

NOVEMBER
2, 1966

Thought and language on A

Lawless challenges MSU as cloisted Ivory Tower

To the Editor:

Is the Ivory Tower a cloister? Yes. Should it be? No. I have been released from the ATL Dept. for breaches of academic decorum. I admit to these, but I deny their validity as grounds for my release. I broke the academic decorum two ways: I spoke in a manner considered rude at faculty meetings and I wrote a story with deeper roots in Tropic of Capricorn than Catcher in the Rye.

I have been chided, and released, for the tone of voice I used in my dissent at faculty meetings. It was my intention to speak effectively, not rudely, but I will admit that an element of rudeness did enter my speech. I was fighting what I considered ignorance in high places on important issues. The phrase "community of scholars" has been used as a synonym for conformity here: is there no room for a rude person in the community of scholars? Is the Ivory Tower a cloister? I fought for writing on the final exam of the freshman comp course, I fought for new and better texts, I fought for student rights, I was outspoken, I may well have been rude, but I take these things seriously.

My Advisory Committee was unanimous about my dismissal. One member admitted a consensus that a story such as "Records" was conduct unbecoming a professional academician. I demand the same artistic freedom allowed to all citizens under civil law. Is the Ivory Tower a cloister? Must I have an academic prose style? I want to explore the whole range of language in my work. This has nothing to do with my classroom competence, I insist, and indeed my chairman told an AAUP representative that all three of us who were released were highly competent men. Why in hell is he firing highly competent men?

How can we teach Roger Williams, Thomas Jefferson, Gene Debs and then sit quietly by when mistakes are made on fundamental issues? One man said "When I came here no one said a word until he had his degree" and "It was six years before I spoke out even meekly in a faculty meeting." I was warned in graduate school to keep my mouth shut until I had tenure, but I believe the conscience can atrophy. How can I teach Norman Mailer, even in the censored excerpt we used, if I myself cannot in my own art explore American thought and language as freely? I am told to write under a pseudonym, but I reject this out of hand. I am Ken Lawless and that is that. I am a teacher and a writer but I see no need to be schizoid about this. I never considered the two functions incompatible and I still don't.

I will not be allowed to teach on this campus next year. All my wit, all my anger, all my education, all my commitment, these have been banished from the community of scholars as constituted at MSU. I admit my youth, I even concede occasional rudeness, I did author a funny, serious story that no intelligent person can consider shocking in 1966, but I do not understand my release. Many of my colleagues are bewildered at my bewilderment: surely I knew I couldn't get away with such behavior. No, no I didn't. I hadn't known the community of scholars was a nunnery.

Ken Lawless

'He challenged us'

To the Editor:

Blam! Some little guy with a vest, red hair, and a big nose had just slammed the hell out of the back door of Room 116 Bessey, and just to show it was no accident he did the same thing to the front door. He threw unequal bundles of paper to the five people comprising the front row and began speaking. "My name is Fogarty. I am with the ATL Dept. (oh no!), but I am teaching this term Soc, because the "Puritan Ethic" leaves me cold (Amen, Brother). The course material will consist of the Soc. books 5-6-7 plus four outside paperbacks (one or two maybe, but four?) Your teacher's grade will be decided by a take-home mid-term essay-five points (they're work); a seven point paper (awk, O-K there's 12 of the possible big 15 -where's the rest? Can't he add?); the remaining three points will be entirely subjective. (He must be mad.)"

He talked very fast, but not nervously. He had a lightning mind that switched from one introductory topic to another. He was interesting, funny, and a bit risqué. He was easy to like, he was different. I decided to "hang in there." It didn't take long. Soon, I liked it.

He challenged us to read. He asked us to make judgments on what we had read and on what he had lectured. "How could we do this," he pointed out, "if we didn't read; for reading and comparing the works of modern minds (Fromm, Baldwin, van den Haag) breeds insight. Insight would aid individuals in coping with social problems just as would the cap-



sule outlines in our pretty pastel Soc. books.

He challenged our passivity. "The university student," he contended, "is faced with many decisions. If he feels that making these decisions will not alter his life, and he remains passive, he is submitting. By flowing along with this world, one can find no meaning in it. Think and make decisions on matters that concern you."

He was a teacher who challenged us to be students. They fired this teacher. Can the Advisory Committee hide behind the tenure rule and offer no reason why? Reason is the basis of education they have offered no reasons. Is the idea that the committee giveth and the committee taketh away? Are they that omnipotent and omniscient? Six men. Why was he discarded? If the reason is his stimulating approach in teaching, his challenge to read, think, and decide, or his ability to make course material meaningful, how can they consider themselves to be educators or the peers of educators?

Bill Donnelly
Cadillac Senior

More Letters

Red Cedar quizzes ATL Dept.

To the Editor

In the current controversy over the firing of three members of the ATL Dept., a great deal of confusion seems to have arisen in the public mind. Was Zeitgeist the reason for the dismissals? If so, how can Fogarty be explained away? Was it simply a matter of unfinished dissertations? If so, why only these three? There are others in the department in similar positions. Why are a number of rumors going around (each person believing what is most convenient for him to believe) without any official statement from the Committee responsible or the Dept. Chairman? If Zeitgeist had nothing to do with it, why hasn't anyone spoken out on the real reason? Dr. Reeve has said the three have a right to know. Why haven't they been told?

We are concerned about the issue from another point of view. Regardless of the reasons behind the dismissals, the loss of at least one of the three quite possibly means the end of Zeitgeist. This would be most unfortunate for all of us. In spite of aesthetic disagreements, we believe Zeitgeist has performed a valuable service to the cultural community. It has stimulated a greater degree of discussion and participation in the creative arts, brought prominent poets to the community (a community which, for its size, is particularly lacking in most areas of cultural participation), and stimulated a very important interest in freedom of speech and the press.

The competition initiated by Zeitgeist in the area of providing outlets for literary efforts has aided the development of a healthy atmosphere for the Red Cedar Review. Calling us to account for ourselves as a valid voice in the community can only have good results. Because Zeitgeist first appeared as an alternative to the quiet voice of Red Cedar Review, we have been able to greatly increase our effort to become an alternative to Zeitgeist and our own quiet past. We have become excited about the potential for diverse expression in this community. It would indeed be sad to these people. And if, out of the confusion, it becomes clear that participation in Zeitgeist was relevant to their dismissal, we must also regret the limited vision of the community which our publications are trying to enliven.

Editors,
RED CEDAR REVIEW



ATL dept.
outdated

To the Editor:

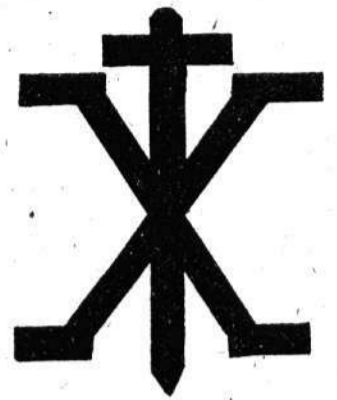
In regard to the recent firing of Ken Lawless, my 4 p.m. ATL teacher, the person or persons involved in the firing are sadly outdated. This is not the early 18th century or even the 19th, where freedom of thought and speech was carefully guarded,

nor are the morals as Puritanistic as this select group (which fired him) makes out.

The first thing I remember Mr. Lawless for is his love of personal freedom. The first class of his which I attended brought this fact clearly to light. He believes a person is allowed to write, feel and say anything he wants on almost any subject he wishes. Was his story in the Zeitgeist magazine so bad? If so, why was it even published? Magazines don't publish bad stories! I read his story and although I'm not a literary critic, it was a well written story, on a well known and long discussed subject. Was the subject matter bad? Or is it a forthright dealing with an everyday subject?

He doesn't corrupt his students, he lets them think for themselves. Half the teachers in MSU should treat their students as people in the way he does. In closing, I protest the rash firing of Mr. Lawless on the grounds that he is a man of honor and one of the most student minded teachers I've met.

Roland Osborne

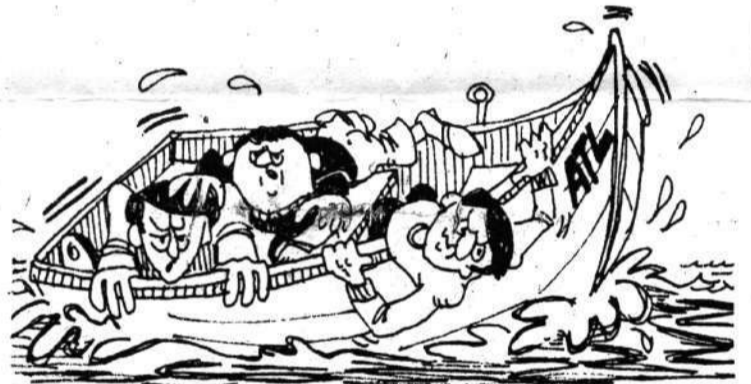


Excalibur

To the Editor:

We the undersigned members of Excalibur feel that the firing of Mr. Groat, Mr. Lawless and Mr. Fogarty of the American Thought and Language Department should be explained. Reasons should be given these three men and the students who respect them as educators for the very serious measures taken against them.

Philip A. Heald
John Mongeon
David Voorhees
Marshall Rosenblum
Gary Dilley
Jim Graham
Kyle C. Kerbawy



Student defends boat-rockers

To the Editor:

As a member of the academic community, I congratulate Ken Lawless, Gary Groat and Robert Fogarty on their efforts to "rock the boat." Perhaps the boat needs desperately to be rocked!

In contrast to the implication of Dr. Strandness's interview with The Paper, I feel that the academic community includes the learning as well as the learned.

As a student, I feel obligated to speak in favor of: (1) a modern text for ATL courses, (2) a written exam for this supposed "writing course," (3) the rightful existence of ANY literary magazine on the American college campus, and (4) the right of anyone, regardless of his position in the literary community, to write and publish, without fear of retribution, within the limits of his own conscience and the law.

The three thorns in the side of the ATL Dept. may have been fatal, may yet be fatal, and so I ask: when does the departmental level of the academic community consider the opinion of the faculty

and student levels of the community, the learning, in addition to the opinion of the learned, on an issue so vital? Apparently not at all.

A. Brent Hawkins
Owosso

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Published by the students of Michigan State University every class day throughout the year and a special Welcome Week Edition in September. Subscription rate \$10 per year. Authorized by the Board of Student Publications.

Member Associated Press, United Press International, United Daily Press Association, Associated College Press, Michigan Press Association, Michigan Collegiate Press Association.

Second class postage paid at East Lansing, Mich. Editorial and business offices at 341 Student Services Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich.

Phone: 355-8252
Editorial 355-8255
Classified Advertising 353-6400
Display Advertising 355-8299
Business - Circulation 355-8311
Photographic