

Special Supplement

THE OLD MOLE

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SYDNEY

"The newspaper that has proved, our old mole, who knows it well how to work underground, suddenly to appear"

"the Revolution." MARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

1970 YEAR OF STRUGGLE



FRONT LAWN MEETING MONDAY MARCH 22nd 1pm THE INTER-DEPARTMENTAL DEMAND: REINSTATEMENT AND ENQUIRY

Two Economics tutors at Sydney University — Bill Waters and Dave Hill — were sacked during the "stunt" at the end of third term last year.

Formerly, their courses have been abolished and their contracts not renewed.

But nobody, in the light of what happened last year, seriously contest that both were sacked.

Further, it appears that the most militant of the two — Bill Waters — has been "blackballed".

An objective consideration of the Waters-Hill case leads to the inescapable conclusion that the sacking was a vindictive and blatant exercise of arbitrary power by the authorities against opponents. An act of simple repression.

Below are listed the basic elements in the affair.

1. Since World War II the universities have been increasingly entrusted with training large numbers of well skilled people, made necessary by the technological advance of the productive forces and its consequences. Of course, many of the courses at universities were "archaic", and needed to be "modernised", if the students doing them were to be useful in the "new" capitalist economy and society.

2. In this sense the Economics course at Sydney University was "archaic" and not "up-to-date". A triumvirate of modern, capitalist, economic technicians — Professor Williams (ex-advisor to the Wilson Government), Professor Hogan (who is spending 1971 with the World Bank) and Professor Simkin — in 1968 took the Economics department in hand and decided to introduce advanced mathematical techniques into the course. This new element was to be compulsory. Heavy, advanced mathematical content was injected into Economics 1 and 2 in 1969, and that content was upped in 1970. This element came to dominate the course.

3. Naturally enough, the new course was imposed in a crude way on the staff (also unfortunately "archaic" in their skills and interests) and on students, who to enter the Economics course did not have to have mathematics as a matriculation subject.

4. In this situation Bill Waters acted as a contesting and critical catalyst. Along with Hill he carried out a survey on student opinion late 1969. Discovering considerable discontent, he began to articulate it in 1970 by demanding that the specialisation in advanced mathematics be optional, after an introductory first year course. Speeches to lecture classes, and follow-

ing mass meetings of students involved, revealed students supported him to the hilt. Waters' main student ally, Peter Wright, won overwhelming victories in the Economics society presidential elections and the SRC elections in April and July. Lectures were also marked by petty acts of disruption by students.

5. For Waters it was a case of student rights. He argued that students had a right to oppose, and veto by their actions, intolerable, imposed courses. He argued that they should have a right to shape the education they received.

6. In opposing the imposition of the new "modern" course as unacceptable, Bill Waters and his student/staff supporters were inevitably asked what their alternative was. This raised the question of the purpose and function of the Economics course, because from an explicit or implicit answer to this question would flow the "alternative" course.

The majority of the opposition argued (implicitly at least) that the purpose and function of the Economics course was to produce people who could uncritically "service" the existing capitalist economy, and proposed courses accordingly. They shared the intentions of Professors Hogan and Simkin. They disagreed in how that intention should be carried out. It was a "tactical" disagreement. Hogan's says his courses are not designed to produce only econometricians, but also professional economists for the Public Service and business" (*Economic Review* 26/6/70), to which his opponents answered that his courses "exclude from the faculty many people who are potential assets to the commercial world" (*Hill* 18/6/70). More specifically Peter Wright and Peter Vaughn argued that the new course excluded would be "industrial relations" people and "managers", who did not want intense specialisation but a general competence. The opposition majority therefore suggested a mix of the "new" and the "old" course (which they implicitly argued was not "archaic" altogether) with a measure of student choice.

7. Hill Waters was part of this consensus for some time, but could not remain so. Prior to May Moratorium, students and their staff allies had decided that May was to be a day when they decided what happened in the university and it was not to be an uncritical service institution on that day. Despite the instructions of the authorities to the contrary, Waters went along with this. This was the measure of the man.

8. The *Financial Review* journalist John Edwards, writing in the issue of 26/6/70, discerned a minority strand

in the opposition who did not agree with the assumption that the course should be uncritically subordinate to capitalism. Edwards wrote: "He (Hogan) is producing economic technocrats, they say, unaware of the social reality in which the economy functions. They add that a strong maths orientation produces not only socially ignorant economists, but bad economists; mathematical techniques are simply not applicable to real-world issues of economic policy. Bad policies result when such techniques are used."

Waters increasingly drew the opposition's attention to critics like E.J. Mishan who argues that the "mathematical school" wants precision, wants to quantify everything, thus tends to leave out of calculations "mathematically inconvenient", hard to quantify factors — like social and human costs. Mishan denounces these economists for having encouraged over-emphasis on growth and neglecting social costs and implications (like environmental pollution, deterioration in the quality of life). The actions of "mathematical technicians", narrow specialisation can have disastrous consequences.

To the premise of uncritical subordination to capitalism and a course of more or less narrow, uncritical specialisation (which was the position of Hogan/Simkin and some of their opponents) Waters began to oppose a course in which students would be initiated into various specialisations, but in framework of encouraging students to be questioning and critical about the purposes and consequences of their work.

9. By mid-1970, opposition from staff and students, and continuing discontent, had sabotaged the "new", "modern" course. At the beginning of third term it was announced that the advanced mathematics content would be compulsory for Economics 1 students in the Faculty of Economics only — for other first year students from other faculties and in senior years the course would be optional.

10. Yet at the end of that term Waters and Hill were sacked. The "frustrated" Economics bosses sought their revenge for the intolerable, continuing contestation of their authority. In this action

they could be sure of the backing of the Vice Chancellor, who had waged an incessant crusade during 1970 against the concept of mass student action for demands refused by the authorities, and who would have had no objections to penalties against the instigators of such action. Waters, as well, had raised the spectre of a challenge to the university's subordinate, uncritical role, which they are busy cultivating.

11. Were there any academic grounds for the sackings? Hill asked for reasons reasons for his sacking but was given none. In Waters' case, there could have been none: he was the tutor for 350 final year students and the senior academic in charge of his course has publicly testified of his competence — he "would be an acquisition for any teaching department" etc.

12. Since he was dismissed last November Bill Waters has applied for jobs as a tutor in Economics and a tutor in Government at the University of NSW and been knocked back for both jobs, though that university continued to advertise for both jobs after knocking him back. Ironically too, Sydney was still advertising for Economics tutors in mid-February 1971.

In conclusion, the academic year is now restarting and staff and students are re-assembled for the first time since the dismissals. One would expect the small group of "left" staff to seek an interview with the Vice Chancellor on the matter to demand Bill Waters' (and Hill's, if he is interested, having taken up a journalistic career) immediate reinstatement. And to rally whatever staff support they can get. In the Economics faculty itself some of Bill Waters' student (and staff) supporters could raise the demand for his reinstatement. If such a campaign began, there would be a strong likelihood of it getting general student support.

The facts or the case cry out for the attempt, to get Bill Waters reinstated, to be made. The sacking of a staff member, who champions students rights and who refuses to accept disastrous uncritical, subordination of university education to the needs of the present economy, should not pass uncontested.

SYDNEY UNI continued

Out of this theoretical, propaganda, and agitational work should begin to emerge a programme which responds to the real needs and aspirations of students (and staff) and the goal dynamics of which is to eliminate the educational, social and general oppression of students, staff and would-be students.

Alone, students are considerably weakened. The staff, or a significant section not caught up in the pyramid-climbing, are needed as allies. In the long run to counter and smash the hostile state forces who will intervene as soon as their cousin (the spot lose control), an alliance with the working class is needed — an alliance around the common aim: socialist self-management.

1970 was a big year and there were casualties — two expulsions and two sackings (see elsewhere in OLD MOLE) — and there is a comprehensible ebb as 1971 opens. The ebb is due, too, to militants still assimilating, analysing, and classifying what happened last year and what the lessons are. The future will bring more of 1970 and students, better prepared, with 1970 understood, will prove as irresistible as their goal and their allies.

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