

A BATTLE FOR THE SOUL OF DEPAUL, AND FOR THE FUTURE OF ACADEMIA: AN OPEN LETTER TO DEPAUL FACULTY

Over the last year, scholars around the country (and worldwide) have been looking to DePaul University with increasing alarm. The denial of tenure to Dr. Norman Finkelstein on June 8, after a mean-spirited campaign spearheaded by Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, is widely seen, even by those who do not share Finkelstein's political views, as a blatant violation of the fundamentals of academic freedom and procedural guidelines. More, it is viewed as a fundamental threat to the intellectual ferment and critical thinking so desperately needed – in academia and in society - at this time in history.

From the beginning there have been faculty from DePaul who have recognized and responded to the gravity of the situation. Though few in number, they have stepped to the fore, often at genuine risk to their own careers. These scholars have investigated and exposed the facts of this case. Their work has laid bare how shameful and dangerous this decision is.

They have taken heart in the response of the students at DePaul, who protested the decision during exam week and at graduation. These students, organized in the DePaul Academic Freedom Committee (www.academicfreedomchicago.org), have continued their work, spending their summer vacation organizing, establishing their own University Without Walls to learn more about the political issues concentrated in these decisions, and going to the US Social Forum in Atlanta to present a resolution to 10,000 activists.

Now the situation at DePaul has moved beyond egregious violations of academic freedom to vindictive and arbitrary punishment of kafkaesque dimensions. The administration has refused to let Dr. Finkelstein teach his terminal year (once again violating AAUP guidelines), and cancelled his classes (ironically, on "Equality and Social Justice," and "Freedom and Empowerment"). It has effectively suspended him against his will and in violation of DePaul's faculty handbook, locked him out of his office and is evidently even threatening to arrest him if he comes on campus.

In the face of this, the fact that Dr. Finkelstein has refused to back down is a very good thing. His resilience and determination is inspiring many others to stand with him, as well as with Dr. Mehrene Larudee, who many feel had her tenure denied because of her public support of Dr. Finkelstein.

On the first day of class (September 5th), Dr. Finkelstein will return to campus to teach his students. The DePaul AFC has organized a press conference and protest, along with an important conference on academic freedom on October 12 at the University of Chicago.

As a faculty member at DePaul, you have an opportunity to make a profound difference by standing with them, in spirit and in body. We encourage you to use whatever means at your disposal to help them reverse a dangerous precedent which is already sending a chilling message to faculty and scholars to self-censor their scholarship and their public roles, or risk their careers.

As DePaul philosophy professor Bill Martin has written ("The Urgent Need to Right Wrongs at DePaul," available at www.defendcriticalthinking.org), if this injustice is not reversed, "DePaul will be destroyed as a place deserving of respect in the intellectual and academic worlds, and, if this happens, academic freedom will be under attack everywhere."

We encourage you to join with others at DePaul who have said they will not allow this injustice to stand. Those of us who have been a part of the National Project to Defend Dissent and Critical Thinking in Academia are determined to support you in every way we can.

Selected Signatories:

Gil Anidjar, Department of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University.

William Ayers, Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Derrick Bell, Visiting Professor of Law, New York University School of Law.

Robert Brenner, History Department, UCLA.

George Caffentzis, Professor of Philosophy, University of Southern Maine.

Eric Cheyfitz, Ernest I. White Professor of American Studies and Humane Letters, Cornell University.

Ward Churchill, Scholar at Large.

Dana Cloud, Associate Professor of Communication Studies, University of Texas, Austin.

Drucilla Cornell, Professor in the Departments of Law and Political Science, Rutgers University.

Walter A Davis, Professor Emeritus, The Ohio State University.

Richard Delgado, University Distinguished Professor of Law & Derrick Bell Fellow, University of Pittsburgh.

Randa Farah, The University of Western Ontario.

Silvia Federici, Emeritus Professor, Hofstra University.

Irene Gendzier, Professor of Political Science, Boston University.

Ruth Hsu, Associate Professor of English, University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Christine Karatnytsky, Scripts Librarian, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Mark Lance, Professor of Philosophy, Professor of Justice and Peace, Georgetown University

Gary P. Leupp, Professor of History, Tufts University.

Peter McLaren, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

Bill Martin, Professor of Philosophy, DePaul University.

Chris Mato Nunpa, Southwest Minnesota State University.

Tom Mayer, Professor of Sociology, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Sadu Nanjundiah, Professor, Physics department, Central Connecticut State University

Peter Rachleff, Professor of History, Macalester College

E. Wayne Ross, Professor of Education, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of British Columbia.

Henry Silverman, Professor and Chairperson Emeritus, Department of History, Michigan State University.

Natsu Taylor Saito, Professor of Law, Georgia State University.

Michael Vocino, Professor, University of Rhode Island.

Immanuel Wallerstein, Senior Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Yale University.

Howard Zinn, Professor Emeritus, Boston University.

(Affiliations for identification only)