

an interview with
Colwyn Williamson
 or: let them call
 off their dogs

by DON SELLAR
 and RALPH MELNYCHUK

Sellar: Up to now you have refused to make any public statement about your being denied tenure. Why are you speaking now?

Williamson: Well, I have only so much patience, and time is running out, and I still do not want to make any statement relating to the tenure issue itself. There is another matter, however, about which I have now been forced to speak.

In The Gateway of Feb. 2, Vice-President Wyman is quoted as saying that this affair is a "personal matter" between the administration and myself. And pressure has been put on your newspaper to suppress the news. All because the matter, it is alleged, is being handled by responsible officials, through "proper channels." These are the considerations which have also been used to induce me to remain silent.

But this talk about not discussing the matter in public is coming to seem completely hypocritical. My silence has been exploited in order to launch a whispering campaign against me, to spread scandalous fabrications about my philosophical and teaching competence, and vile lies about my personal conduct.

Sellar: Are you speaking for both yourself and David Murray, or just for yourself?

Williamson: Just for myself.

Melnychuk: Could you be more specific about how your silence has been exploited?

Williamson: At the same time as The Gateway is being told to keep quiet, the head of my department sees fit to convey to CBC television his fantasies about my competence as a philosopher and teacher.

Sellar: On CBC's Dimension Prof. Mardiros was quoted as saying you have "published very little in the last four years".

Williamson: Well, even if we grant his insistence that the only criterion for **quality** is **quantity**, can we be informed of the actual standards of the philosophy department—can we learn how much has been published by other members of the department (including Prof. Mardiros himself)?

Of course, Prof. Tennessen has published a great deal and is the only member of the department



—Al Scarth photo

COLWYN WILLIAMSON

"... I am running out of patience"

with an international reputation in philosophy. That, I suppose, is why it was decided that he should not be on my tenure committee.

Melnychuk: Prof. Mardiros was also quoted as referring to the decline in enrolment in your Social Philosophy class.

Williamson: Once again, suppose we grant him his criterion for teaching ability—the quantity of student taught. Is there any evidence for attributing the decline to the quality of my teaching?

All of the students in that class have already indicated **their** view, but no one seems to give a damn about what students think. Several people have already pointed out that there is no evidence for his position, but Prof. Mardiros carries on saying the same thing, blind to the evidence.

Isn't it obvious that these two charges are red herrings and fabrications introduced solely in order to cover up the basic issue?

Melnychuk: Then what is the basic issue?

Williamson: The real charge is that I have played a "disruptive role" in the philosophy department. This other nonsense has been introduced simply because no one has had the guts to be honest about why I am really being fired.

Sellar: And is the charge true? Have you been a disruptive influence?

Williamson: Yes! I have been a disruptive influence in the department of philosophy. Of course, this has nothing at all to do with "personalities" or the rumors about having spread rumors of Prof. Mardiros. These topics, too, are introduced by those who are afraid to face up to the real issues of principle involved.

I have been a disruptive influence, and so, you will find, if you add up the numbers involved, have a **majority** of the members of my department. What we have

been fighting for is democracy in our department, an end to arbitrary decision-making, and a re-introduction of professional standards.

What the department of philosophy needs is a great deal **more** disruption, if it is ever to be anything more than a playground for philosophical amateurs, where sycophancy is more important than ability.

Sellar: Let's get back to the issue of "exploited silence". You haven't really told us the specific reasons why you are making this statement.

Williamson: At the same time as my supporters are being told that they must observe a discreet silence about the case, a little trio from the Philosophy Department launches a public campaign in the columns of The Gateway. At the same time as we are all being asked to respect the "dignity" of the situation, an actual member of my tenure committee has so little sense of personal dignity as to write a letter to The Gateway defending his behavior, via the clumsy ruse of defending the head of my department.

One of this trio writes a hypocritical letter to The Gateway telling us all to work through "responsible channels" and then spends classroom time that should have been devoted to teaching philosophy propagandizing his view of the incident.

If they really want a fight, they'll get one. If they push too much, they'll push the lid off this whole dirty business.

If, on the other hand, the parties who have been urging silence and the "proper", "respectable" channels really mean it, let them call off their dogs.

Melnychuk: What about the possibility of a compromise?

Williamson: Last Wednesday night I was assured by the president of the Association of Academic Staff that a definite compromise settlement would be proposed to me on Thursday or Friday. Up till today (Sunday) I have heard nothing, and the president of the AASUAE has not contacted me again.

Sellar: What will you do if you don't hear something soon?

Williamson: The CAUT has said that if a private settlement is not reached they will intervene. If I don't hear something soon, I suppose I shall be forced to appeal directly to the CAUT.