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by Michael Cohen and Colwyn Williamson

**Next Meeting:** October 12, 2002, 2:00pm to 4:30pm

**Submitting Contributions**

Deadline for the next *Update* is **4 December 2002**

Please send letters on any issue, news items and articles to:

*CAFAS Update*

7 Benn Street

London E9 5SU

e-mail: [thorpe@lgu.ac.uk](mailto:thorpe@lgu.ac.uk)

Tel/Fax: 0208 986 3004

Disks & email are best.

**Items in CAFAS Update do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council.**



**Comment**

MORDECHAI VANUNU

Colwyn Williamson, President

The Swansea AUT hopes that other NATFHE/AUT branches will consider action along the following lines:

The Swansea AUT notes that Mordechai Vanunu, the scientist who blew the whistle on Israel's secret nuclear preparations, has now spent fourteen years in prison, often in solitary confinement, and that the worldwide campaign to free him has called for renewed efforts on his behalf. Swansea AUT therefore resolves to write to Mordechai expressing our concern and sympathy, and to the Israeli government condemning his continued confinement, and to put to the AUT national conference in January a resolution urging other local associations, and the AUT nationally, to act similarly.



## ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN AMERICA

Janet Collett

Date sent: Thu, 27 Dec 2001 09:34:45 -0800

This came to me from another routing but must be the same story that is developing far beyond the original question which I believe was about the FBI's pursuit of Universities for information about their foreign students, which, alas, is within their rights. Foreign students have to sign agreement for this before they are given student visas, or so I understand from the International Herald Tribune.

As I gather from horrified friends in the US, the problem of press freedom in the US almost dwarfs the problem of academic freedom. Those of us who are old enough are remembering the bad old days of McCarthy. Although I have been preoccupied with fighting questions of academic integrity at Sussex to date, I think I'll have a little time to think about this question now. Here are several possible, relatively easy things to do.

- Write directly to Lieberman.
- Use CAFAS sponsors for some signatures, as for the *New York Times*.
- Urge organisers to go for the *New York Times* first as of the very greatest importance.
- Write our own letter to the press urging academics to write about problems of the press and academic freedom in US.

From: Phil Gasper <pgasper@ndnu.edu>

Subject: Academic freedom statement--update

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

This message is to update you on the current status of the statement in defense of academic freedom which has been circulating by email over the past two months.

The good news is that there has been a tremendous response, with well over 3000 endorsers both from the United States and from many other countries. The statement has received some media attention (see, for example, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4322832,00.html>) and new endorsements continue to arrive every day.

The bad news is that since the statement was first formulated, the threats to academic freedom have increased. Last month, for example, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (a private organization whose founders include Lynne Cheney and Senator Joseph Lieberman) issued a report accusing numerous faculty members who have criticized US policy of being unpatriotic (see <http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?ItemID=12355>).

Given the source, it is hard not to see this report as representing a potential academic blacklist. Even more worrying is the University of South Florida's decision earlier this month to dismiss Dr. Sami Al-Arian, a tenured professor of computer science, after he was attacked in the media because of his political activity (see <http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?ItemID=12547>).

Developments such as these make it all the more urgent for us to speak out in defense of academic freedom. We have made some small changes to the original statement to correct an inaccuracy that was pointed out to us and to update its content. The latest version is appended below and can also be found at our new website: <http://www.academicfreedomnow.org>.

The website also lists many of the endorsers (the rest will be added as soon as we can finish the time-consuming job of compiling them all), and allows supporters to both endorse and make contributions on-line.

We would particularly like to thank all those who have already donated money towards publishing the statement. We have raised sufficient money for the statement to appear in the London Review of Books (which has wide circulation in the US as well as in Britain) next month.

We would still like to publish the statement as a full-page ad in the New York Times, but we have discovered that this will cost many tens of thousands of dollars, which is considerably in excess of the money we have so far received. However, if everyone who has endorsed the statement but who has not yet made a contribution were to donate \$20, we would raise sufficient funds. Even if an ad in the New York Times proves beyond our reach, publication in the New York Review of Books, the Chronicle of Higher Education and similar venues, is considerably less expensive. If you have not made a donation, we urge you to consider sending what you can - your contribution will be put to good use.

Thank you for speaking out in support of academic freedom at this critical time. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us. And please continue to circulate the statement (endorsements can still be sent to [academicfreedomnow@hotmail.com](mailto:academicfreedomnow@hotmail.com)) or direct potential endorsers to our website

(<http://www.academicfreedomnow.org>).

Sincerely,

Phil Gasper, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Notre Dame de Namur University  
([pgasper@ndnu.edu](mailto:pgasper@ndnu.edu))

Bill Keach, Professor of English, Brown University, ([william\\_keach@brown.edu](mailto:william_keach@brown.edu))

#### STATEMENT IN DEFENSE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM -- REVISED TEXT

In the crisis precipitated by the terrible events of September 11, members of academic communities across the U.S. have participated in teach-ins, colloquia, demonstrations, and other events aimed at developing an informed critical understanding of what happened and why. Now that the U.S. is waging war in Afghanistan, such activities are continuing.

Unfortunately, some of those who have been critical of U.S. policy have been threatened and attacked for speaking out.

Trustees of the City University of New York voted to condemn faculty members who criticized U.S. foreign policy at a forum in October.

The president of the University of Texas at Austin publicly denounced a prominent faculty critic of U.S. policy.

Efforts by pro-war students, alumni, and prominent media outlets to silence criticism and dissent have been reported at the University of New Mexico, Brown University, MIT, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and elsewhere.

Some faculty members have been suspended or threatened with suspension, others have received death threats or have been physically threatened.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, founded by Lynne Cheney (wife of U.S. vice-president Dick Cheney), has issued a report listing faculty members it considers insufficiently patriotic.

Attacks on faculty who have questioned or dissented from the Bush administration's current war policy have coincided with other ominous developments. Colleges and universities are being pressured by agencies of the federal government to hand over confidential information from student files. And there are moves in Congress to limit visas for students from abroad.

We call on all members of the academic community to speak out strongly in defense of academic freedom and civil liberties, not just as an abstract principle but as a practical necessity. At a moment such as this, we must make sure that all informed voices - especially those that are critical and dissenting - are heard.



## Articles

### WHY THE UNIVERSITY OF WALES IS UNDER ATTACK

by Michael Cohen and Colwyn Williamson

We quite appreciate that academics are currently under tremendous pressure to lower standards. The whole system of higher education in Britain is in a state of crisis. Cuts in funding, combined with dramatic increases in student numbers, have meant more work for fewer staff. But the problems, if they can be tackled at all, must be tackled honestly. Cohen & Williamson, Academic standards Under Pressure: the Case of Swansea, 1991

#### Preface

Academics in Wales, like their colleagues in the rest of the UK, have for the most part endured without much protest the destruction of everything they valued about teaching and themselves as teachers. Demoralised by staff cuts and increased workloads, and driven to despair by the sheer weight of the bureaucracy and quangoism which now dominate university life, they have not shown much stomach for resistance. They complain, of course. Even at the highest levels, even among the very people who have allowed themselves to be the instruments of decline, it is freely admitted that universities are now a pathetic parody of what they used to be. But precious few have actually done much to fight the decline in higher education in Wales. There are signs, though, that these latest developments in the commercialisation of what used to be academic institutions may be a bridge too far. As we write, neither the demise of the University of Wales nor the abolition of faculties and departments in Swansea is a fait accompli. The purpose of this small pamphlet is to explain that such measures would do nothing to improve the quality of higher education in Wales, and we call upon our colleagues to resist them with might and main.

MC & CW

27 February 2002

#### Appearance & Reality

The appearance of things is that Cardiff and Swansea, along with Aberystwyth, Bangor and Lampeter, belong to a family of universities united under the auspices of the federal University of Wales. The reality behind this is that Cardiff and Swansea, the two most powerful members of the group, have schemed for at least a decade to dissolve the federal university. They have of course adorned this process with the

most touching declarations of filial piety, but every promise of undying love has served only to confirm that the aim is patricide. The parties involved know each other well: Cardiff and Swansea officials are currently fulsome in their praise of federalism; federal officials have responded by organising a petition to rally support for the continued existence of the University of Wales.

The very fact that Cardiff et al are now called 'universities' is indicative: they used to be called 'constituent colleges'. The announcement in 1991 that Wales would have a separate funding council 'intensified the long-running battle between the federal university and its larger member colleges' (Times Higher, 27 December 1991). Five Principals immediately wrote to the Welsh office declaring that the new funding council would make central planning redundant and demanding the right to call their institutions 'universities'.

As with all the important changes in the character of higher education in recent times, the transition from 'college' to 'university' was advertised as primarily a matter of terminology. Cynics described it as enabling the officials to upgrade their own titles, with 'principals' becoming 'vice-chancellors', their deputies 'pro-vice-chancellors'. But the flimflam concealed a deeper purpose, which was perhaps not for public consumption, but which was sometimes stated inside the colleges themselves:

The central bureaucracy of the University of Wales needs to be reduced...in this new world of value for money and competition.

(Letter to all Swansea staff, Professor B L Clarkson, Principal, 10 June, 1992)

This talk of 'value for money and competition' was more than cheap rhetoric; it signified a fundamental change in attitude towards higher education. Commenting on Professor Clarkson's conception of a university, the Visitor said:

The point is that neither the University of Wales nor the University College of Swansea is 'a company' in the profit-making or any other sense. They are academic institutions. I believe that this has not always been remembered in Swansea.

(The Davies Report, Thoemmes Press, 1993, p 114)

There is not the slightest evidence that the officials in Swansea, or anywhere else in Wales, took this message to heart. On the contrary, they have to this day declined to supply academic staff with copies of the Visitor's report.

### **Two Pretences**

The plot to destroy the University is generally hidden behind one or both of two pretences. One pretence is that the aim is only to modify the role of the University in certain minor respects, notably by reducing the amount of 'bureaucracy'. The plausibility of this suggestion, however, is somewhat undermined by the fact that those making it have in the last ten years manufactured more bureaucracy in their own institutions than was manufactured in the previous fifty. Academic staff are drowning in red tape, and most of it has

nothing whatsoever to do with the University of Wales.

The other pretence is that the plot to dissolve the federal structure is merely a contingency plan. The application for degree awarding powers, for example, is not intended to bring about the collapse of the University of Wales; it is merely a necessary precaution, designed to cope with the tragic possibility that the University might collapse of its own accord. The reality behind this pretence is again an open secret in the colleges themselves, where the objective is said to be replacing the University with independent 'regions' and reducing it to a 'purely ceremonial role'. For public consumption, the objective has to do with what would happen 'if' the University were to disintegrate; internally, the 'if' is habitually replaced by 'when'.

One of the few facts that cannot be denied is that both Cardiff and Swansea want to have their own degree awarding powers. Anyone who thinks through the implications of this fact will soon see that it makes professions of federal loyalty utterly meaningless.

#### **The Virtues of the University**

The relationship between the University and its constituent colleges, according to the Visitor, is that

'academic' matters, including the granting and deprivation of degrees, the regulation of examinations, the establishment or discontinuance of departments of study and the approval of schemes of study, are the province of the University; 'discipline', including the appointment and removal of staff and dealing with grievances, are for the College.

(The Davies Report, p 11)

The virtues of this division between 'academic' and other matters were aptly summarised by Sir John Meurig Thomas, the deputy pro-chancellor of the University of Wales:

The work of the Academic section of the Registry must not be jeopardised...It safeguards standards and reinforces the ethic of consistency of purpose...a vitally important part of the University's role is keeping a dispassionate eye on reports by external examiners and on higher degree examinations in general, as well as serving as a focus for any independent inquiries.

(Further Thoughts on the Changing Scene in the University of Wales, 1992, p 9)

Consistency of purpose, keeping a dispassionate eye on standards, serving as a focus for independent inquiries: these will seem like crucial virtues to anyone concerned with the quality of higher education. In reality, they were precisely the features of the University's role that the college officials resented the most. Sir John had 'chosen to ignore' the facts, said Swansea; his ideas were 'unbalanced'.

The 'facts' that Sir John and the Visitor allegedly ignored were of course 'the new world of value for money and

competition', which is to say, the commercial priorities of those running the colleges. 'Consistency' is not a virtue if you believe that education must be based exclusively on the fluctuating demands of the market-place; 'keeping a dispassionate eye on standards' is not a virtue if standards must be discarded so that more students can be taught by fewer staff; and 'independent inquiries' are the last thing you want if you are committed to pretending that an educational system which is everywhere in decline is actually improving.

As it happens, the Visitor had been perfectly aware of the economic pressure on universities. In a television interview after the appearance of the Visitor's report, the Queen's representative, Sir Michael Davies, said he appreciated that places like Swansea were short of funds. 'All I am saying', he explained, is that 'if universities remember their purpose, the dash for cash must never be allowed to take priority over academic considerations.'

### **Goodbye One Nation**

In 1992, we described the political reality behind the formal appearance of the University of Wales in the following terms:

The idea that the colleges should be autonomous has a previous history, but it has begun as a result of government policy to be urged much more strenuously. The policy consists essentially of reducing central funding, increasing student numbers, and decreeing that every sector of education must be judged by its cost-effectiveness. The result of this policy has been to throw all the universities into a frenzy of competition for students, for government funding, and for financial assistance from the private sector...

A special consequence in Wales of the pressure on universities is to stretch federal loyalties to breaking point. As it becomes evident that the colleges depend for their continued existence on doing better than one another, the restraints imposed by common planning become increasingly irksome...and the heads of the various colleges, at one time regarded as the most senior among a community of scholars, have begun to see themselves as the managers of enterprises resembling businesses and resent what they regard as bureaucratic interference from outside.

(Commentary on the Assumptions, Findings and Method of the Calvert Report, 1992, Introduction, slightly paraphrased)

A decade later, the 'breaking point' we predicted has now been reached. Cardiff has in effect issued a unilateral declaration of independence. Swansea intends to follow suit, putting the blame on Cardiff for making this inevitable. Aberystwyth and Bangor, less sanguine about the prospect of going it alone and always slower to discard tradition, will be left with no choice: the University of Wales will have vanished. Those who still favour the monarchy of a federal structure argue for the bond between 'one nation' and 'one university', but the barons in Cardiff and Swansea are impatient with both these notions.

The future for them lies with several nations (to be called 'regions') and several universities, each of which will bring the other institutions in their area under their own sway and seek alliances when necessary without regard for national boundaries and wherever income can be generated.

### **Goodbye Standards**

One consequence of the economic climate we described in 1992 was to put tremendous pressure on traditional standards and to diminish what Lord Dearing called 'the quality of the educational experience' for students. Increased student numbers combined with reduced resources made this inevitable, but the spirit of competition did not encourage the universities to admit this honestly. Sir Edward Parkes, the Vice-Chancellor at Leeds, was almost uniquely frank when he admitted that 'we will fudge...and pretend that loss of quality is not happening'. For the most part, universities found it more convenient to allow that there was indeed a decline, but only among their rivals.

In the period from 1990 to 1993, Swansea was the scene of a particularly traumatic clash over declining standards, when we exposed the casual manner in which some degrees were awarded there. Our survival, and eventual victory, was very much bound up with the existence of the federal university. It was our view that, although this might well endanger a university's reputation and thereby undermine recruitment, academics had a duty to expose malpractice, and the University of Wales had a duty to protect them for doing so. Swansea did not share this view: sacking us seemed more appropriate. The 'great battle in Swansea' raged for some three years, and it was to a large extent about the respective powers of the federal university and one of its constituent colleges. 'The Establishment' in Swansea, as the Visitor called it, was inclined to think that sacking people was its own business, and no one else should meddle. Students disagreed, then academics elsewhere joined the protest, and eventually the University of Wales itself was obliged to save our necks.

We have never praised the federal university unduly. It is weak, little more than a creature of the imagination; and the crown of its Vice-Chancellor is merely passed around those who rule the constituent colleges. We have no doubt that, left to its own devices, the University of Wales would hardly have lifted a finger to defend us, or anyone else in trouble. It was, on that one occasion, embarrassed into action by a massive wave of protest, and it does not seem to have learnt much from the experience of being branded as 'the plagiarism university' in every national newspaper. It has in our judgement done nothing to prevent the decline in the quality of higher education in Wales.

The passing of the federal university would nevertheless be of some historical importance. Despite its feebleness, the University of Wales exercises some constraint on the ability of those running the constituent colleges to do as they like. The mere fact that it obliges them to confer about academic strategy inhibits their manoeuvres against one other in the war over recruitment and funding. And the running sore of declining standards is not a matter that any of the colleges wishes to come under the scrutiny of those whom they now

regard as rivals and enemies.

When Swansea was in the process of fine-tuning its change of name from 'college' to 'university', one extremely senior academic told us that he favoured 'Degrees are Us'. This was of course a joke, but it was a joke with serious intent: we all know that higher education is going to the dogs, but we are allowed to say only that it is happening somewhere else.

The fact that the University of Wales provides students with an avenue of appeal against their treatment in the individual colleges is another source of irritation to college officials. As the number of students grows and the quality of the institutions deteriorates, so the complaints multiply, and these complaints are exacerbated by the litigious spirit which accompanies the 'market values' dominating today's higher education. Supply and demand have supplanted teaching and learning; students have been replaced by 'consumers'; and the transaction between teachers and pupils is governed by a 'contract'. The poor quality of the goods makes these consumers complain, and the prevailing ethic makes litigation inevitable. Students, too, have learned to live in 'the new world of value for money', only to discover that, as often happens, the buyer and the seller do not agree on what 'value for money' means.

For staff and students, then, the destruction of the University of Wales will mean that both are even more vulnerable to mistreatment. Institutions like Cardiff and Swansea have never been, to put it mildly, models of open government and democratic participation. The dissolution of the federal structure will make them even more unaccountable.

### **Restructuring**

The move to dissolve the University and thus remove external constraints is in any case accompanied by moves to remove the internal constraints on the behaviour of the increasingly tiny coterie making policy decisions. The name for this process is to be restructuring. Anyone puzzled by what 'restructuring' means might begin with the example of the wolf and the sheep, the former of which has been known to restructure the latter.

Officials in Swansea have circulated a document Report of the Working Group on Academic Structure: A Consultative Report which explains how Faculties and academic departments need to be 'restructured'. 'Current departments', the Report says, must 'amalgamated into new schools', while 'Faculties and the office of Dean and Sub-Dean' must be 'abolished'.

As always, readers of these proposals are encouraged to regard them as primarily a matter of changes in terminology. Just as the 'polytechnics' became 'universities' and 'courses' became 'modules', so the existing 'faculties' will become 'schools'. These new Schools will, like Faculties it seems, contain groupings of departments. Thus a new 'School of Humanities', like the old Faculty of Arts, would contain departments like History, Politics and Philosophy, among others.

It is a theme of the changes in higher education, we have pointed out, that nothing is as it seems and most things are their opposites. When the polytechnics became universities,

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what really happened is that the universities became polytechnics. When the merely terminological change from 'course' to 'module' occurred, what really happened is that a form of teaching which made a priority of the logical relationship between areas of study was displaced by one in which every unit could be 'consumed' independently of the others.

### **Goodbye Faculties, Goodbye Departments**

The shift from Faculties to Schools follows the same pattern of deception. Each of these new Schools, we are told, would have a Head and a Deputy Head whose responsibilities would extend from 'planning, resources, finance, staffing' to (at the end of the list) 'academic leadership'. Each Head of School would chair a School Management Committee which would have a membership of between eight and sixteen members of staff selected 'to reflect the spread of disciplines within the School'. And each School would establish various sub-committees, of which the 'Academic' would be one, and 'Research' another, but alongside sub-committees entitled 'Third Mission', 'Marketing and Recruitment', 'Promotions', and 'Support Staff'.

There is no place in this structure for Departments and the academic distinctions they reflect. Departments are scheduled for extinction. As in the case of the University of Wales, which would continue to flourish but with only a 'ceremonial role', there may still be bodies called departments, but their functions would be, the report admits, quite 'different in nature' from existing departments. These departments would, one might say, have a purely ceremonial role: unlike departments in the old sense, they would not for example hold meetings. The report speaks of 'amending' the regulation governing departmental meetings; but since the only regulation is that such meetings occur, 'amendment' here is another euphemism for destruction.

Such 'departments' would moreover exist only 'where thought desirable'. We are not told who the thinkers of such thoughts might be: teaching staff familiar with current practice will not expect themselves to be included in whatever thinking goes on. But we are given some indication of the kind of thoughts that these unspecified thinkers will find desirable: 'departments' with 'Subject Heads' may sometimes be constituted to preserve 'subject identity'. It is said that Subject Heads, where they exist, would be responsible to School Heads: nothing is said about their responsibilities, if any, to others involved in teaching their disciplines.

### **... and Goodbye Subjects**

This silence on the relationship between Subject Heads and those teaching the same subject is no accident: the aim of the changes proposed is to do away with the very concept of an academic subject. The Report does indeed refer to 'subject identity', but it turns out that they have found this notion puzzling and translated it into something they can more easily understand.

There is, the report says, a 'considerable body of opinion' which favours the 'identity of individual subjects'. As a sop to this body of opinion, the report suggests that there might

be occasions on which it would indeed be desirable to preserve 'subject identity'. But 'subject identity' is immediately equated with 'visual identity', and 'visual identity' is said to be something that might be desirable if it aided 'student recruitment'.

There could be no better illustration of the chasm between those living in 'the new world of value for money' and those who still care about academic values: the identity of individual subjects is interpreted as a possible marketing ploy. 'We do not wish to lose the identities of subjects within schools', says the report, if this would 'affect adversely their marketing'.

As for the effect of all this on academic standards, the report pays the customary lip-service to 'quality'. 'We feel', say its authors, 'that it is vital that quality and standards are not compromised'. Setting aside the fact that quality has already been compromised beyond measure, how does the report envisage the prevention of further decline? The report recommends that 'consideration be given to designating a member of staff as Director of Academic Affairs'. But since the 'member of staff' in question turns out to be the chair of the school's academic sub-committee, all we get is another name for the same thing.

The problem is to be solved, in other words, in the way that it has been solved so far. The colleges have avoided decline in the past by changing their names to 'universities' and the names of their Principals to 'vice-chancellor': they will avoid decline in the future by changing the name of a staff member to 'Director of Academic Affairs'.

Behind the gobbledegook, then, lurks another profound deterioration. The members of what used to be, say, the Department of French will no longer have any significant control over what students of the language should learn. If the Department of French continues to exist at all, it will be only a sign on the door and, more important, a name that is sometimes used to advertise the university's wares. As for the opportunities to discuss policy provided by departmental meetings, these will have been 'restructured' out of existence.

Why is it necessary to abolish the Faculties and the Departments? The trouble with the present structure, the report says, is that it permits decisions to be made which are 'divorced from resource implications/influences'. Translated into plain English, what this means is that, when academic staff are allowed to participate in decision-making, they will occasionally be influenced by considerations which differ from those influencing their masters. The solution to that problem is to 'restructure' them out of the decision-making process. 'Restructuring', in other words, is motivated by the same commercial priorities that have reshaped every other aspect of the universities and brought about the destruction of everything that university teachers valued in them.

### **Previous CAFAS reports**

Academic standards under pressure: the case of Swansea

Prospects of promotion: towards a common code of practice  
Raising concerns and handling the consequences in Further and  
Higher Education  
Nolan: what you need to know  
The other plagiarism case: Mrs Jones and the University of  
Wales  
Upward appraisal  
Research assessment: as strange a maze as e'er men trod  
Universities: the way forward

also available:

Sir Michael Davies - The Davies Report: the great battle in  
Swansea

[www.cafas.org.uk](http://www.cafas.org.uk)



## Notices

**TITLES HERE**

Text here