

ABOLISH TENURE?

NO

Gateway opinion poll

Are you in favor of keeping tenure?



Winfred Wirtz
arts 3



Clark Lysne
arts 2



Lynn Wier
arts 1



Valerie Harrison
sci 1



Garry Cowan
arts 2



Ramzen Ali
sci 1

—Shirley Skeel photos

by Willard Allen
Ass. Prof. of Chem., U of A
Pres. C. A. U. T.

In the frequent references to the tenure system in The Gateway and elsewhere there is a great deal of confusion between the existence of tenure and the problems associated with the granting or denying of tenure, between *abolition of tenure* and *abolition of probationary periods before tenure decisions*. I shall discuss these separately.

Tenure is a guarantee

Any discussion of the abolition of tenure must logically start with a statement of what is meant by tenure. How does an appointment with tenure differ from one without it? The answer is simple: tenure is a guarantee that a professor can continue in his position until his resignation or retirement *unless* he is dismissed for adequate cause and by acceptable procedures. Adequate cause is understood to involve either failure to fulfil his academic duties or some form of misconduct which seriously affects his ability to fulfil them properly.

It lessens pressure

What is the purpose of tenure? Why this preoccupation with protection against dismissal? Again, the answer is simple, at least in principle. The university is a centre of intellectual activity—Ideas are its lifeblood; ideas whose development, refinement, preservation and dissemination are largely in the hands of faculty. We demand of faculty, then, an objectivity and integrity which can best be achieved in an atmosphere free from direct political, social or economic pressures. The most direct pressure is the threat of dismissal.

Competence not conformity

The abolition of tenure would presumably mean that every faculty member would be reviewed annually at which time his appointment might be renewed or it might be terminated without cause, or at least with-

out the serious kind of cause indicated above. The results of such a system need not be imagined—they have been seen at universities and colleges in many places at many times: in the worst examples continuing appointments depend not upon competence but upon conformity. This has happened at large universities as well as small, at great ones and obscure ones, in Canada and in the U.S., in Nazi Germany and in Communist Russia.

IT could happen here

Don't tell me it couldn't happen here, that faculty and students would investigate and defend each individual case. Faculty who opposed the majority would themselves be forced out. Students are more subject to the whims of ideological fashion than any other group in society; German students supported Hitler's policies; American students supported McCarthy witch hunts in the U.S.; many of our own now lead or support witch hunts against individuals or organizations they disapprove of.

No due cause or process

So I say to you the question "Do you favor the abolition of tenure?" must be translated "Do you favor allowing the dismissal of faculty without adequate cause or due process?" and the answer to that must be an unequivocal "no!"

Abolition of probation

The second proposal frequently heard is not for the abolition but the extension of tenure, so that it begins with the initial appointment. This is the abolition of the present probationary period. Although probation does allow the pressure toward conformity which tenure reduces (it does not eliminate it!) there are balancing advantages to the university community and to society at large which justify it.

Initial appointments

An initial appointment is made on the basis of a prediction of a man's contribution in teaching and research. For most junior appointees this prediction

has to be made before the person has done significant *independent* teaching or research. For most appointments at any level the prediction is made on the basis of second hand observations and conclusions. The need for first hand information is so pressing that if the present probationary periods were eliminated other substitutes would be found. Postdoctoral or visiting professor appointments would be used as screening devices (they are so used now, to some extent, to circumvent the difficulty of making negative tenure decisions). If we need probation, and I am convinced we do, then let's keep it open and above-board, not hide it behind a phony system where the man involved doesn't know where he stands or what his rights and expectations are.

Criteria—the real issue

Although a system of probationary appointments followed by tenure is required (and will persist functionally, whatever labels are attached to it) the real issues are the criteria used for decisions on appointment, tenure and dismissal, and the procedures or mechanisms for applying these criteria. These issues must be analyzed with intelligence and honesty, and with a minimum of emotion and rhetoric. The "abolition of tenure," whatever is meant by the phrase, would create problems, not solve them. I conclude that your referendum asks the wrong question. It should ask "How can the criteria and procedures for tenure decisions be improved so as to better fulfil the proper functions of the university?" This of course cannot be answered "yes" or "no." So I urge you to vote against the abolition of tenure. But don't stop there. Go on to consider what changes in the criteria or procedures used for appointments, tenure and dismissal would best serve legitimate student interests. Let's modify and improve the tenure system. But abolish it? No!



don't care how well you can play—how much have you had published?

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