

Chapter 1. The People's University, Myth and Perception

FALSE PHILOSOPHERS' FALL

When all that is bluff and bull is squandered,
Whom does the wind embrace but simple men,
And soothe their griev~~e~~ with delicate disdain
For those who squandered truth like excrement?
Black-clothed pedlars of universal pain
Came by to my old ghost and me one night:
As he strained with all the hopeless collier's
Bygone strength to lift, I shoved a brick
Between the axle's biting steel and earth
And scurried like a ferret for the stars.
A weight would crush me in its gravity,
On me a drunken university
Would reel and bite with teeth **of** sordid liars,
Would sugar our petrol and slash **our** tyres.

(first published in "The Salmon".)

This little book summarises my attempts at gaining tenure in the University of Wales. In my opinion my applications and representations covering the period 1974 to present have not been assessed properly by the various committees and officers of the University, especially in the three colleges at Aberystwyth, Bangor and Swansea. I have appealed for tenure on numerous occasions to various bodies such as the University Court, the Committee of Principals, and the Privy Council. The book is based on the most important correspondence between the various University authorities and myself; on my Petition to the Privy Council; the College's reply and my comments on this reply. An Appendix contains a Table of relevant statistics comparing my qualifications with those of tenured contemporaries, and other relevant data.

PRINCIPLES

The aim of the book is not to cause further dissent and bitterness among the antagonists, but to provide a clear basis for an appeal direct to the People of Wales for tenure in its only University – *The People's University*. I wish simply for an opportunity to serve the People of Wales, an opportunity to use my training and talents to pursue and disseminate knowledge in the University. Some of the most important principles at stake are as follows.

1) Recognition by the University of Wales of scholarly excellence and qualifications, recognition in the form of tenure, or its reformed equivalent.

2) The principle of academic freedom, which embraces the most severe difference of political opinion, or such factors as ethnic or social origin.

3) The principle of free speech, and expression of opinion.

4) The principle that all qualified persons that apply for tenure in the University of Wales must be assessed on ability, experience, and recognised contributions to knowledge.

5) The principle of equal status for the two languages of Wales, active Welsh language education, and the right of qualified native speakers of the Welsh language to tenure in the University.

6) Above all, the principle of fair assessment, recognition for lengthy service, experience and scholarly excellence in the form of tenure or its contemporary equivalent.

THE ASSAULT ON CARREG CENNEN CASTLE.

Driven like slaves by trivial convention
Which centuries old became a habit
In bodies that were barely fed or clothed
In mouldings that they feared and despised,
In which elders conceived youth and light,
A busload arrived of the unemployed
To be shown around the State's Old Mortar.
In the pointless, desolate wilderness
Habitual management of slaughter
Had created inside the castle walls,
Realpolitik of kill, steal and keep,

has

They forgot for the day their own drab lives.
For years after that, all labouring done,
The castle still filled them with dawn and sun.

(First published in "The Salmon").

THE CHARTER AND ITS INTERPRETATION

The Charter of the University of Wales is the basis for its existence, and is a document which defines its rights and duties. It bears the sign manual, or signature, of the present Head of State, Elizabeth II, and its Articles and Statutes are available to the General Public from the Registrar of the University in Cardiff or in the annual University Calendar. The purpose of the original Victorian Charter was to found a University *in and for Wales*. Subsequent amendments have not altered this original purpose.

The rest of the Charter elaborates and defines the way in which the University's Constituent Institutions, or Colleges, shall be *in and for Wales*. Unfortunately, the document as it stands at present is pedantic, assertive and detailed, but open to very loose interpretation. For example, it is the opinion of the College at Aberystwyth, the University College of Wales, expressed in its reply to my Petition of 1986 to the Privy Council, that the College is not obliged by Charter to teach in the Welsh language. The absurdity of this assertion is easily revealed by the argument that if this were the case, than neither is the College obliged to teach or research in English. The Charter does not specifically instruct the College to teach or research in English or in Welsh, but only to teach and research. A simply remedy to the quaint point of view taken by the College is not specifically available, because of looseness in the wording of the Charter. The latter begins with the confident assertion that *there shall be and is hereby constituted a University in and for Wales*. Let there follow a sentence such as this, *The University shall actively and diligently teach and research all subjects whatsoever in the Welsh and English languages, and opportunity shall be give for well qualified Welsh speakers from Wales and elsewhere to teach and research in the University using the medium of the Welsh language*.

Such an amendment to the Charter has to be proposed and approved by its supreme legislative authority, the University Court, and then submitted to the Privy Council. Unfortunately the Court is an apathetic and ineffective Body which

would be frightened by a revolutionary idea like making the University teach more effectively in the Welsh language. Pressure for reform must come from the People of Wales itself, if it wishes to see the Welsh language treated with a modicum of dignity and if it wishes to see the language survive.

You were a brilliant child, a model for
Posterity; of these, which cares that you
Are told so frequently to go to hell
By these fat and barren politicians?
These fools could bear no offspring, never will,
Untouchable and safe behind the scenes
Their torpid poisons coiled around your root
In child-like learning and integrity.
Hypocrisy in lurid modern guise,
The corpse that flickers blandly on the screen
Will always be lying, contriving,
To perpetuate the all-embracing see,
Rotting in babbling anonymity.

MYTH AND PERCEPTION

Let us assume that the People of Wales (about two and three quarter millions within its geographical boundaries and thousands more exiled) wishes to see the survival of the Welsh language in its vigour and brilliance, strong and uncorrupted. By inference the University of Wales, being in and for Wales by its own Charter, should be aware of this wish and should ensure that it teaches in the language far more effectively than it does today. It would surely seek to appoint to tenure fully qualified native Welsh speakers who have gained recognition as International scholars in any specialty whatsoever. I am such a scholar and am more than willing to serve the educational needs of the People in its University.

Indeed this would be expected of the *People's University* as it is still known with increasingly misplaced affection in contemporary Wales.

Let us assume that a University *in and for Wales* be concerned with the award of tenure to an internationally recognised scholar, a native of Wales, with ability to teach and to write, deliver lectures and to compose scientific research papers and monographs in both the official languages of Wales. This assumption is made on the basis that a University *in and for Wales* is *for Wales* and therefore the People of Wales. A native of Wales such as myself is one of

the People of Wales whose only University is for Wales. I may reason that the University concern itself with my ability to produce knowledge, a concern that ultimately must manifest itself in the award of tenure. Otherwise, it will not be possible for me to continue to teach or research in the University. Indeed I have already earned and been awarded three of its degrees, its highest degree of Doctor of Science (D. Sc.) nineteen years ago when I was 27 years old. Apparently I am the youngest scholar in the University to have received this degree, and probably the youngest in any British University to have been so honoured. This degree was awarded to me for a thesis composed of forty two published scientific articles. I have now published over five hundred articles and books at the time of writing. Nineteen years later~~er~~ therefore, with a matured and established international reputation, the award of tenure by the University of Wales is a logical sequitur. Why have I been rejected for tenure by the University so many times in these nineteen years, and by five of its Constituent institutions? Why has this occurred despite numerous awards and honours in Britain and several other countries around the world? These include the Harrison Memorial Prize and the Meldola Medal of the Royal Society of Chemistry, numerous Fellowships awarded in open British competition, and Visiting Professorships in Cornell University and IBM in the United States, and in the Scuola Normale Superiore and University of Pisa in Tuscany; in the University of Zurich in Switzerland; in the Indian Statistical Institute; and finally the rank of full professor in the United States and Canada. My complete Curriculum Vitae is Appended, well known to the University of Wales from numerous requests for tenure.

Why should I have to strive so hard for a routine appointment to tenure, why has the mechanism and authority of the People's University been so blindly unable to grant a single scholar, out of so many appointed, his basic necessity, right and reward?

Can a *People's University* which does not feel obliged to teach in the original language of that People or even to recognise with tenure an internationally accepted scholar born and educated in Wales be anything but a parody of virtue and a myth of its own devising? Let us see if our perceptions mature when we have the facts of this book at our disposal. What can the People of Wales, the readers of this book, do to cure a contemporary affliction that debilitates, renders impotent, mocks and destroys those principles embodied in the Charter of its only University? Is this *in and for Wales* or merely in Wales and for an obscure but

powerful few, not of Wales, not for Wales, but for themselves and themselves alone?

RAIN

Falling rain looms heavy on the silent earth,
Brilliant, verdant threads are grey with age.
The toiling bureaucrats are penning birth
To woven shadow in an iron cage.
The darkest hours of enlightenment
Run headlong from the July sun
And hide from him, conceal the stinking scent
Among the streams, our leaders on the run.
Quickly the sage and learned turn and flee,
In shining, sodden torrents drown their debts,
Custodians, swept to deep obscurity,
An army beaten by obscure threats.
The cloth of wisdom is a winding sheet,
A seamless garment full of rotting meat.

THE CONCEPT OF UNIVERSITY TENURE

A working definition of tenure is an agreement between University and Scholar whereby both parties devote themselves to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge in all its forms. The Scholar agrees to research and/or teach in the University, which agrees to provide for the Scholar's basic needs until he retires.

This is a simple exchange of intent, and such agreements are commonplace throughout Academia on thousands of occasions every year in over a hundred countries. In many hundreds of these cases the Scholar granted tenure (and probably rightly so) is far less experienced than I am, much less qualified, much less known. How qualified must I be to obtain tenure in the University of Wales?

The concept of tenure is probably medieval in origin, with some roots in the monastic life of post Roman Europe and Byzantium. The great Universities of modern times, Paris, Rome, Oxford, Edinburgh among them, are in some ways direct descendants of the monastic ideal, dedication to virtue in all its forms. The first Scholars and Fellows of these Universities were *tenured* in that their bodily needs were cared for as long as they remained faithful to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.

Yma'n ddiogel dan ei glo
 Mae'r gwr gwyn yn agor ei gan
 A thinc gofalus, llywodraethol.
 Yn hecian yn ddall yng nghalon y nos
 Beth oedd ond wargaledrwydd
 Mae nawr yn chwarae rwydd
 A'r fformiwlai.

A phan mae'r gynnau mawr yn tanio
 A'r arfau cryf yn glanio
 Yn ddyrnau brwnt ar blant ein byd,
 Mae ef a natur yn gyhyd
 Mewn galar mud.

(Cyhoeddwyd, "Poetry Wales").

ABUSE OF TENURE

In my twenty years of experience of the contemporary Universities of Wales and Oxford abuses of tenure have weakened the ideal in several ways. The present British Government, which funds the hundred or so contemporary Universities of Britain, is probably working towards the abolition of the concept of tenure and its replacement with term contracts, awarded competitively. Some blatant breaches of the spirit of scholarly tenure in my own experience are recorded as follows.

1) Tenure is normally agreed upon until retirement at age 65 and I have not known one case in the three Colleges at Aberystwyth, Bangor and Swansea where tenure has been revoked on grounds of incompetence or even failure to produce research. Tenured members of staff in these Colleges were almost invariably required to teach and research but in many cases of which I had direct personal experience the recorded research output of tenured individuals fell to what I consider to be a grossly unsatisfactory level, measured typically by three or four published articles in perhaps thirty or forty years. Once the practice of research is neglected it cannot be regained easily. This led directly in several cases I knew of to almost complete inactivity. This contrasts strongly with my own (untenured) record of over 500 publications in about twenty five years as

a post graduate; post doctoral and professor. Many of my publications are internationally significant papers, review articles, monographs and edited monographs. During this time I also obliged the University of Wales with my services as demonstrator, tutor, graduate and post-doctoral supervisor and Scientific Coordinator of the European Molecular Liquids Group, of which I was a co-founder. I have been rejected for tenure on many occasions by the University at all ranks in all Colleges. In contrast, tenure has been provided to some of my less prolific and less active colleagues without any form of advertisement and competition. This has been done with funds provided by the Department of Education and Science to the University, in other words at the expense of the tax-payer.

One remedy is to abolish tenure and to award individual contracts on the basis of a National Competition, involving all Universities. The easiest remedy for Wales is self-Government. The contracts would last a maximum of five years, but would be renewable according to performance. Detailed indices of qualification, experience and performance would be devised, applicable without exception to all individuals.

2) In my experience tenure has been awarded on numerous occasions to individual post doctorals with few achievements and with no form of competitive advertisement. On many occasions these were considerably less qualified than I was at the time and had no outstanding or even apparent quality as non-tenured post doctorals. The award of tenure was the result of a personal decision by an official such as head of department using his influence on a key committee of the College administration to create and ratify the post with Senate approval. The favoured appointee was then free to pursue research and teaching, if had the inclination to do so, until retirement, normally at age 65. Sometimes the College provided the inactive tenured individual with a very large amount of money to encourage early retirement. Depending on the power and prestige of the individual within the College hierarchy, this sum would range from about two or three thousand pounds to about two hundred thousand for a powerful professor retiring some fifteen years early at the age of fifty. This is money supplied by the tax payer through the University Grants Committee. The financial details of early retirements are available by law to the General Public, and presumably can be obtained from the Registrars and

Research

Secretaries of the Colleges. The Registrars should be pressed for details, not general accounts.

The use of public funds in this way is dubious, and the situation is often made worse by the fact that the early retiree promptly finds himself another job, enriching himself enormously in the process. This is a strong argument against the award of tenure, and for a *statute of limitations* on all academic contracts.

3) The power structure of the contemporary University of Wales lends itself to the abuse of tenure. Administrative power is concentrated with very few individuals, and filtered away from the majority of the College Community. It is concentrated in the Senates, which are composed overwhelmingly of professorial staff and by powerful finance committees whose membership is derived from the Senates, not elected democratically by the College Communities. A Head of Department must gain influence in his Senate in order to procure funds for tenured appointments within his Department. The individual staff members of that Department are irrelevant, power is frequently concentrated exclusively with the Head of Department. This absurd administrative structure was apparently deliberately created on a Victorian model. It has remained useful to some to this day. Reform will be resisted strongly unless forced upon the University by direct Government action, culminating if necessary in the complete elimination of Public Funds. Far preferable is voluntary democratic reform within the University as the result of Public Opinion in Wales.

In my experience members of Senates are not particularly concerned with scholarship and may not even be aware of the presence of outstanding scholars within their College. Their power depends however on the perpetuation of the Status Quo, and they are concerned with this. Personal and sterile rivalry between the unelected members of Senate can ruin scholarship within a Department. A clash of personality between a Principal and Head of Department, both unelected officers, can be equally ruinous to scholars under their administrative control. Members of the Senate become isolated in many instances from their own scholarly roots, lose their craft and art. In this atmosphere of concealed power scholarship itself finally becomes inimicable to the College administration, the very negative of the ideal. The gross torpidity of the system in my own case, as recorded in this book, is one symptom of the

decadence of the University of Wales, particularly marked in the last decade. This is a large University (of some 40,000 students) that has never produced a Nobel Laureate or a Fields Medalist, and which has failed miserably to serve the People of Wales with its own high ideals.

Native scholars often choose to leave the University of Wales in search of fresh air, others like myself are forced by neglect into exile. Senate power imposes intolerable constraints on imagination. Symptomatic of the basic lack of confidence in the administration is the number of occasions during my career as post-graduate and post-doctoral on which I was forcibly and repeatedly advised to leave Wales and its University. My scholarship, however, found ample native soil in which to flower, and I resisted the attempts to have me removed for nearly twenty years. A University in and for Wales cannot in logic encourage the removal from Wales of an established and internationally recognised native scholar who holds the University's highest degree unless the University's own existence is without meaning.

An effective system of checks on the power structure of the University of Wales is needed in order to ensure that scholarship and service to the University is recognised by the award of tenure or its reformed equivalent. If the University eventually recognizes this it might have some chance in future of international recognition by some means such as the Nobel Prize. Until then it will wallow in obscurity. At present the University is dangerously close to being an elaborate and murky system for gratuitous self-help among the powerful, secretive, and privileged few. The pursuit of excellence, in either language, is an after-thought. First and foremost is power, and the state salaries that go with power, its ever fruitful followers.

JIM

Jim, opaque and ordinary,
Was born of hope and dignity,
Felix and Regula, twin images of Zurich,
Faith and order.
Two faces, ancient, but cold now, Swiss stone,
Geminal reflection in the Zurichsee,
Is hanging on a cross beam,
Swinging on a hole in the garage floor,

Ambushed by black infinity,
Bounteous time is a waiting grave.
Shivering high on the Celtic Rhine
Is an anonymous Welsh speaker,
Labelled just like Jim by strangers,
Older, much older, now,
Further away, now, than ever could be.
Suddenly, an office, a clockwork concrete box
Purgorative, decorative chocolate
High on the spine of Turicum
Is all, is memory,
For Jim is now a bit of old Cambrian News,
An afterthought in Irchel and Dyfed,
As fleeting and pointless as profit,
For Jim was found dead in his garage you see
Very early one morning
He died - of anxiety.
