

ACADEMIC SCAPEGOATSby Brian Martin

In the late 1960s Marlene Dixon worked at the University of Chicago. She was a prominent radical both in scholarship and in popular causes. When her position came up for renewal she was not rehired. This was widely interpreted as both sex and political discrimination. 1/

Dixon then obtained a post in the Sociology Department at McGill University in Montreal. Her Marxist views and participation in radical activities quickly generated opposition within the department. When her position came up for renewal, an attempt was made to block her reappointment. This failed because her publication record was too good and because a number of other academics provided support against the obviously political attack.

Dixon's trouble had only begun. When formal procedures were insufficient to get rid of her, her opponents in the department began a campaign of petty harassment. Nothing that Dixon did was well received. Her suggestions were blocked, her attempts at innovation were sabotaged, minor mistakes were blown out of proportion, her students were harassed, and vicious rumors about her were circulated. This applied not only to Dixon but to anyone else who sided with her. Eventually the harassment drove Dixon out of the department. Other academics who left as a consequence of the campaign were radical political scientist Pauline Vaillancourt and internationally renowned sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein. Prominence and performance are no guarantee against this sort of academic witchhunt.

Dixon's experiences at McGill are documented in her book THINGS WHICH ARE DONE IN SECRET, 2/ one of the most detailed accounts of such academic machinations.

Once an academic is attacked, for whatever reason, a process of scapegoating may begin. This can happen even if the academic is formally vindicated. Instead of realizing or admitting their own role in the attacks, the attackers blame the victim and launch further attacks, sometimes in most unscrupulous ways.

In Australia, the most notorious case of academic scapegoating was the horrendous attack on Sidney Sparkes Orr who was sacked from his chair at the University of Tasmania in the 1950s. Colleagues who supported Orr were also penalized, while many of those who joined in the attack were awarded with jobs and promotions. 3/

A leading official in an Australian university staff association told



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me that certain people in his university, who had gotten off side with key figures in the administration, would find it exceedingly hard to get ahead no matter what they did. Their job and grant applications were given the hardest time, and even minor requests for leave were stymied.

One of the most prominent attacks on academic freedom in Australia in the 1970s was directed against Clyde Manwell, Professor of Zoology at the University of Adelaide. In 1971, Manwell and his wife Ann Baker made public criticisms of the South Australian government's fruit fly spraying program. As a direct result of this, the senior professor of Zoology, H.G. Andrewartha, made a complaint to the Vice-Chancellor which led to an attempt to dismiss Manwell from his post.

In the end, the complaints were shown to be trivial or false. For example, one of them concerned errors in statistics in Baker and Manwell's book on evolution -- and most of the alleged errors turned out not to be errors at all. But the minor nature of the allegations belied the seriousness of the attack on Manwell. Manwell's "crime" was to publicly question the fruit fly spraying program in South Australia, which was backed by powerful figures in the government who had connections with people at the University of Adelaide. The case was not resolved until 1975. 4/ It involved among other things a committee of inquiry, a student occupation and a court case.

Aside from the time and enormous stress involved in defending himself, Manwell's Australian Research Grant Committee research grants were cut off, in spite of his continued performance as one of the most productive researchers in the university. 5/ This is a perfect example of the scapegoat effect.

A detailed account of the Manwell-University of Adelaide case is included in the recently published book INTELLECTUAL SUPPRESSION. 6/ But that account was already incomplete before it appeared. A further attack on Manwell was launched after the book went to press.

In June, 1985 Manwell obtained a note from his physician stating that he was suffering from hypertension and that his teaching load should be adjusted to avoid stress. The head of the Zoology Department, Professor W.D. Williams -- who filled Andrewartha's position after the latter's retirement -- queried the physician's assessment and alleged to the university registrar that Manwell did not spend sufficient time in the department and that Manwell's teaching load was "by far the lightest" in the department. 7/ It soon became clear that Manwell was expected to spend more time teaching or else dismissal proceedings might begin.

Professor Williams in previous years had never complained about Manwell's arrangements for attendance in the department or about Manwell's teaching load. His criticisms were made only after receiving the note from Manwell's physician. William's response was hardly one calculated to reduce Manwell's hypertension.

The figures which Williams provided to the Registrar about teaching loads were intriguing. For the teaching of undergraduates, only formal contact hours were listed: no time was allocated for preparing lectures

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and demonstrations, marking papers or consulting with students. The limited total was less than three hours per student per year for the whole department. Manwell was above average in the figures for undergraduate teaching.

The claim that Manwell had the lightest teaching load arose from the figures for supervising postgraduates and fourth year honors students. Williams gave figures amounting to 100 to 200 hours per student per year. These figures completely tipped the balance against Manwell. But the figures are misleading in several ways.

* The figures presented by Williams indicated there are 28 postgraduates in the department. Official lists indicated only 14 or 15.

* The figures indicated that Manwell spent no time with postgraduates. That is incorrect.

(When a survey by postgraduates in the department of time spent with members of the staff was made, the figures showed Manwell close to the median. Some staff members, including Williams, received zeros. This student effort was not well received by certain staff members.)

* The University of Adelaide officially classifies postgraduates under research rather than teaching. If postgraduate supervision were counted as teaching, it might well be considered improper for staff to put their names on papers reporting postgraduate research.

Using the method of comparison adopted by Williams himself in years past -- the total number of different lectures given in a year -- Manwell had the highest teaching load in the department. 8/

The attack on Manwell's teaching would be laughable if it were not so serious in its implications. But then, Manwell could hardly have been attacked on his research, which stands head and shoulders above that of most others in the department.

Williams resigned as chairman of the Zoology Department at the end of 1985. Manwell in 1986 decided to negotiate early retirement for reasons of health. Williams was reappointed as chairman in June, 1986.

To determine whether someone is being unfairly attacked, the easiest procedure is the double standard check. Are there other academics, with equal or worse performance than the person, who are not being criticized? Anyone familiar with academia will know that there are quite a number of academics who do no research, who are at best mediocre teachers, or who are haphazard in the performance of their duties due to laziness, alcoholism or incompetence. When those who are excellent researchers or inspiring teachers -- but who have offended the powers that be through the expression of their views -- are singled out for attack, there is a good chance that a double standard is being applied. The sad thing is how many academics, who are supposed to be searchers after truth, will go along with such victimization.

A good place to apply the double standard test is to the case of John de Castro Lopo, a lecturer in the Department of Economics at the University of Newcastle. De Castro Lopo has encountered severe difficulties and antagonism at the university over the past decade. His case is quite separate from a widely known case at the University of Newcastle during the same period, which involved the dismissal of tenured senior lecturer Michael Spautz. 9/

From 1973 to 1975, De Castro Lopo was convenor of the University of Newcastle Staff Association's Subcommittee on Open Government. In this position, he pushed for reforms such as the right of staff to access to

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their personal files, for their right to respond to adverse material in their files, for the requirement that the administration give reasons for denial of promotion and other adverse decisions, for the introduction of appeal procedures against such decisions, and for the availability of information about the running of the university. Such rights are widely accepted as basic to any liberal democracy, but they do not exist in many universities. In the feudal-style hierarchies in some universities, the demand for these rights is seen as radical and destabilizing rather than mildly reformist.

According to de Castro Lopo 10/, in 1976 he was called in by his head of department, Professor Clem Tisdell, and told that life would be made difficult for him unless he moderated his activities. Specifically, de Castro Lopo alleges that he was told that social pressure in the department would be mobilized against him, that he would be given "the treatment" by being given menial tasks, and that pressure would be put on potential examiners of his Ph.D. thesis so that it would never be passed. Tisdell was de Castro Lopo's Ph.D. supervisor at the time, and as a result of this threat de Castro Lopo dropped his Ph.D. studies.

De Castro Lopo applied for promotion to senior lecturer several times, first in 1975. Each application was denied. After the third rejection, he appealed in 1979 to the University Council against this decision on the grounds of possible prejudice: he claimed that Tisdell, head of the Economics Department and a member of the Personnel Committee of the University Senate, had displayed bias against him.

Tisdell on his part says that he has never threatened de Castro Lopo nor discriminated against him. 11/

The university had no official appeal procedures to deal with adverse decisions on promotion; that is one of the things de Castro Lopo had been pushing for. Council set up an ad hoc committee to look into the matter. The committee was not empowered to change the decision of the original promotion decision. But the committee did find that Tisdell had shown an "appearance of bias" 12/ This was a hollow victory, since no remedy was offered to de Castro Lopo. It was simply suggested that he apply again for promotion. So in 1979 he applied for the fourth time. Again it was denied. Again no reasons were given. Again he "appealed" to Council.

This time de Castro Lopo appealed on the ground that the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Don George -- chair of the Senate committee deciding on promotions -- had displayed prejudice against him, for example by making prejudicial comments in the presence of several members of the University Council. 13/

De Castro Lopo also appealed on the ground that unstated criteria had been used to deny promotion. The Vice-Chancellor admitted that age was a factor in denying the promotion. (De Castro Lopo was in his 40s at the time, though what relevance this has to promotion is not clear. 14/) The Appeal Committee said that no objection could be made to the age criterion for deciding on promotions! 15/ De Castro Lopo lost the appeal. Since then he has publicly stated that he will not apply for promotion again.

The double standard test is useful here. While de Castro Lopo's age was held against him in at least one of his promotion attempts, a lecturer in another department in the university, then nearly 60, was promoted.

De Castro Lopo has since initiated a case before the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, on the grounds of discrimination due to national or ethnic origin, alleging that prejudicial actions by members of the University of Newcastle have hurt the progress of his career.

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De Castro Lopo on occasion has embarrassed the university administration by publicly pointing out irregularities and abuses within the university. For example, in a letter to the newsletter of the University of Newcastle in August, 1983, de Castro Lopo stated:

"Earlier this year the Vice-Chancellor issued a public statement in which he mentioned the existence of regulations constraining the ability of academic staff to earn income outside the university.

"I contend that the said 'regulations' are not being applied; or are being applied selectively, as is normally the case in this institution. I know of a Professor (and Head of Department yet) who for over a year has been residing in Sydney, where he devotes much...the greater proportion of his working time to the advancement of his (private) professional and commercial interests." 16/

The contrast here with Clyde Manwell's situation is striking. At the University of Adelaide, Manwell's position has been threatened because of allegations that he is not spending as much time in the department with students as do other staff. At the University of Newcastle, what would seem to be a clear and blatant violation of university regulations was entirely ignored.

De Castro Lopo's situation is a difficult one. For several years, the two consecutive heads of the Department of Economics have assigned him duties which he considers not part of the terms of his employment, such as marking papers for someone else's course. De Castro Lopo argues that academics are not simply servants of their heads of departments, who can exercise arbitrary powers.

Given his previous experiences, de Castro Lopo naturally believes that many of the demands on him made by the heads of the Economics Department are part of a campaign of harassment. After he refuses these duties, a complaint is made to the Vice-Chancellor by the head. The Vice-Chancellor then writes to de Castro Lopo asking him to explain his conduct. De Castro Lopo replies. The Vice-Chancellor does not reply, nor even acknowledge receipt of de Castro Lopo's letter. Nothing further transpires until the next complaint.

It may only be a coincidence, but new staff discipline procedures at the University of Newcastle were proposed in mid-1985. They would allow the Vice-Chancellor to unilaterally suspend any member of staff, and provide for dismissal on the grounds of persistent neglect of duties.

There are a number of factors which make it easier for academics to scapegoat one of their colleagues. As in other occupations, in academia it is important to fit into the prevailing ethos. This may include going along with "the boys" in sports, humor or drinking. More important is not upsetting others in day-to-day interactions, which means going along with the standard ways of doing things and not rocking the boat by criticizing the normal way things are done. The insidious part of this is that one's sex or national origin may be sufficient in itself to "upset" others in the department. Anyone can become an outsider to the academic ethos, but it is harder for women or non-British immigrants to fit in.

Marlene Dixon undoubtedly raised academic hackles by being an extremely confident and outspoken woman. Sydney Orr, who was prominent in staff criticisms of the administration of the University of Tasmania in the 1950s, was from Ireland. Manwell is originally from the United States. That may be one reason why he was not sensitive to "proper behavior" and spoke out about fruit fly spraying, and why so few academics openly defended him

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against the University of Adelaide administration. Michael Spautz, who was sacked from the University of Newcastle, is also from the United States. Frank Knopfelmacher, a prominent opponent of Soviet communism who in a famous case in the 1960s was blocked from a post at Sydney University, started his life in Czechoslovakia.

De Castro Lopo is originally from Portugal. That may be one reason why he has been so "insensitive" as to openly criticize and challenge university procedures, or in other words to exercise what should be a right and indeed a duty in a democracy. It may also explain why so few academics have supported him against higher officials in the University of Newcastle.

One of the stated goals of the university is to encourage critical thinking and the search for truths which transcend parochial interests. The sad irony is that critical perspectives are so often discouraged in practice, especially when they bring to light unpleasant truths about the university itself.

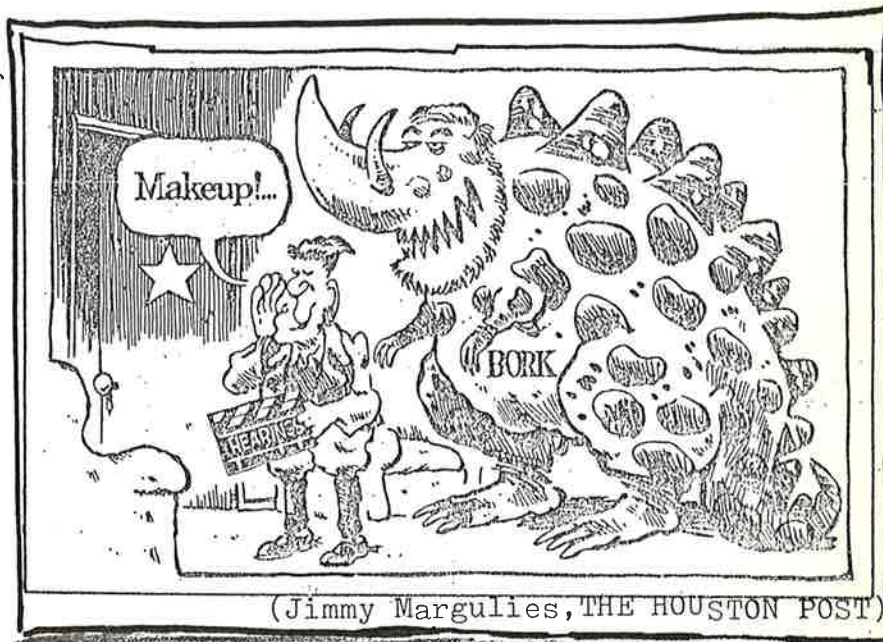
Notes

1. "Student Participation in Faculty Hiring: The Marlene Dixon Case," in Immanuel Wallerstein and Paul Starr (Eds.), THE UNIVERSITY CRISIS READER. Volume I. THE LIBERAL UNIVERSITY UNDER ATTACK (N.Y.:Vintage, 1971), pp. 510-517.
2. Marlene Dixon, THINGS WHICH ARE DONE IN SECRET (Montreal:Black Rose Books, 1976).
3. W.H.C. Eddy, ORR (Brisbane:Jacaranda, 1961).
4. C.M.A. Baker, "The Fruit Fly Papers," in: Brian Martin, C.M. Ann Baker, Clyde Manwell & Cedric Pugh (Eds.), INTELLECTUAL SUPPRESSION (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986), pp. 87-113.
5. Clyde Manwell, "Peer Review: A Case History from the Australian Research Grants Committee," SEARCH, vol. 10, 1979, pp. 81-86.
6. Martin et al., op. cit. note 4.
7. W.D. Williams, letter to F.J. O'Neill (Registrar, University of Adelaide), June 12, 1985; W.D. Williams, letter to F.J. O'Neill, August 1, 1985.
8. Clyde Manwell, letter to F.J. O'Neill, August 14, 1985.
9. Brian Martin, "Disruption and Due Process: The Dismissal of Dr. Spautz from the University of Newcastle," VESTES, vol. 26, no. 1, 1983, pp. 3-9.
10. John de Castro Lopo, statement, December 5, 1985. De Castro Lopo wrote a letter to the Vice-Chancellor in 1976 with these charges, specifying that this letter was to be given to Tisdell only if Tisdell agreed to respond to the allegations in it. Tisdell declined to receive the letter on this basis.
11. Clem Tisdell, letter to Brian Martin, November 20, 1985.
12. Report from the Committee of Appeal (University of Newcastle Council), June 15, 1979.
13. Stephen Date, statement, April 22, 1980.
14. See note 15 below.
15. David W. Dockrill, "Matters Arising Out of Mr. J. de Castro Lopo's Second Appeal re Failure to Gain Promotion to Senior Lecturer," The University of Newcastle Staff Association & Newcastle Division UASANSW, April 14, 1981.
16. J.C. de Castro Lopo, letter, UNIVERSITY NEWS, vol. 9, no. 13, 4-18, August, 1983, p. 2. See also John Lewis, "Student Union Calls for Inquiry into 'Moonlighting' Academics," NEWCASTLE HERALD, August 13, 1986, p. 12.

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(Jimmy Margulies, THE HOUSTON POST)