

CAFAS Update No 43

30 June 2004

Council for Academic Freedom & Academic Standards

<http://www.cafas.org.uk>

AGM and Next Meeting:

Saturday 10 July 2004 1.30-4.30pm

Room 252.

Birkbeck College

Malet Street

London WC1

Underground: Goodge Street, Euston Square, Euston, Russell Square, Holborn

The Fight in Swansea

Last week's THES (25 June) carried an article about the fact that Neil Garnham QC had stepped down as the Visitor's representative dealing with the Swansea Petition, a move believed to be unprecedented in the 500 year history of the visitorial system. His departure followed several AUT branches writing to the Secretary of State criticising Garnham's view that there is no need to involve the union in discussions about closures because members of staff can be consulted as individuals.

Although Garnham's replacement has not yet been named, the Swansea management have already set about nobbling the new Visitor, with letters from the lay members of the governing body denouncing us and professors

declaring their undying love for the Vice-Chancellor.

After delays, the management have finally produced their Response to our petition. This relies heavily on an 'independent' investigation conducted by their Internal Audit Unit, which is dominated by the same lay members who denounced us and who keep telling us that we must all live in the 'real world' of commerce. This investigation was independent only in the sense that it was independent of us. We weren't even told that it was going on.

As always, we need support from AUT and NATFHE branches elsewhere. We urge Cafas members to get copies of *The Mission Betrayed* to sell in their workplaces and to ask their local branches to pass resolutions of solidarity.

**Michael Cohen
Colwyn Williamson**

(See *Mission Betrayed*. p.4)

Academic Boycott of London Metropolitan University

Three hundred and eighty-seven academic staff at London Metropolitan University have been issued with dismissal notices. Natfhe is calling for an academic boycott of the university. London Met Natfhe took strike action on 23rd June and are currently taking action short of a strike.

The 387 staff at City campus were issued with notices of dismissal (2 April 2004 and again on 24 May 2004) to take effect on 31 August 2004. They are advised that they are not redundant and would resume employment immediately on accepting the 'preferred' contract. Their dismissal is due to the fact that they have chosen not to transfer to this 'preferred contract', otherwise known as 'the contract

from hell', that is currently in place at North campus. The contract cedes unprecedented freedoms to management. City campus staff are of the view that to transfer to it would negate their right to academic freedom. There is no place for such a contract today, especially in universities.

At the same time, management have failed to recognise the right to negotiate and agree a contract with the recognised union, Natfhe. The union recognises the need for a unified academic contract.

This means that academic staff on both campuses are in dispute.

London Metropolitan University is the result of a merger between London Guildhall University (LGU) and University of North London (UNL), now respectively City and North campuses.

LGU was the receiving institution. Natfhe was told at the time that the LGU contract was the preferred one. Natfhe has informed members that this decision was unilaterally overturned without consultation.

The following Natfhe annual conference resolution 29 May 2004 was carried unanimously.

Recognising that the threat to impose a new contract on the ex-LGU members at London Metropolitan University, under threat of dismissal, is a serious attack with potentially national ramifications, we ask NATFHE and the rest of the trade union movement to fully support the campaign to defeat this threat.

Please support the academic boycott. Other ways to show support would be to circulate this and to write letters of concern to:

Mr Brian Roper, Vice Chancellor; and Professor Roderick Floud,

President and Sir John Carter,
Chair of Governors
London Metropolitan University
166-220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB

Please send copies/messages to:
Greg Barnett, Natfhe Chair or
Steve Cushion, Natfhe Secretary
London Metropolitan University
Calcutta House
Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT

You should also find a press release on the dispute under HE 22nd April 2004 on the Natfhe website.
<http://www.natfhe.org.uk>.

Londonmet's mission statement (<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/about/mission.cfm>) is to be competitive and to implement government policy. There is also a clause stating that the university is founded on the 'principles of academic freedom'. The contract and the mission aims if implemented would contradict this.

Geraldine Thorpe, Pat Brady

Members of Parliament and Confidentiality

My local MP claims that he always treated constituents' enquiries in total confidence. My experience shows otherwise.

The Headteacher of a school at which I taught denied me access to my files claiming that he was following what he called Essex County Council Closed File Policy.

As the school was then a grant maintained self-governing school I asked my local MP to find out my legal entitlement to access my files and the nature of the said Essex County Council closed file policy.

He wrote to ECC enquiring about the closed file policy. At the same time he wrote a **private and confidential** letter to the Headteacher expressing a personal opinion about me together with a copy of the correspondence he sent me. His private and confidential letter contains the following:

'I always treat constituents' enquiries in total confidence but in case any misunderstanding might arise and I thought I should just let you see the enclosed note, which I have sent to Mr Ali who is one of your teachers.'

He said he wanted me to find out the legal rights he has to see documents in what he refers to as 'Closed file'. He continued,

'I have a suspicion that the whole business may stem from his competence over his performance as a teacher and this is why I am very anxious indeed to alleviate any misunderstanding, particularly in view of my high regard for you'.

'I have simply written to Mr Sharp asking for his opinion on the legal position and will be advising Mr Ali of the outcome in due course.'

He did not send me a copy of the private and confidential letter. I only discovered it when I obtained a disclosure order from a Chairman of an Industrial Tribunal.

I wrote to my local MP requesting an explanation for the unfavourable treatment meted out to my enquiries. His response was that he did what he did in the best interests of the community.

My repeated requests for an explanation of how his private and confidential letter could possibly serve the best interests of the community have received no satisfactory reply. He wrote to me in May 2004 a letter that contains the following:

'I would emphasise that there is no legal requirement on MPs to treat correspondence or discussions as confidential although as you know I normally make a practice of treating all enquiries as confidential.'

That practice did not apply to me.

I wonder whether any CAFAS member has had a similar experience.

Majzoub B Ali

Royal Society Report

There is virtually nothing to report on this matter at the moment. To the best of my knowledge, the Royal Society's committee investigating quality control in science has still not produced a report and I have heard nothing further from them. My "Humour as an IFF" paper is still being considered but I am promised a reply soon.

John Hewitt

Committee

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http://www.ahabitoflies.co.uk

NOTICES

MEETING

10 July 2004 at 2.00 p.m.

Agenda

1. Minutes
2. Matters arising
3. Case reports
4. AOB

There will be an officers' meeting in Room 252 at 1.00 pm

Informal lunch and chat from 12 noon in the Junior Common Room, 4th floor, extension wing, Birkbeck College, Malet Street. All welcome.

Has your CAFAS subscription lapsed?

As always, we are dependent upon your financial support. Unfortunately, a number of members have fallen into arrears.

Your address label shows the date we last received any money from you. A red asterisk tells you that your subscription urgently requires renewal; two red asterisks indicate your subscription has seriously lapsed and needs your urgent attention.

If you have any query/ies, please get in touch! [Subscriptions are £10.00 per annum for waged, £5.00 for unwaged individuals; £25.00 for T.U affiliation.

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Next Update

Please send letters, news items and articles to:

CAFAS Update

7 Benn Street

London E9 5SU

e-mail: g.thorpe@londonmet.ac.uk

Tel/Fax: 0181 986 3004

Disks & email are best. Disks will be returned.

The Mission Betrayed

**Academic values under
attack: the case of Swansea**

A Petition to the Visitor

**Michael Cohen
Colwyn Williamson**

NEAR

**Cafas has linked to the
Network for Education and
Academic Rights (NEAR).**
Information is on the website
<http://www.nearinternational.org/>

Notice to union affiliates

Due to constraints on organising envelopes of different weight this mailing you will receive only two copies of *Update*. Should you need more please contact *Update* or the membership secretary for extra copies. Our apologies for any inconvenience. We shall resume the normal mailing in the autumn.

'The purpose of this Petition is to seek remedies for what we argue are serious defects in the university's conduct.' MC, CW

This 110 pages booklet is exemplary in its approach to presenting wide-ranging staff and student concerns. It is essential reading for all those concerned about 'defects' in universities' conduct.

**Copies can be obtained from
Cafas. Price: £2.99 plus
p&p. (approx. £3.50)**

**10 copies for £30.00, p&p
free.**

CONSTITUTION

CAFAS' aims are outlined on the membership form. The full constitution can be obtained from the Secretary or www.cafas.org.uk. CAFAS was founded in February 1994. It depends on subscriptions and an active membership. It meets in January, April and October.

***CAFAS Update* seeks to
provide an open forum
for opinion and
discussion.
Items do not necessarily
reflect the views of the
Council.**

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

PATRONS: Professors Geoffrey Alderman (Middlesex), Michelle Barrett (City), David Beetham, Leeds, Jennifer Birkett (Birmingham), Noam Chomsky (MIT, USA), G A Cohen (Oxford), J B Deregowski (Aberdeen), Michael Dummett (Oxford), Terry Eagleton (Oxford), Chris Freeman (Sussex), John Griffith (LSE), Reuben Hasson (York, Canada), David Howell (Manchester), Richard Hyman (LSE), J F Lamb (St Andrews), David McLellan (Kent), T J Reed (Oxford), Hilary Rose (Bradford), Steven Rose (Open), John Saville (Hull), Phil Scraton (Queens, Belfast), Stan Smith (Dundee), John Westergaard (Sheffield)

CAFAS welcomes widened access to further and higher education. But expansion without a corresponding increase in funding and the attempt to run education on commercial principles have led to standards being undermined and to staff who protest being victimised. Many are too demoralised, or too pressured by inadequate resources, to challenge the decline; others are fearful of redundancies or intimidated by the threat of victimisation.

CAFAS faces the fact that the British educational system is decaying. The Council will not collaborate with the pretence that this is not happening nor will it compromise on the right to say so. The principle of academic freedom enshrined in the Education Reform Act 1988 - that "academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs" - is increasingly under attack, particularly when staff expose instances of corruption and shoddy standards.

- CAFAS**
- * campaigns against the decline in standards
 - * defends individuals against victimisation
 - * gives moral support and legal advice
 - * investigates malpractice and publishes findings
 - * seeks to develop a support network with unions and other organisations

Everyone who shares these objectives should join and persuade their local union branch or association to affiliate. Affiliations from students are welcome. For further information, contact the Secretary: Dr John Hewitt, 33 Hillyfields, Dunstable, Beds LU6 3NS; john.hewitt22@virgin.net

CAFAS website: www.cafas.org.uk

Please photocopy this application for membership and distribute it among your colleagues. Cheques payable to CAFAS.

Send to Dr Eva Link, 17 Highcliffe, Clivesdon Court, London W13 8DP

Name.....Address.....
.....Post Code.....Date.....
Telephone..... e-mail.....Specialism.....
I/we wish to join/affiliate to CAFAS and enclose a cheque for..... I wish to be active
(£10 p.a for individual membership, £5 p.a for students and unwaged, £25 p.a for trade union affil.)

Bankers Order please send to your bank

To (name & address of your bank).....
.....
Your Bank Sort Code.....Your Account Number.....
Please pay CAFAS the sum of.....every year from (date).....Signature.....

For Bank Information Account: CAFAS Sort Code: 30-95-46 Account No: 0824135
Lloyds Bank plc, Swansea Branch, PO Box 66, Swansea SA1 3AP