

2 LIVING CONTRADICTIONS I am a University Academic. I am not. 1976

Until recently academics, on joining a University, would be offered a tenured appointment if they successfully completed a three year probation. On 21st January 1976 the Personnel Officer invited me to meet the Academic Staff Committee to assist them in reporting on progress:

The last meeting of the Academic Staff Committee considered a report on your progress to date with a view to confirming your appointment. The Committee felt that in order to assist them further in making a decision you should be interviewed by two members of that Committee and I should be obliged if you would report to the room of Professor R.E. Thomas, School of Management (Wessex House 3.14) at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 4th February 1976 for interview by Professors Thomas and Broadbent. I expect the proceedings to take about 45-60 minutes.

Would you please bring copies of your publications or theses with you for possible inspection. Thank you.

As the University regulations required that a probationer be informed before the end of the second year if progress was unsatisfactory and I was well into my third year, I attended the meeting with Professors Ray Thomas and Len Broadbent and a Professor Stephen Cotgrove with little concern that I would not be offered a tenured appointment. I would now ask you to use all your empathy and intuition in the feelings and thoughts which followed my reading of the following letter from the Personnel Officer on the 12th March 1976.

I am writing to inform you that the Academic Staff Committee made a recommendation to Senate that as you have not fully satisfied the requirements of your probationary contract, the University is unable to offer you a tenured appointment on the expiry of your probationary contract on 31st August 1976.....

These recommendations have now been confirmed by Senate.

The Academic Staff Committee's grounds for recommending that a new appointment should not be offered are as follows:-

- 1) *That you have not given satisfaction in the teaching of prescribed courses assigned to you.*
- 2) *That there is an absence of evidence to suggest that you have pursued research of sufficient quality for the assessors to be assured of your ability to perform adequately the duties of a University Lecturer; the objectives being to make acknowledged scholarly contributions to the advancement of your subject as well as to perform proper teaching and other administrative tasks.*

- 3) *That you have exhibited forms of behaviour which have harmed the good order and morale of the School of Education.*

Can you imagine the strength and nature of my existence as a living contradiction in the feelings and responses I made to this communication? These judgements were made and communicated with the full force of the University. They were intended to terminate my employment as a University academic. Please focus your attention on the grounds given for terminating my employment. The University stated that I had not given satisfaction in my teaching. I had not pursued research of sufficient quality. **I had disturbed the good order and morale of the School of Education.** My judgements on my activities were that I was certainly a competent teacher, if not a good teacher, that my research into educational theory was progressing well and that the values embodied in my practice were making a positive contribution to the good order of the School of Education. I thus had to hold my positive judgements together with the University's negative judgements. You can imagine my tension in living this contradiction. My determination to resist the negative judgements and the power relations which legitimated them led me to make the submission below to the Vice-Chancellor on the 29th March 1976.

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chairman of the Academic Staff Committee, to appeal against the decision of Senate to confirm the recommendation of the committee that I should not be offered a new appointment.

Fresh evidence will be submitted to the Committee in the immediate future, concerning my teaching, research and behaviour.

Between receiving the letter of the 12th March and appealing on the 29th March I received the support from a number of colleagues, students and external academics on which rests my life at the University. I could not have survived if I had been left on my own. Indeed one of the most depressing moments I can still vividly recall was the response to my request for help from Dr. Leslie Palmier, the Chairman of Bath University Association of University Teachers. He advised me that my attempt to resist the University was hopeless and that I should look for other employment. In marked contrast to this advice was the support I received from Geoff Whitty, Mary Tasker and Cyril Selmes, three of my colleagues in the School of Education and Paul Hunt an education student. Geoff Whitty in particular provided bedrock support. He advised me to contact the Campaign for Academic Freedom and Democracy. I went to see John Griffiths, a Professor of Public Law at the London School of Economics. After looking at the letter of the 12th March and the procedures for probationary lecturers he agreed to write to the University on my behalf. Geoff organised petitions around the School to confront the judgements that I had disturbed the good order and morale of the School of Education. Paul Hunt organised petitions from students and teachers in local schools which confronted the negative judgements on my teaching. Geoff advised me to send my research papers to Michael Young at the Institute of Education of London University and to a Dr. David Hamilton, a Visiting Professor at the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation of the University of Illinois, who was a well respected educational researcher. All this had to be organised

between the 12th and the 29th March. I look back with gratitude and some incredulity at what others were prepared to do on my behalf. One political lesson is very clear. The abuse of institutional power requires organised resistance if it is to be overcome. As an individual, without this support, I would have been overcome.

The Vice-Chancellor replied on the 30th March

Thank you for your letter date 29th March. It is likely that Senate would want the Academic Staff Committee to consider any new evidence you may care to put forward but, for your guidance, I should say that I doubt if it would be sufficient for you merely to re-submit in a different form data which the Committee has already considered. However, the form in which you present your views is a matter for you to decide.

I responded on the 1st April.

Further to my letter of 29 March. I enclose fresh evidence relating to my teaching, research and behaviour. I would hope that there is sufficient fresh evidence for the Academic Staff Committee to reconsider its recommendations to Senate that a new appointment should not be offered to me.

In the letter to Mr. Horner, I state the grounds, and given the evidence to substantiate my grievance appeal to Council. I should be grateful if you could submit this evidence to the academic staff committee, as a matter of urgency.

I have included copies of all correspondence in my possession relevant to my case....

I do think that serious charges have been made against me, which I am anxious to answer as soon as possible. I hope that you will be able to assist me in obtaining a hearing for what I see as a serious miscarriage of justice.

The submissions included the following letter from John Griffiths. Given his position as a Professor of Public Law I think it carried significant force to the University.

I ask you to consider the following submissions which suggest to me that he (Mr Whitehead) is being treated with less than justice.

1. *The first ground given was that Mr. Whitehead had not given satisfaction in the teaching of prescribed courses. But here again he is not told where and how he is deemed to have failed. So how can he answer or produce fresh evidence on this charge?*

2. *The second ground given was that there was an 'absence of evidence' about his pursuit of research. I note that it is not said that the research he has undertaken is of insufficient quality. What then is the nature of the evidence of his "pursuit of research" that the Academic Staff Committee requires but finds absent? Unless he is told this,*

he cannot meet this criticism, or be sure he is producing the most relevant fresh evidence. "Absence of evidence" may be a good ground for acquitting a man of fault but it cannot be a ground for proving him culpable.

3. The third ground given by the Academic Staff Committee was that he had exhibited forms of behaviour which had harmed the good order and morale of the School of Education. The Academic Staff Committee have refused to substantiate this. This refusal is manifestly unjust, as it is wholly unspecific. The ground might relate to his political opinions, to his personal morality, to his style of dress. Moreover the accusation is that his "forms of behaviour" have actually harmed the School of Education. He is surely entitled to know how he has done so. It is an elementary rule of natural justice that a man shall be told the offence with which he is charged and which, in this instance, has been found proved against him. How, otherwise, can he produce fresh, or indeed any, evidence? "

The Personnel Officer wrote to me on the 18th May,

The Academic Staff Committee met last Friday (14th May 1976) to consider the appeal indicated in your letter to the Vice-Chancellor of the 29th March 1976.

I confirm that (I quote from my written version of the statement which I read to you last Friday) the Academic Staff Committee thinks there may be further evidence to consider and has decided to meet again on Wednesday 26th May commencing at 9.15 a.m.

The Vice-Chancellor would like you to be available during that morning in case the Committee wishes to see you. If you would care to provide telephone numbers where you may be contacted quickly during the morning, this would assist us and possibly save your time.....

I met the Committee along with Professor 'Bunny' Dowdeswell, my Head of School and the Professor responsible for submitting the original evidence to the Academic Staff Committee on which was based the recommendations and judgements in the letter of the 12th March terminating my employment. Whilst I only have a vague recollection of this meeting I am sure that I communicated a sense of justified outrage.

The Secretary and Registrar wrote to me on the 14th June 1976 ,

On the advice of the Academic Staff Committee, Senate has given further consideration to your position in the University, and has resolved to extend your period of service as a probationary lecturer for one further year to 31st August 1977. I should be glad if you would confirm that in the circumstances, you will not now wish to proceed with your request for a hearing of a grievance relating to the procedure for notifying criticisms.

You will be considered again for a permanent appointment in the early part of 1977 in accordance with the usual procedures, and I am instructed to make it quite clear to you that it is by no means certain that such an appointment will be offered; the decision will be made at the appropriate time on the basis of the evidence before the Academic Staff Committee on your attainment in teaching, research and administration, and the committee must be satisfied that you have shown the necessary ability to perform the duties of a lecturer in the University.

In particular, the Committee will have regard to the following criteria:

- 1) *The presentation of the conclusions of your research in publishable form, to the satisfaction of referees.*
- 2) *Your work in the development of the Science and Technology Centre for teachers.*
- 3) *Your teaching ability.*
- 4) *Your co-operation in the efficient running of the School.*

Professor Dowdeswell will give you all possible guidance and assistance.

I finally received an offer of tenure from the Personnel Officer on the 11th February 1977.

I am writing to inform you that Senate recently approved a recommendation from the Academic Staff Committee that you be offered a permanent appointment in the University with effect from the 1st September 1977.

At the time I did not relate these experiences to my educational research. The paper described below was written in 1979 and published in the British Journal of In-Service Education in 1980. It contains no reference to the above experiences which have had a profound influence on my educational development in the workplace. What it does contain however is the evidence of the three original ideas described above in terms of individuals experiencing themselves as contradictions when some of their values are negated in practice. It contains the action reflection cycle and the view that a new form of educational theory is being constituted by the explanations which individual educators produce for their own educational development as they answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?.'

It also contains the imaginative proposal that school-based degrees could be awarded for teachers' analysis of their own work with their pupils. The successful completion of Ph.D., M.Phil., M.Ed., Advanced Diploma and Advanced Certification programmes is described in Part Two. When you read Part Two do bear in mind the comprehensive rejection of my ideas by the examiners of my Ph.D. submissions in 1980 and 1982. Details of the rejection follows my 1980 paper on the knowledge base of educational theory. I am still being driven by my commitment as an educational researcher to make an original contribution to knowledge of education.