

READIN', WRITIN', AND REPRESSIN

BY SARA DIAMOND

IN THE MIND-SET of right-wing strategists, academia is hotly contested terrain, and the stakes couldn't be higher. Who will decide what versions of reality young people will be exposed to? Who will become the officially recognized "experts" advising policymakers in government and influencing public opinion by way of the mass media? A large cohort of white men who have held sway over academia since the 1950s is now retiring, and many of their seats are being filled by women and people of color. The more diverse the student body and faculty become, the more outmoded curricula inevitably, and justifiably, will be questioned.

Precisely at this time the right has revived its long-standing concern with purported leftist domination of academia. The demise of "international communism" as an adversary leaves right-wing intellectuals with an obvious target of next resort: the liberals and radicals who've managed to hold some ground during the dark ages of the Reagan-Bush administrations' education budget cuts.

Case Study: University of Texas, Austin

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of Scholars (NAS) is leading the drive to preserve academia's preferential option for all that's rich, white, macho, and ancient. NAS has been particularly active at the University of Texas at Austin, site of a full-scale right-wing backlash. (See Martine Torres-Aponte and Kathy Mitchell's September 1990 *Z* article, "Capital & the Corporate Canon.")

Last spring the Texas chapter of NAS emerged in reaction to proposed changes in a lower division writing course. Amidst a climate of increasing racial and sexual harassment at UT, English professor Linda Brodkey proposed that E306 be revised to include readings about civil rights issues from a sociology textbook on race and gender. The idea was to give students provocative and socially relevant themes around which they would construct their own written arguments. Among the English department faculty, opinion was divided, but before any compromise could be reached, the campus Right took the proposal and ran with it.

Two Texas NAS members, professor Alan Gribben from the English Department, and philosophy professor Daniel Bonevac, made wild allegations about leftist "indoctrination" plots. During a local PBS television debate, Bonevac charged that E306 should really be called "Marxism 306." Heritage Foundation syndicated columnist William Murchison was drafted to write biting columns for the *Dallas Morning News*. By summer's end the course revisions—intended to be in place for the fall 1990 semester—had been postponed for at least a year. In September the English department faculty voted to accept the revised course, pending approval by the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and the university president. In its fall 1990 newsletter, NAS claimed victory in "resisting a powerful attempt to distort and politicize the curriculum."

While embroiled in the English department fracas, the Texas Association of Scholars held its first public event in March 1990, a conference entitled "Ideologically-based Suppression of Research in Social Science." Exhibit A of the "suppressed" scholars was TAS chapter head Joseph



Horn, a psychology professor who peddles theories on ethnic group differences in intelligence. Horn was then also an assistant dean in the College of Liberal Arts and the faculty adviser to UT's Young Conservatives. Horn encouraged the student rightists to hold rallies and circulate petitions against a Black Student Association proposal to hire more tenured Black faculty and to require all students to take three hours of African or African American studies. The Chicano student newspaper *Tejas* published an investigative report on Horn's political and academic career and an editorial calling for his resignation as dean. Horn's student group then launched a campaign to protest university funding of *Tejas*. The Administration caved in and decided that state funding may be used to write, edit, and publish 50 copies of the paper—one for each class member and the journalism faculty—but not the total circulation of about 5,000 for the student body. The other three journalism class publications received no such treatment.

The incidents at UT suggest that right-wing strategy for academia has moved from its early phase, in the 1980s, of funding like-minded professors and student projects and harassing progressive faculty to confrontations of a more profound and conceptual nature. Now the target is the very idea of using civil rights literature to teach writing skills; or the very idea of a journalism course offering publishing experience for groups under represented in corporate media. The right consistently claims to oppose what it calls "the politicization of the academy." Translated, that means opposition to what the left calls "diversity" and "multiculturalism."

Origin Of The Species

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of Scholars is the first concerted effort to organize right-wing faculty. NAS began in 1987, but its genealogy can be traced to the Institute for Educational Affairs, founded in 1978 by neoconservative writer Irving Kristol and former Treasury Secretary William Simon. IEA has since served as a conduit for corporate funding of selected academics. (In September 1990, IEA changed its name to the Madison Center for Educational Affairs.)

IEA-Madison Center is bankrolled by corporate foundations, including Coors, Mobil, Smith-Richardson, Earhart, and Scaife and Olin. IEA board members—some of whom are also trustees of contributing foundations—dole out respectable sums to up-and-coming graduate students and junior faculty, according to the minutes of one IEA meeting, "to give their work impact and promote their careers."

From the start, IEA differed from an "Old Right" academic project, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, started in 1952 by associates of William F. Buckley. ISI continues to hold conferences and publish a slew of journals, but the articles are too philosophical and lackluster to attract much attention.

IEA is the force behind a crop of 60 provocative tabloids published on 57 campuses. The most notorious, the *Dartmouth Review*, has repeatedly drawn fire for its bigoted invectives. In 1986, on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, *Review* staffers tore down shanties built by the college's anti-apartheid groups. In a stunt timed for the 1990 Yom

Kippur holiday, the *Review* published a quotation from Hitler's *Mein Kampf* on its masthead. Dartmouth president James Freedman responded by denouncing the paper—and its outside agitators William F. Buckley, Pat Buchanan, George Gilder, and William Rusher—in a *New York Times* op-ed. But while the spotlight has been fixed on IEA's irritating student press, its intellectual authors have quietly laid the groundwork for more insidious means of putting liberal and progressive academics on the defensive.

Behind The Supply Lines

ACCORDING TO A set of documents I've obtained, the immediate predecessor to the NAS was a group called the Campus Coalition for Democracy, headquartered, like NAS, in Princeton. The Coalition began in 1982 and was headed by Stephen H. Balch, a professor of government at the City University of New York. (Balch later became president of NAS.) In 1983 the Campus Coalition held a conference at Long Island University, attended by about 120 people. The subject was Central America and the list of speakers was impressive. Jeane Kirkpatrick gave the plenary address. Panel speakers included Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams, Penn Kemble of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Michael Ledeen of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, William Doherty of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), and contra leader Arturo Cruz. The conference program acknowledged funding from the Long Island University John P. McGrath Fund and from the Committee for the Free World.

The Committee for the Free World, headed by Elliott Abrams' mother-in-law Midge Decter, was at the time one of the most important assets in the Reagan administration's war against Nicaragua. (See "Rumble on the Right" in the December Z.) It turns out that CFW was also involved in securing funding for the nascent faculty organizing projects. Campus Coalition president Stephen Balch solicited advice from CFW's Steven Munson on getting money from IEA.

By late 1984 the campus organizing plan was spelled out in a confidential memo, "The Report on the Universities," written by Roderic R. Richardson for the Smith-Richardson Foundation. (It's worth noting that this foundation has had a history of sponsoring CIA-linked media projects and leadership training programs for CIA and Defense Department personnel.) The document proposed to distinguish between two possible anti-left strategies: "deterrence activism" and "high-ground articulation," also termed "idea marketing." Deterrence activism, wrote Richardson, "exists purely in response to the left-wing agenda. It is not very interesting, frankly, boring, and it is the kind of activism sponsored heretofore. At best it is a form of cheerleading that can focus some attention on stirring media events."

Instead, Richardson advocated "high-ground activism" or "articulation," the attempt to steal one or another highground away from the left, by both action and articulation. As noted, it involves doing things like insisting on rigorous discussion and debates, setting up political unions, battling divestiture and other causes, not by calling their goals wrong, necessarily, but by proposing better ways of solving the problem. Backing student journalism is a high-ground approach.

Richardson recommended that the right "mimic left-wing organization" by forming what he called Regional Resource Centers, starting with a faculty network in one area of the country, say, New England or around New York. The aim of such a group is to set up a permanent network, to defuse the left, to grab the highground, to change the atmosphere on campuses, and perhaps, to help command a corner of the national agenda.

Richardson wrote that he already had support for his plan, but he warned that "the New Right, perceiving a vacuum, might well try to take over the student activist and journalism movements."

The Usual Suspects

BEFORE THE REGIONAL Resource Center plan could get off the ground, a faction further to the right than Richardson and IEA launched Accuracy in Academia. A spin-off of Reed Irvine's Accuracy in Media, AIA recruited classroom spies and began compiling a database on professors AIA labeled "left-wing propagandists." AIA's first executive director, Les Csorba, was a 22-year-old activist fresh from the University of California at Davis, where he had organized a harassment campaign against visiting lecturer Saul Landau in 1985. AIA president John LeBoutillier, a former member of Congress, was then a leader of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL), as were three other members of AIA's initial advisory board. Irvine had at one time been prominent within WACL. At the time of AIA's founding in 1985, WACL was one of the most important coordinating bodies for death squad activities in Central America and elsewhere.

Not because of these connections, but because of its pit-bull tactics, AIA attracted plenty of media attention and earned itself a reputation as campus "thought police."

Among AIA's strongest detractors were fellow rightists, including Midge Decter of the Committee for the Free World. In a December 1985 *New York Times* op-ed, Decter expressed agreement with Irvine's view of the professorate, but charged AIA with mimicking 1960s radicals who had turned the universities into "a veritable hotbed of reckless, mindless anti-Americanism." Advocating the "high-ground" strategy of her colleagues at the Smith-Richardson Foundation, Decter wrote, "The only way to deal with words and ideas and teachings one deplors is to offer better words and ideas and teachings."

Decter projected herself as a true believer in "academic freedom" when, in fact, she and her ilk were motivated less by civil libertarianism than by the shrewd understanding that the most effective ideological warfare strategy is that which sneaks up on its enemy slowly. AIA was such a crude and noisy operation that it might have discredited—and thereby slowed—other right-wing strategies.

But not for long. In 1986, Decter's *Commentary* magazine published an important article "The Tenured Left" by Stephen H. Balch and Herbert I. London (who in 1987 would become the founders of the National Association of Scholars). Balch was then associate professor of government at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. Herbert London was, and is, dean of the Gal-

latin Division of New York University, as well as a fellow of the Pentagon-funded Hudson Institute in Indiana. Balch and London expressed their distaste for Accuracy in Academia by making a phony analogy between it and the campus anti-apartheid movement. The only difference, as far as Balch and London could see, was that AIA's efforts, "unlike those of the divestiture campaign, have been wholly confined to the realm of public criticism, neither fomenting disruption, nor toying with the possibilities of violent confrontation, nor obliging university administrators or faculty members to adopt an institutional stand."

Their argument continued: anti-apartheid protestors were getting slaps on the wrists, while AIA activists were labeled troublemakers. And all because the academy is dominated by leftists. Among the "evidence" presented, Balch and London reported an incident in 1985 when the *American Sociological Review* had given its lead article space to a real live Marxist—who also happened to be an associate editor of the journal. The Marxist in question was U.C. Berkeley sociologist Michael Buraway. Balch and London trashed Buraway's field study of a Hungarian manufacturing plant, because the work was done in collaboration with Janos Lukacs, of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The logic was that Buraway's work could not be scientifically valid so long as his fellow sociologist was a citizen in a communist regime. (Presumably, Balch and London would now approve work by Buraway and Lukacs, since Hungary has turned toward capitalism.)

Still, the tactic was to red-bait particular scholars. By 1987 the right's anti-progressive argument was broadened with the publication of Allan Bloom's best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*. With generous funding from the Earhart and Olin foundations, Bloom's book constructed a case against the concept of "cultural relativism," propagated by leftist intellectuals, but manifested throughout society in everything from too little Bible reading to too much rock 'n' roll. Bloom attributed the dumbing-down of the U.S. citizenry to a gradual erosion of ethnocentric prejudices. "Cultural relativism," he wrote, "succeeds in destroying the West's universal or intellectually imperialistic claims, leaving it to be just another culture."

Enter NAS

IN LATE 1987 the National Association of Scholars (NAS) was formally inaugurated, with Herbert London named chair of the board and Stephen Balch, president. Among the prominent board members are Leslie Lenkowsky, formerly research director of the Smith-Richardson Foundation, who was at one time acting director of the U.S. Information Agency. Lenkowsky directed IEA until 1990, when he left to become president of the Hudson Institute, the current hang out for former drug czar William Bennett.

A preliminary survey of tax returns from some of the same right-wing foundations that bankroll IEA shows NAS with an annual budget well in excess of a quarter of a million dollars.

The first few issues of NAS's quarterly journal *Academic Questions* took aim at feminist scholarship, affirmative action, supposed leftist control of Latin American,

African and Asian studies programs, and even student evaluations of professors. Recent articles are more broad-brushed in approach. One six-page article lamented college students' use of highlighter pens. Beyond its surface absurdity, the real point of the article was that students should not be so free to pick and choose what *they think* they need to remember from any assigned reading. The argument underlying a fall 1990 article on "the radical politicization of liberal education" relies on a patently false assertion. John Agresto, president of St. John's College in New Mexico, claims that radicals deny the possibility of reading texts "nonpolitically" because they deny "transtemporal and universal truths or principles."

NAS has taken credit for the repeal of a University of Michigan speech code—intended to reduce racist and sexist incidents on campus. With support from NAS and the Michigan chapter of the ACLU, Wesley Wynne, a graduate student in biological psychology, sued his alma mater and won. In 1989, a federal court ruled that UM's speech code was so broadly defined as to threaten the First Amendment.

ACCORDING TO a favorable article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, NAS now has 1,400 members, statewide affiliates in 17 states, and campus chapters at the Universities of Minnesota at Twin Peaks, New Mexico at Albuquerque, Texas at Austin, and at Duke and Emory Universities. And NAS has some concrete plans to expand its influence.

In early 1990 all NAS members received a 38-page questionnaire prepared by the affiliated Madison Center, founded in 1988 by Allan Bloom and then-Secretary of Education William Bennett. (In September 1990 the Center merged with the Institute for Educational Affairs and is now known as the hybrid Madison Center for Educational Affairs.) The survey is an amazingly thorough intelligence-gathering tool. Respondents are asked to provide detailed answers to questions like: How often does the Administration play an active role in tenure decisions? What are the prevailing attitudes toward ROTC and CIA recruitment on campus? How conspicuous is the homosexual faculty presence on campus?

Some of the data is liable to find its way into "The Madison Guide: A Commonsense Scorecard on America's Colleges," scheduled for publication in 1991. The guide will focus on "how education and teaching has fared under the mixed influences of the last 15 or 20 years," says Madison Center vice president Charles Horner, a former State Department, U.S. Information Agency, and RAND Corporation official.

NAS has set up a Research Center in Princeton—consistent with the 1984 Richardson plan—to "accumulate information on the issues and trends of contemporary higher education." In its fall 1990 newsletter, NAS appealed to its members to send in course descriptions and proposals, departmental newsletters, and the like, for trend analysis to be conducted by NAS research director Glenn Ricketts.

The survey data from the Madison Center will come in handy as NAS implements a couple of its other plans. One is the new Faculty and Executive Search Service, which is a mini-employment service provided free to NAS members.

Another strategy is the formation of caucuses within the professional associations organized by various academic disciplines. Already, NAS and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute have formed anti-liberal groupings within the Modern Language Association, the American Historical Association, and the American Philosophical Association, according to ISI national director Chris Long.

A November 1990 mailing to the Sociology-Anthropology section of NAS, from Dan McMurry of Middle Tennessee State University, spelled out an effort to "reform from within" the American Sociological Association (ASA). Hardly a hotbed of radicalism, the ASA exists to promote the careers of its members, who are mostly mild-mannered theorists more interested in studying the world than changing it. NAS plans to begin sponsoring special sessions at ASA meetings. How convenient—the current president of the ASA is University of Chicago Professor James S. Coleman, a prominent member of NAS. The "Dear Colleague" letter warned NAS members to "avoid being regarded as conservative. We hope to cast our nets widely."

Knowledge Is Power

NAS WILL SUCCEED if and only if progressives don't do their homework. The first step is for people to learn the nature of the right-wing game plan on their own campuses. Who are the administrators and faculty out to block proposals and hirings that would improve university teaching and research? Which faculty are vulnerable to attack from the right and how might they be supported? Are their opponents motivated by misguided notions of what academic pluralism should mean, or are they part of an NAS chapter or something like it? In what ways are rightist faculty mobilizing students to do their bidding? The right-wing student groups that have harassed liberal professors are often the same ones involved in racist and sexist attacks on other students, and in infiltration of the student left.

An energetic analysis and discussion of the right's intellectual arguments is as important as knowing the political line-up on campus. Just as the Smith-Richardson Foundation advocated "high-ground articulation," so should the left take the initiative in debates around important questions for which there are no easy answers. Should degree programs include a core curriculum, including specific sets of books which must be mastered by everyone within the discipline? Do punitive sanctions for users of "fighting words" on campus *really* reduce racist and sexist violence, or are such measures misguided infringements on free speech that might *also* have the effect of exacerbating conflict? The left ought not find itself in a position of taking knee-jerk positions that seem "politically correct" or expedient in a short-term sense. Rather, the campus left should develop a deserved reputation as the group of people most open to rational, democratic decision making, even if that means taking positions—for principled reasons—that are also voiced by some conservatives.

To do otherwise might mean surrendering education as one more institution committed to the preservation of the powers that be.