

POINT OF VIEW

Refuting the myths of the orange horse

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a five-part point of view on the present controversy in the American Thought and Language Department.

By BOB BALDORI

In the furor that has followed the decision of the ATL advisory committee not to rehire Gary Groat, Kenneth Lawless and Robert Fogarty, I have seen little unbiased reporting and few serious attempts to clarify a series of important facts which might help explain the decision.

I feel that T. Ben Strandness, the advisory committee and the case for the instructors has been misrepresented to the public.

This series of articles is an attempt to present some evidence refuting specific popular assumptions, some evidence refuting general popular theory, and finally some theories which better fit the facts.

First I will attempt to clarify pertinent, specific assumptions with available factual material.

1) A fundamental premise of the dissenters has been that there was some sort of administrative pressure brought to bear on the faculty committee not to rehire the instructors.

Reaction to this premise has run from immediate dismissal by close associates of the members to immediate acceptance by academic freedom conscious, and I should say, sincere people.

It is a fact that there was no administrative pressure. If there was, Dr. Strandness and the committee are liars to a man.



They have publicly and privately stated, and with good reason, that such an idea is an insult to everything they stand for as educators.

And what about indirect pressure? What it comes down to is: do you believe men like Reeve, West, Strandness, et al are intelligent enough to realize the possi-

bilities of indirect influence in such a delicate situation and rise above it.

Without reservation, these men have indicated that any sensed indirect influence from administrative sources would have resulted in an inclination to do exactly the opposite.

The reason is, simply, the tremendous awareness and conscientiousness of the committee men toward the academic freedom issues which would then have become involved. I am waiting for something factual that indicates otherwise.

2) A second fundamental premise has been that the association by two of the in-

structors with Zeitgeist was directly responsible for their dismissal.

Quoting Ben Strandness, "This was specifically discussed by the committee. As far as their (the instructors) professional qualifications were concerned, Zeitgeist was no factor at all.

As far as outside activities, inasmuch as they can be "judged," it was agreed by all that association with Zeitgeist was definitely a positive factor."

This statement was later confirmed to me in conversation with Reeve: If Zeitgeist had any effect, it was to help their case."

3) "All three are among the most popular teachers in the department." This is a myth even the instructors wouldn't defend.

Even surveys in Bessey Hall lobby indicate their popularity is greatly exaggerated.

Class enrollment figures, from which a partial indication of popularity can be obtained, indicate no overwhelming enthusiasm for their classes. In fact student enthusiasm is clearly lacking in some cases.

On the other hand, these same figures show that classes of other ATL profs are consistently overflowing, that others are in high demand.

More important, popularity is not the only consideration. Hitler was popular. Intelligent people have been misled by popular men.

In fact, the educator's podium is one of the most dangerous places to have a popular incompetent man.

He is given a stamp of respectability and approval by an institution whose integrity is the basis for a student's presence in front of him. He has a responsibility to educate, not indoctrinate.

The institution, especially in the form of a man's own colleagues, certainly should have a procedure by which it can withdraw this sanction if its standards are not being met.

I am not here questioning the competence of the instructors. I am questioning the argument that popularity in itself (if it in fact exists, which I doubt) is reason enough to retain a man in this position.

Tomorrow: more Feeble Fables from Bessey Hall.