other employees, push for better conditions, including job security. The reality is that very few tenured academics ever do anything that rocks the boat: in essence, they never exercise their academic freedom. Part of the reason is that the very process of obtaining tenure makes aspiring academics cautious: they keep a low profile so as not to jeopardize their prospects. By the time they actually get tenure,

cautiousness has become a way of life. So it's not surprising that many of the most outspoken members of the academic community are students and untenured faculty.

JK: If tenure isn't the key, what is?

BM: The most important way to promote academic freedom is to encourage a culture of outspokenness: the more people who speak out, the easier it is for others. There's safety in numbers. If dissent is an everyday occurrence, then fear is reduced and dialogue and debate become the norm.

JK: In your essay, 'Knowledge and Power in Academia,' you state that 'academia has responded to the challenge of feminism by avoiding structural change.' Your interest in feminism and women's experiences has played over into the range of your writing on higher education, in various ways. You devoted an entire chapter of *Tied Knowledge: Power in Higher Education* to patriarchy, for example. What issues, problems and concerns do you feel should be accorded additional attention in future research on patriarchy as a system of power within academia?

BM: I'd like to see studies of what works and doesn't work to bring about change. For example, is provision of on-site child care, in any sizable campus building, feasible? How can it be promoted? How can a more egalitarian, cooperative, female-friendly academic style be fostered? How can intellectual activity be made more a part of daily life, rather than a separate, professional activity? Some of these are not solely feminist issues, but they do relate to strands of feminist theory and practice.

JK: What type of feedback have you received on your writings about patriarchy and higher education?

BM: I haven't had much specific feedback on these writings, but I have been contacted by many women about suppression, discrimination, harassment, and bullying. Some of them are targeted because they are women or because they express feminist views. At least as commonly, though, women are targeted for the same reasons as men: because they are a threat to powerful interests.

JK: You've read Alvin Gouldner's famous book, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (1979), and critiques of professions such as Randall Collins' *The Credential Society* (1979). Robert Jensen's chapter in this book scrutinizes the myth of the neutral professional. To what extent do you feel that professionalism is political, how are the political dimensions typically 'hidden,' and in what ways can the myth of objectivity be seen to service the interests of established power?

BM: Professions are systems of power that serve both professionals themselves and the key patrons of professions, namely corporations and the state. The exercise of power is more effective if others don't realize that power is involved. The idea of objectivity serves admirably to mask the exercise of power, to clients, observers, and professionals themselves. It may be that funding for a project is being provided by a pharmaceutical company, but the research findings are seen as valid because the scientists are perceived as objective. The fact that the research agenda was shaped by corporate priorities is omitted from the picture. The idea of objectivity, at the level of the researcher, thus masks higher-level biases.

JK: Various representations cast academic intellectuals as largely integrated into specialized disciplines and departments, constrained by professional demands, moving toward mutual connections and away from political relevance, concerned with career advancement and the demands of professionalism. The impression conveyed is that avoidance is partially if not wholly induced. Such discourse seems to exist in a vacuum, between the costs associated with dissent at one extreme end and seductions of privilege at the other.

BM: There are certainly plenty of pressures and enticements that encourage intellectuals to orient their work to each other and to patron groups. Yet there is still a lot of idealism. Many people believe the rhetoric of service to the community and enter professions, including academia, with energy to promote change. Some of this energy is drained away, but quite a bit remains. Therefore it continues to worthwhile to analyze problems, propose alternatives, develop strategies, and take action.

JK: In a market system, intellectual work, like other forms of labor, tends to circulate on the market. It is available for purchase, as are all commodities, for the right price, to be bought and sold. Many intellectuals find extremely lucrative, high paying careers within the corporate world, working in the field of 'impressions management.' What roles do such intellectuals play in legitimizing power, furnishing justifications for various situations within contemporary society, in your opinion?

BM: From their viewpoint, these intellectuals are serving a fair system. Critics—who are intellectuals themselves—would say that these intellectuals are legitimating the system. Developing sophisticated rationales for policy and practices, selling soap or social control, and putting spin on the latest crisis are all roles that some corporate intellectuals play. But they are in a minority. Most corporate intellectuals operate on mundane matters in a variety of roles that are less overtly ideological but instead are

embedded in organizational structure and routines. Engineers, accountants, lawyers, and many others do intellectual work that is sufficiently ordinary that they would not normally think of themselves as “intellectuals.”

JK: In his book on the decline of public intellectuals in contemporary society, *The Last Intellectuals*, Russell Jacoby argues that ‘news travels fast and well. All know of cases of teachers forced out, not because they were imperfect professionals but because they were something more: public intellectuals and radicals.’ Jacoby conveys his view that institutional backlash happens continuously and commonly goes unreported. How true is this still today, in your view? What dynamics are common, in play?

BM: The attack on radical intellectuals continues to be commonplace. But there are plenty of exceptions. Attacks are situation-specific and often depend on the local configuration of power and the whims of individuals. Those who are most likely to come under attack are those who, through their actions or public statements, are seen as a threat to the local power structure. Those who restrict their radicalism to the classroom or academic journals are less likely to be targeted, though they are still vulnerable.

JK: You’ve written that ‘From Copernicus to Darwin to Einstein, as well as countless others who have challenged the conventional wisdom, it has been the dissidents, the outsiders, the contrarians who have spurred science on.’ The academy itself should be oriented to encourage dissent, in my view, precisely because knowledge creation is so fundamentally bound to challenging prevailing orthodoxy. History teaches us this, with a remarkable degree of clarity.

BM: Within science, dissent is accepted within limits. That’s one reason why science has been so dynamic. Another reason is that science has found a ready application in society, though often those applications are skewed towards the interests of the state, capitalism, and the military. Within social sciences, there is a fair bit of dissent within scholarly domains but little scope for applications that conflict with dominant interests. So dissent often has no practical outlet, with a profound stultifying effect on both social research and on society. Yet there are many who are challenging this situation. For example, practitioners of participatory action research, which combines the tasks of building knowledge and changing society, are bridging the familiar gap between theory and practice.

JK: The last line of your review of Conrad Russell’s book *Academic Freedom* reads as an expression of frustration that more academics are not writing for audiences outside the academy. Your thinking (and sentiment) here seems to echo C. Wright Mills and

Russell Jacoby. Instead of focusing on the need to connect with society and the everyday lives of common people, most contemporary intellectuals intentionally avoid integration and/or any type of public relevance. Why do you think this is the case and what are the implications? Do you feel that today's doctoral students are essentially being trained to adapt to this type of system?

BM: The status of intellectuals derives from their control over knowledge domains. Disciplinary insiders would lose advantages if outsiders could enter the field easily through publications and appointments, or could easily understand what key debates are all about. To prevent this, fields develop jargon, esoteric theoretical frameworks, and self-referential citation practices. Entrants are expected to have certain types of credentials. That's just to ward off trespassers from other fields. The public is also a potential threat: if non-specialists knew what was going on in a field, they might expect to participate or to intervene in decision-making. Therefore, public relevance threatens intellectual status. I agree that doctoral students are being trained to adapt to this system. That's what training is all about: learning insider knowledge and behavior. Luckily, there are quite a few who survive the process intact, and a few who are radicalized along the way.

JK: In your essay, 'Advice for the Dissident Scholar,' you write that: 'Anyone who does something that threatens a powerful individual or group is potentially a target of suppression.' You advise anyone fighting back against institutional backlash to avoid institutional channels. Why?

BM: Here's how I stated it in the article:

Dissidents are often tempted to use official procedures. They make a formal complaint, file a grievance, use appeal procedures, approach an ombudsperson, or file a lawsuit. Sometimes these procedures are effective. But my advice is not to rely on them. They often give only the appearance of dealing with the problem without achieving anything for the dissident. Official channels are designed by, and usually serve the purposes of, powerful organizations. Typically, they keep public discussion to a minimum. They deal with technicalities rather than the underlying issues. They take a lot of time, allowing abuses to continue. They are largely under the control of bodies with more links to suppressors than to dissenters. My skepticism about official channels is not based on some nasty personal experience, but rather on observing quite a number of cases.¹⁰

Talking to whistleblowers, the failure of official channels is a continual refrain. I usually hear from them after they have blown the whistle and suffered reprisals. Telling their story, they say “I then went to...”—naming some appeal body or anti-corruption commission or politician or court—and I interrupt and say “That didn’t help, did it?” and they say “How did you know?” Well, it was a good guess on my part. They wouldn’t be contacting me if the system worked well, and research shows that the odds of being helped are very low.¹¹ Yet many whistleblowers believe so strongly that somewhere in the system they can obtain justice that they approach agency after agency, having their hopes repeatedly dashed. Before long, the failure of official channels becomes a greater concern than their original grievance.

JK: How many people do you know of whose lives have been literally destroyed (economically, emotionally and/or physically) because of various forms of institutional backlash?

BM: A sizable proportion of whistleblowers have their lives destroyed. Not only do they lose their jobs, suffer economic hardship, and never get back into their careers, but many also suffer health problems, addictions, and/or relationship breakdowns. I’d guess that I’ve been in touch with many dozens of people who have suffered such devastating consequences of their principled actions. Fortunately, some people survive, move on, and make a success of a new career.

JK: Any examples?

BM: Dr John Coulter, a medical researcher in the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science, was a prominent environmentalist in South Australia in the 1970s. On a couple of occasions, chemical companies put pressure on the IMVS due to Coulter’s public statements. In 1980, Coulter tested a sterilizing agent used at the Institute itself, and found that it could potentially cause cancer. He released his findings to the workers exposed to the chemical. This led to Coulter being fired. He later entered politics, becoming a senator representing South Australia, promoting environmental causes. He is one of the few I know who survived a major attack and went on to bigger things.

JK: In his book, *The Powers That Be*, William Domhoff writes that the ruling class has utilized strikebreakers and the police, as well as organizations such as the FBI and the CIA, to silence and contain threats to ideologies of dominance. Domhoff comments that such actions ‘suggest that the power elite will use the most drastic of methods to defend its position.’ Is this assessment accurate, in your view?

BM: The power elite will use drastic methods, to be sure, but it's wise not to exaggerate. Would the power elite drop a mini-nuke on a neighborhood to stop a popular insurrection? I doubt it, because it would cause immense outrage. Those with power often understand the limits of their power and restrain themselves because of the likely consequences, either popular backlash or damage to their own self-image. The limits of power are established as part of an ongoing struggle over what is acceptable. So I'd modify Domhoff's statement to something like "the power elite, to defend its position, if necessary will use the most drastic methods it thinks it can get away with."

Remember the 1989 velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe: in most countries the Communist Party elites didn't begin to use their most drastic methods. They judged the situation hopeless and gave up.

JK: Please share your thoughts on the David Kelly case.

BM: The lead-up to and aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq led an unprecedented number of inside experts to speak out in the U.S., Britain, and Australia. David Kelly was one of them, whose case became prominent because of the way the British government revealed his identity and subjected him to a humiliating interview. Then Kelly was found dead, causing a political crisis. An inquiry was set up to dampen concern. The standard story is that Kelly committed suicide, but many who have studied the evidence suspect foul play in his death. Whatever happened, the events reflected the struggle over the justification of the invasion of Iraq.

JK: You've adapted the terminology of Herman and Chomsky regarding 'retail' and 'wholesale' terrorism to the issue of protest. I am referring to your article 'Protest in a Liberal Democracy.' Do you see this relation as still applicable today?

BM: Yes, there continues to be a double standard about social action. When citizens take direct action, such as rallies, strikes, and vigils, these actions are subject to scrutiny on the basis of ethics and law. But when elites take action, such as implementing repressive laws or moving capital out of a region or country (a "capital strike"), this is seldom subject to much scrutiny at all. So using Herman and Chomsky's terminology, we can say that citizen action is "retail protest" and elite action is "wholesale protest"—all the attention is on retail operations, with little attention on the wholesalers who deal in volume.

JK: Noam Chomsky has said that the best defense against democracy is to distract people. Do you agree with this view, in relation to the broader political and popular cul-

ture? To what extent do you feel, if at all, that academia serves to induce avoidance and impose ignorance?

BM: There's a lot of evidence that people, if given the opportunity to collectively determine what happens in their lives, approach the task with enthusiasm and sound judgment. But this sort of direct or participatory democracy is relatively uncommon. Most people's only experience of it is in small groups that operate by consensus, whether formal or de facto. I agree with Chomsky that distraction is a powerful tool against the attractions of direct democracy: television, shopping, and video games are distractions, and so is electoral politics to a considerable extent. One of the main ways that academics support this process is by assuming that representative government is identical with "democracy."

JK: In our brief discussion, we've predominantly focused on two major areas: the multiplicity of ways in which power impacts academia, and the issue of dissent. You've written widely on a range of other topic areas, including democracy, social defense, peace and war, environmental issues, protest, and drug debates, to name only just a few. What inspired you to make the vast majority of your writings available online?¹²

BM: My initial thought was that by putting my publications online, I wouldn't have to do so much photocopying and posting of reprints. In addition, I write to communicate and interact, so it makes sense to make publications cheaply and easily available. Finally, I'm opposed to intellectual property,¹³ so it's consistent to support open access.

JK: What have been the implications for you personally in writing and talking about dissent and power?

BM: When I worked at the Australian National University in the 1970s and 1980s, I was on one-year contracts as a research assistant for most of a decade, and a couple times my contract was not renewed, so I had to find another position. The non-renewals may well have been due to my activism, but the evidence wasn't ironclad. When university rules changed so that I could inspect the administration's file on me as an employee, I found a letter criticizing my public statements about suppression, sent from a professor of forestry to me via the Vice-Chancellor. I couldn't have it removed from my file, so I wrote a response to be put on the file. This professor, as the dean, had rejected my application for continuing appointment as a research assistant.

After I moved to Wollongong, my position became more secure, not so much because of tenure (which no longer gives full job security in Australia) but because my

colleagues have been far more supportive. I've had some difficult times, but these have been due more to academic infighting than to my views.

As my visibility in studying suppression has increased, I think I've become somewhat more protected: attacking a high-profile target is more likely to backfire. Indeed, that's my current research: how to make unjust attacks backfire. It's wonderful to be able to learn a bit more about how to help dissenters.

JK: A huge thank you for your time, and for sharing your thoughts and insights.

Notes

1. For more detail see Brian Martin, *Suppression Stories* (Wollongong: Fund for Intellectual Dissent, 1997).
2. Brian Martin, C. M. Ann Baker, Clyde Manwell and Cedric Pugh (editors), *Intellectual Suppression: Australian Case Histories, Analysis and Responses* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986), pp. 1-2.
3. Brian Martin, "The scientific straightjacket: the power structure of science and the suppression of environmental scholarship," *Ecologist* 11 (January-February 1981): 33-43.
4. Melvin J. Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion* (New York: Plenum, 1980).
5. Bertell Ollman, *Class Struggle is the Name of the Game: True Confessions of a Marxist Businessman* (New York: William Morrow, 1983).
6. Brian Martin, "Nuclear Suppression," *Science and Public Policy* 13 (December 1986): 312-20.
7. Michael J. Mahoney, *Scientist as Subject: The Psychological Imperative* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1976). For a survey of more recent studies, see Juan Miguel Campanario, "Peer Review for Journals as It Stands Today—Part 2," *Science Communication* 19 (June 1998): 277-306.
8. See, for example, Philip Nyden, Anne Figert, Mark Shibley, and Darryl Burrows, eds., *Building Community: Social Science in Action* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1997).
9. Jeff Schmidt, *Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System that Shapes their Lives* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).
10. Brian Martin, "Advice for the Dissident Scholar," *Thought & Action* 14 (Spring 1998): 119-130.
11. William De Maria, *Deadly Disclosures: Whistleblowing and the Ethical Meltdown of Australia* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1999).
12. See: <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/pubs/>.
13. Brian Martin, "Against Intellectual Property," in *Information Liberation* (London: Freedom Press, 1998), 29-56.

BOUND BY POWER

Intended Consequences

Jeffery Klaehn, editor



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