

# Kingmaker

IN OUR LAST ISSUE'S editorial, the *Observer* documented the abolition of the governance structure at the University of Texas at Austin English department, against the wishes of the majority of the faculty (see "Illiberal Arts," *TO*, 9/6/91). But that was only part of the story. Since UT President Bill Cunningham appointed Robert King Interim Dean of Liberal Arts, King has consolidated his hold on the position by forcibly exerting his regressive political agenda over the college. King, who holds the Audre and Bernard Rapoport Regents' Chair in Liberal Arts, previously held the deanship throughout the 1980s. Although King has only been appointed interim dean, after the abrupt resignation of the more liberal Standish Meacham last spring, Cunningham has also named him chair of the search committee charged with finding a new dean, and has asked King to keep the post through the 1991-92 academic year. In addition, despite the University's much-ballyhooed budget crunch, Cunningham granted King a \$21,000 pay raise — boosting his salary to \$124,000.

Of course, not every controversy in the Liberal Arts College can be traced to the interim dean. And it must be noted that King, under UT's hierarchical structure, technically has the authority to hire and fire administrators, and to institute or abolish departmental governance, at his pleasure. But even though he is only a temporary dean, King has not simply maintained a holding pattern — his actions toward the English department, the Middle Eastern Studies Center, Women's Studies and the Humanities program reveal a clear pattern of heavy-handedness, cronyism, and reactionary conservatism.

## King's English Revisited

The *Observer* reported last issue that King, who still has not returned the *Observer's* phone calls, had ignored letters from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in his haste to demolish faculty governance in the English department. At the end of August, the AAUP sent King another letter, again informing him that by all appearances, his actions violated AAUP guidelines. The letter pointed out that King had ignored offers of compromise from the department chairman, Joseph Kruppa, and asked him to respond and explain his actions.

The chair of the English department's faculty recruitment committee, Kurt Heinzelman,

resigned his chairmanship on August 27 as a result of King's declaration. In a lengthy resignation letter, Heinzelman said he feared King's actions throughout the college risked AAUP censure. He argued that "[a]lready this acting dean's injudicious actions are becoming a scandal and a source of ridicule by colleagues around the country. This University is in danger of being denigrated by those very graduate institutions from which we draw our best assistant professors." He also wrote that by imposing a budget council, which restricts governing duties to only full professors, "King has virtually stripped the women in this department of any representation. Of the 35 full professors in our Department, only four are women and two are on leave all next year."

One of King's few supporters in the English department, however, cites other reasons why the dean might derail departmental governance. Norman Farmer, a full professor who last year along with King signed a "statement of academic concern" that led to the rejection of the revised syllabus for the controversial English 306 class (see "On the Question of Political Correctness," *TO*, 5/31/91) said he felt the English department "had become overly politicized, that it had become more of a political situation." Farmer fears that radical methodologies practiced by some junior faculty have subverted and "politicized" the governance process, because "members of the executive committee were all elected, and it led to increased politicking in the department." He argues that the "budget council is comprised of [sic] only full professors," who "have no specific constituency." Under the budget council, he says, "issues can be discussed on their merits without political interference."

Leaving aside for the moment the question of how elections or for that matter "governance" might be carried out apolitically, Farmer's criticisms are not borne out by the recent history of the executive committee. In July, English department chair Joe Kruppa told *Polemicist*, a student news journal at UT-Austin, that more than three-quarters of full professors currently in the department have served on the executive committee, which changes its composition every year. Representation on the committee, he said, cuts across every philosophical and methodological difference in the department. The most recent executive committee was made up of six full professors, two associate professors and two junior faculty. Even so, in the past two years

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Cover illustration by Richard Bartholomew.

### Correction

In the story "Out of Touch" in our September 6 issue, Chris King is mistakenly identified as a faculty member at the University of Texas' LBJ School of Public Affairs. In fact, he is a research scientist and Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Human Resources, a research center of the LBJ School, and though he sometimes teaches there, is not a member of the LBJ School faculty.

no executive committee vote has been closer than 8-2, and most have been unanimous. The argument that full professors would somehow govern the department more efficiently seems unsupported at best.

But Farmer's critique does point up another possible reason for King's actions, which the acting dean doesn't mention in his memo-randa: crushing the department's autonomy, Farmer's testimony implies, will somehow purify the governing structure of what has been portrayed in the press as a department wildly out of control, run by radical leftists, feminists, minorities, lesbians, etc. An inflammatory May 1990 *Texas Monthly* article, using only

undocumented rumors from anonymous sources, accused the department of radicalism and flag burning. Then, last summer, the department became the subject of statewide and national attention after the local chapter of the right-wing National Association of Scholars successfully engineered the blocking of a new syllabus for English 306. In the case of E306, the administration struck its first blow against the department's autonomy when President Cunningham strong-armed then-Dean Meacham into cancelling the course.

Many think that Cunningham struck his second blow by rehiring King, whose regressive history at UT is well known, and turning him loose on the department. Certainly Cunningham's silence in the face of the AAUP inquiries supports this claim. But whatever his intentions, Cunningham has only watched passively as King's iron jackboot has squashed the collective intentions of the largest department in the university.

### All The King's Men

One of the patterns that has emerged during King's short tenure as acting dean is his refusal to honor commitments made by his predecessor, Standish Meacham. A prime example of this tendency came when King appointed Norman Farmer (quoted above) to head the Humanities program, an interdisciplinary honors degree. History professor Michael Stoff, Meacham's appointee, refused to comment on the incident, and told the *Observer* to rely on the version of the story in the student daily for the facts of the case.

According to *The Daily Texan*, Meacham had offered the position to Michael Stoff, promising a small pay raise and a reduced course load if he took on the added administrative duties. Despite King's own sizable recent pay hike, he retracted these conditions, and offered the job with no perks and a full course load. Stoff told the *Texan* King had given him a July 15 deadline to decide if he wanted the job.

King, however, had other plans. On July 10 he penned a letter to Stoff, informing him that he'd already given the job to Farmer. Farmer says he had no idea Stoff was still considering the job. He learned of it in the *Texan*, he said, just like everyone else.

Still, Farmer's appointment by King was not a complete surprise. Farmer, as noted above, has been one of the only English department faculty to support King's demolition of the department's chosen structure, having written a personal letter to the interim dean supporting the budget council just prior to his appointment. And last summer he joined King and the Texas Association of Scholars in their bitter opposition to English 306. Farmer was one of only seven English

faculty to sign the TAS's "Statement of Academic Concern" opposing his colleagues' E306 syllabus.

By contrast, Stoff, as chair of the American Area committee in the History department, had pushed for multicultural sections of a required lower-division History course, sought to compile a "multicultural reading list" for faculty and students, and proposed that the department develop "lectures and workshops on race and ethnicity," according to a May, 1990

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History department memorandum. Stoff's ousting represents another instance of King obstructing faculty with even a reserved multicultural agenda, and installing opponents of curriculum reform.

### A Woman's Work

King's snatching the Humanities position out from under Stoff might be seen as an aberration, except that he repeated the pattern in Women's Studies. The Women's Studies Center has never received significant support, and is really just a vehicle for cross-listing courses from many different disciplines to allow a concentration in Women's Studies.

Last spring then-Dean Meacham offered the position of director of the Women's Studies Center to Susan Marshall, an associate professor of sociology. As with Stoff, Meacham promised Marshall a lightened course load and a pay hike. Also as with Stoff, Bob King refused to honor these conditions, asking Marshall to consider taking the position without them.

While Marshall mulled over the new terms, however, King again made other plans. According to English professor Carol Mackay, "I was offered the position while Marshall thought she was still negotiating with Dean King." Mackay turned down the offer, although she didn't know at the time that Marshall was considering it. She wanted more monetary support for the center as well as more physical space; currently the center shares a secretary and an administrative as-

sistant with several other programs.

After Mackay had turned him down, King went back to Marshall, and they negotiated a compromise, whereby she maintained a full course load, despite her administrative duties, but received an adjunct to her salary. The program's funding, however, will remain "at the same insignificant level as last year," according to Mackay. And Marshall's compromise with King was a cutback from what she had negotiated for the directorship under Meacham. Since the program's funding is so paltry, cutting support for the director amounts to cutting support for the center, said Mackay.

Observers say King's distaste for the center dates back to his first tenure as dean. One professor close to the center, who asked to remain anonymous, pointed out that, "King has never conceived of women's studies in the serious way that many women scholars on this campus do." "At another university, a women's studies program can be a strong, viable resource," she said, but at UT Austin, "our active growth is being curtailed."

### The Merits of Cronyism

The case of the Middle Eastern Studies Center perhaps best illustrates King's high-handed style and his propensity to place his political agenda over accepted principles of academic merit. While the *Observer* interviewed several individuals knowledgeable about the center for this article, none, including the principal actors, would agree to speak for the record. In addition, the student daily has completely ignored King's actions affecting the center, printing not one story the entire summer. Thus the following account, while perhaps incomplete in some respects, represents the information we were able to confirm.

The story began in January, when former Middle Eastern Studies Center Director Ian Manners decided to resign his post as of this fall. According to sources close to the center, Meacham sent a letter to all the faculty connected with the center asking for advice or suggestions on who should be the next director. In addition, Meacham spoke personally with all or virtually all of the senior faculty. This consultation process took almost two months.

By March, Meacham had discovered a strong consensus within the center that Elizabeth Fernea should be its next director. Fernea, an English professor and well-known Middle Eastern scholar, is the only member of the center ever to have been president of the Middle Eastern Studies Association, the most prestigious national group for Middle East scholars. Fernea has been closely associated with the center. She has served as its undergraduate advisor and as a member of its executive committee. She has lived in the Middle

East for years at a time, and traveled widely throughout the region. She has an international academic reputation, and her Orientalist memoir, *Guests of the Sheik*, has enjoyed international acclaim and numerous printings.

At the time, Fernea was on leave in Israel helping produce a film about the Israeli peace movement. According to knowledgeable sources, Meacham phoned Fernea in Israel to ask her whether she wanted the job. She accepted informally. Meacham then forwarded his recommendation to Cunningham.

For weeks, however, no word came from Cunningham on the status of Meacham's recommendation. But at a meeting of the department chairs in May, just before he stepped down, Meacham announced that he had forwarded Fernea's name to Cunningham, and that he was confident she would be approved.

After King formally assumed the deanship, however, he called a meeting with senior faculty associated with the center, and informed them that he felt, after consulting with (unnamed) faculty and examining her credentials, he could not support Fernea for the directorship. According to sources, King gave no specifics as to his objections, but every Middle East scholar we talked to said that no one at UT was more qualified for the position.

Why then, given Fernea's credentials, would King reject her appointment?

Scholars at the center cite a number of reasons. First, as a member of the English department, Fernea had been a vocal supporter of the revised English 306 syllabus, which King, as noted, publicly opposed. She even at

one point appeared on a television talk show defending the syllabus. In addition, Fernea participated in a committee appointed by Meacham to study and formulate multicultural curriculum proposals for the College of Liberal Arts. And she chaired a subcommittee which produced two books on multiculturalism proposals entitled *Multiculturalism: Resources for Dialogue*, which were released last summer. King's opposition to multiculturalism has never been a secret in the Liberal Arts college.

But perhaps the most important reason King might have to oppose Fernea's appointment is her position on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. A faculty member at the center describes Fernea's positions as "sympathetic to the moderate Arab/Palestinian position," although he stresses that she has "never let her sympathies affect her scholarship." Some faculty speculate that King, an ardent long-time Zionist, allowed his own political sympathies to affect his decision.

In her stead, King installed as director a geographer, Bob Holz, who sources say is a long-time friend and hunting partner of the interim dean. Most faculty at the center interviewed for this story were dismayed by the appointment, since Holz speaks no Middle Eastern languages and his primary field of research is not the Middle East. Holz has been affiliated with the center in the past, but, says one professor, has never been "central to its role." According to his vita, Holz has taught courses on Middle Eastern geography cross-listed under the center, and once chaired the

center's fellowship award program. He was once even hired by Fernea's husband, Bob, to help organize a summer teaching program in Morocco. But he has never served on the center's executive committee, nor in any administrative capacity connected with the center. While no professors interviewed for this article thought Holz was reactionary or incompetent — one professor called him a "good person, an honest person" — not one thought his qualifications came close to Fernea's, judged on objective merit.

In his research, Holz uses sophisticated technology to perform satellite mapping, mineral searches, etc. While he has used his skills with this technology in the Middle East, it's fair to say, judging from his vita, that his research doesn't reflect an interest in its culture or its politics. Most scholars in the center don't define "Middle Eastern Studies" as the study of how to exploit the region's resources.

During last year's English 306 controversy, President Cunningham received numerous letters from alumni, some of them donors, demanding that he save the Liberal Arts college from subversion by feminists, Marxists, lesbians, etc. State Rep. Kent Grusendorf (R-Arlington) even mailed UT officials a copy of the infamous *Texas Monthly* article, demanding to know what UT planned to do to purge the radicals. If Cunningham did hire Bob King as part of a backlash against liberals in the college, he's certainly getting his \$21,000 worth. — S.H

Tom Philpott Jr. contributed to this article.