

"ombudsman"

Elsewhere in these pages there is a review of Charlene Dixon's *Things which are done in secret* — a book that chronicles and documents academic repression and harassment at McGill University in the late 60's and early 70's. In this column I want to expand the focus of that book to raise the question of the extent to which this occurs at other universities, particularly this one. I am not an expert, though. I do not have massive access to confidential files as a real Ombudsman might (nor do I share his obligation to maintain confidentiality): thus, I may not know as much, but I can say more. Let me reach some local confidences, then.

Here, for example, are some excerpts from a letter written by Christian Bay and addressed to all members of the Political Science Dept. at this University in 1968. Those of you who don't know, or don't remember, Christian was, while he was here, perhaps the most widely esteemed and world-renowned social scientist ever to work at this university; in 1968, when student involvement in departmental affairs was a key issue on campuses all over the world, Christian was both chairman of the Poli. Sci. Dept. and one of the strongest spokesmen for student involvement on this campus. This letter contained his informal resignation as Chairman, which was shortly followed by his formal resignation — first from the chairmanship, then from the university.

One of the least attractive features of life in this Department has been the extent of gossip about real or alleged hostile feelings and schemes on the part of given individuals. I feel very deeply that the way to get out of this mess is to be more candid all around, and keep our discussions open to all those who are or will be affected by them. Thinking back to yesterday's exclusive meeting ... it seems to me that every point of substance ... could just as well (have) been made in the presence of student representatives, and with considerable advantage in the way of spreading information instead of rumours; only some of the indulgences in personal rancor (on the part of the faculty) might have been modified.

What I cannot understand is the outright fear

expressed by older and younger colleagues at this kind of prospect (of "political" student representation in the department); I find this fear a symptom of a basic lack of confidence either in their own good judgment of in the good judgment of our graduate students ... Just what are we afraid of?

One thing that I, for one, am afraid of, and yesterday for the first time I had moments of real misgivings about a good number of my colleagues, is the possibility that some of us are so anxious about our purely academic careers and reputations that we forget our humanistic and intellectual concerns with our life-long self-education as developing human beings. The implied contempt of graduate students ...

This is not just another "disgruntled" faculty member complaining about perceived injustice: this is the chairman, and one of the most widely esteemed educators ever to serve at this University.

Charlie Brant was Chairman of the Department of Anthropology at about this time: with his help, the students there set up a "Plenum" composed equally of students and faculty, to run the department's affairs. When he resigned (both from a Co-chairmanship, foisted upon him by an administration that did not approve of the "Plenum" system; and from the university) in 1970, he circulated these reasons to the faculty and graduate students in his department.

He began by presenting some of the background that led to the Co-chairman situation, which followed a university "review" of the Anthropology dept.

The review, in my opinion, was conducted hastily and superficially. There was no precise specification of the reasons for it and there was no report of specific findings. Worse than that, in my opinion, is the fact that I was never informed, by anyone, of the first oral complaints made to the administration, as early as late October or early November, 1968; nor was I provided, when in early December of that year I learned that a review had been requested, with any concrete information as to the reasons for that request.

Indeed, I was told, when I asked for such information, that I would be given it if a review were authorized! You may wish to draw your own inferences concerning the administration's behavior in this respect, particularly in its failure even to suggest offering its services as a possible mediator when the differences within the department first came to their notice. You may wish to bear in mind that the complaints .. came *after* we had voted by a vast majority ... to establish what we have come to call the Plenum ...

The reason I have given to the administration in my letter of resignation is clear and simple. I quote it: "The breach of trust and integrity committed by the administration of this university left me no choice; my sense of justice and fair play has never been for sale to anyone, under any conditions, for any price."

That "breach of trust and integrity" was, of course, to the students, whose representation in the department was virtually ended with the Co-Chairman arrangement.

In 1971, the Academic Staff Association nominated me for membership on the committee on Staff Files being put together by General Faculties Council (GFC). That committee was struck to address, primarily, the question of confidentiality of staff files. My nomination was accepted, and when the committee met, I was elected Chairman, despite the fact that I was scheduled to leave on Sabbatical some four months later. In those four months, I put together the "Open Files" proposal, which maintained, essentially, that all files should be kept confidential, *except* those pertaining to career decisions (tenure, promotion, dismissal): *these* should be open to all parties involved. I circulated this to a key sample of faculty and administration, noted and tried to take account of criticisms; and then left on Sabbatical.

No sooner was I gone than the committee *changed* this proposal — which I had left ready for GFC — by eliminating that key provision of open files for career decisions. From Europe, I fought to leave the old

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