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REFUSE

DOCTORAL STUDENTS' COUNCIL PRODUCT

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Free

TRENCH SCHOLAR!

By Will Petry



I have been asked by the Doctoral Students' Council to write a few words about myself.

On January 8, 1985, I was elected the Chairperson of the Doctoral Students' Council to replace Paul Perry, who regretfully had to resign from the position. In the course of the academic year there have been three elected Chairs of the DSC. A game of musical chairs of Chair reflects the fact that something is amiss at the Graduate Center.

I have reluctantly accepted this position. In the past two years, I have witnessed the toll it has taken on others. I am not a member of the school of Machiavelli. To seek power is otiose. Therefore, like Cincinnatus of Old, I have decided to leave my plow and assume the Chair of the DSC. I will defend student rights and interests. We are not merely the convenient resources needed to be blissfully mined by those who mask our exploitation with the verbiage of collegiality. I can not help feeling like an elected president of a "Banana Republic." I doubt that I will finish my term in office.

I have taught as an adjunct instructor at six schools during the past four years. I have taught as many as thirteen courses at four different schools in one year and did not gross \$12,000 dollars in income. I have been denied Unemployment Benefits by Hofstra University and Nassau Community College. I was black listed for union activity at Hofstra, which could afford to send an attorney to Unemployment Insurance Hearings, but could not pay adjuncts a decent wage. I have taught a full-time load twice at Hofstra and was still paid as an adjunct in violation of their own collective bargaining agreement. As the unemployment officer of the Hofstra Adjunct Faculty Association, I had the pleasure of seeing a woman with a three year old child denied Unemployment Benefits, because some "humanistic" quisling of a chairperson wrote a letter stating that she would have reasonable assurance of a position in the Fall. The children of adjuncts can eat roots and berries during the Summer. I and others successfully organized an independent adjunct faculty union at Hofstra only to be betrayed at the last moment by the American Federation of Teachers. I took Hofstra University to the National Labor Relations Board and won an out of court settlement for unfair labor practices.

I have often had so-called fellow scholars of the gentle academic community attempt to and sometimes succeed in taking away my courses after a semester has commenced. Of course, the difference was my problem. One chairperson actually asked me to perform research without mentioning payment. The tacit threat was obvious. I have often prepared courses that I were assured would go. Later, it was my unfortunate luck that en-

rollment was too small for the course to go. Only a non-collegial ragamuffin would expect to be paid for preparation work. I have twice been threatened with imprisonment and fined under the Taylor Law because adjuncts on strike threaten public safety, but piddling wages and poor working conditions do not threaten the public interest. I have actually been paid at one school on a piece-work basis at so much per student head.

The inconsistency of adjunct employment actually led to my being mugged. After leaving the Unemployment Office in Freeport, Long Island, I was relieved of my worldly goods after being informed that my head would be blown off. Naturally, when the trial came up and I was subpoenaed to testify, I was docked a day's pay by one of the schools that did not decide to hire me and forced me to the unemployment line. I have also been docked for attending family funerals. I continually have to wait six weeks to be paid at all the schools where I have taught several times. I was once forced to sell my own books to purchase gasoline to get to a campus where I taught because of the above policy. I have gone without medical or dental insurance. I have even gone without eyeglasses. I have lived with broken front teeth. I have slept in an unheated room so I could teach. I have walked twenty-five miles to teach because the cost of a cab was prohibitive.

I have worked for four years at Nassau Community College. When a one semester full-time Instructor position opened at Nassau I was not even considered fit enough to be informed by my colleagues. In fact, I had to be informed by someone outside of Nassau to learn that a position was open. I was not interviewed. I was not considered. The litany of horrors continues.

I am sick of the phoney credentials racket that exists solely to insure exploitation, rather than to insure academic excellence. I have taught where there are full-time tenured faculty with only a BA. I have been judged as unfit to teach full-time by people who only have a MA as I do. I know damn well that many of the intellectually insecure inhabitants of academe -- all the Dr. Drs. -- that sit in pre-terious judgement of me today were teaching full-time and often tenured without a PhD in hand. A few years ago, all that was required was an ABD for appointment and a PhD for tenure. Now, these pedantic hyaenas want us to have PhD's to teach as adjuncts. They continually up the credentials ante for less and less reward. Our credentials and publications are never good enough. We are the bastards of the academic world. Although, these academic hypocrites will always use our credentials for their own benefit. One college actually had the pompous gall to send me a twenty-five page questionnaire and requested the latest copy of my transcript to aid in their accreditation. I had not worked there for a year. The

credential game goes on and on even if you do get beyond the one year contract laborer status. If you land a tenure track position, the boobaholics that first said you were competent, who worked with you for five years, will turn around and find you unfit for tenure. A convict has a better deal with the parole board. They wonder why the best and the most dedicated of us leave teaching? I wonder why so many of us stay? They do not deserve us.

I am tired of being told by people who make more money than I do that my huge \$7,000 dollars a year salary is too great to permit financial aid. I am also tired of the fellowships, research grants and paid sabbaticals going to those who are not the least privileged in the academic setting.

I am aware of all the hucksters and huckstering in the realm of academe. I have paid my dues and have the running wounds and scars from too many campaigns in the trenches of academe. Therefore, I am a trench scholar. I have no illusions. My litany of horrors is not unique. Those of you who have not been in the trenches may assume that this will never happen to you. You will learn soon enough. This is your fate. Unless, you are independently wealthy or are willing to be kept by someone to have the status of "professor". You can not eat a bowl full of status for breakfast.

These things that are now possible are impossible. Therefore, contrary to all the benefactors of our impossible present we should demand that the impossible be made possible now. We deserve it. Teaching should not be an eleemosynary activity. As long as the trenches exist there can be no community of scholars. The conditions that presently exist show an educational system that is increasingly becoming moribund. It is not only failing in its task to educate, but is becoming irrelevant in a world where a BA will permit you to be a secretary or a sales clerk. Do not be narcotized by the siren song that things will be better next semester, next year or in the glorious year of 1995. The millennium year when supposedly a new wave of baby boomers will flock to the ivy covered groves of academe. If you were a parent and worked like a grunt to get your child through college and all they got for their BA was a humanistic experience, would you permit your younger child to go through the same thing for a piece of paper? A piece of paper that is only good for use in an outhouse. The bubble of the value of a college education is bursting. The world does not stand still and we can not embrace the myth of the past as the future, that all too many of those already ensconced in their secure little sinecures would have us believe. This is not the 1950s or the 1960s, but rather, it is the 1980s. We live in the here and now.



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