Free academics or council servants?  
Tasmanian University staff before the Murray Report

While most university scholars accept academic freedom as a basic and essential right, few analyze its contents with precision. Academic freedom at the University of Tasmania is a term that applies to all university teachers, to ensure teachers are protected from interference in the exercise of their academic freedom. In the 1930s, the Tasmanian University Teachers' Association argued that academic freedom could be absolute or relative, and that it did not depend on the economic circumstances of the university.

The University of Tasmania, Australia's fourth, is a particularly useful case study, especially in providing answers to the larger questions. From 1913 to 1936, the Tasmanian University Teachers' Association organized an annual conference that provided a platform for discussing the challenges faced by university teachers.

On this occasion, a group of academics and businesspeople were appointed to a committee to consider the issue of academic freedom. The committee consisted of three academics and two businesspeople.

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The crisis of academic freedom at the University of Tasmania was influenced by the turbulent political climate of the 1930s. The university was facing significant financial challenges due to the Great Depression, and the Board of Studies was under pressure to cut costs and improve the financial situation of the university.

The academic staff at the University of Tasmania were concerned about the impact of cuts on their academic freedom. They believed that academic freedom was essential for the university to function effectively and that it should not be compromised in the face of financial difficulties.

The University of Tasmania was founded in 1893 and was initially intended to be a university that would provide education and research opportunities for Tasmanians. However, the early years of the university were marked by financial difficulties, and the board of studies was under pressure to reduce costs and improve the university's financial situation.

The Board of Studies had the authority to make decisions about academic appointments, funding, and other matters related to the university's operation. The board of studies was not composed of academics, but of businesspeople and politicians, who were sometimes at odds with the academics.

The crisis of academic freedom at the University of Tasmania was also influenced by the political climate of the time. The university was located in a predominantly rural area, and the Board of Studies was under pressure to ensure that the university was responsive to the needs of the local community.

The University of Tasmania was also facing competition from other universities in the state, particularly the University of Melbourne. This competition was further intensified by the economic challenges faced by the state in the 1930s.

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The University nevertheless grew more confident under Labor, which governed continuously till 1969. In 1937, the pro­
fessor of History, E.W. Turner, dédicated himself to Turner's irritation, that some financial help was rendered for academics on sub­
matters. The Senate, however, still had to provide the balance of remuneration for academic staff. Mean­
while, Turner's erstwhile op­
ponent, A.B. Taylor, became emboldened with Catholic church authorities over­
anti-Catholic remarks in Togurka, the stu­
dent newspaper. As vice-chancellor, Mount­
more than a minor victory in 1941, with­out agreeing with Taylor's contentions. Community attitudes differed from those in Melbourne when Marshall Hall was a member of the choir. The appointment of Albert Ogilvie, who had even sought Morris Miller's advice on eliminating the Catholic image of his Labor Party. 

The University of Tasmania's contribution to staff development was minimal. The Labour government (1945) was raised to 10 per cent in 1947-8. Tasmania was the only state to sit on the University of Tasmania (p.22), the university had "reached university status" and "had developed a national reputation to an extent which is not in accord with the resolutions of the Board itself" and "had reached university status". The Board itself for a full statement of its reasons for its recommendations, and fur­
ther considered exceptional circumstances, and under full consider­
ation, made various and substantial such recommendations of the Board. 

Chancellor Morris, who had played a strong role in this issue, moved that the Board be put to the vote. While the Board favored and endorsed the position without open conflict, Chancellor C.R. Baker opposed the action with eminent words, convinced of the desirability of retaining the position of lecturer to keep the ability of lecturers to keep rolls and thus enforce compulsory attendance. 

The matriculation requirements were eased, and the number of students had increased. The distance between Council and academics which culminated in the Royal Com­
The Commission, headed by a retired Western Australian judge, J.E. Fagan, and two academics, J.S. Turner (Melbourne) and A.D. Thompson (Sydney), began its investigation in February 1953 and reported in May. The Commission’s proceedings comprised a long legal battle between the Council and Professorial Counsel, which was cross-examined like a criminal, and an attempt was made to show that Orr was guilty of plagiarism in his lectures.

The Commission’s report generally accepted the case, though it acquired some notoriety because of the acceptance of the Board of the establishment of a new body, the Board of Inquiry, to investigate the case. The acceptance of the Board was a victory for the University and it is unlikely that the case would have been allowed to proceed to a full hearing in the absence of the Board’s strong condemnation of the activities of the Board of Inquiry.

Relations between Board and Council had improved considerably after the meeting of the partially reconvened Council in December 1953, when the University agreed to accept the recommendations of the Royal Commission. The Commission’s agreement to a new body to handle academic matters was a victory for the University and it is unlikely that the case would have been allowed to proceed to a full hearing in the absence of the Board’s strong condemnation of the activities of the Board of Inquiry.

The case has become such a cause célèbre, given the University of Tasmania’s one unmentionable international notoriety, that it is difficult to separate the real issue from the public relations perspective. Though the case for an anti-RRR academic comment is well supported, and Eddy’s massive, unwieldy and unnecessary part-time professorial counsel, and the allegations of plagiarism and corruption in the case are not always obvious. A caution by historians is that the allegations of plagiarism in the case are not always obvious. A caution by historians is that the allegations of plagiarism in the case are not always obvious. A caution by historians is that the allegations of plagiarism in the case are not always obvious. A cautious by historians is that the allegations of plagiarism in the case are not always obvious.
References

UTS = Minutes of the University of Technology, Sydney, Senate and Vice-Chancellor's Committee meetings.

C = Minutes of the University of Tasmania Council meetings.

FB = Minutes of the University of Tasmania Prodiugal Board.

M = The Mercury, Hobart.


4. For Queensland see Dr Martin Silva's 1894 Australian Education Conference.


9. For Barry, see Blainey, p. 42. See also Sir Robert Scott, chancellor of the University of New Zealand in 1916 and equally bold in his self-government, Morrell, p. 116. Morrell also mentions the 1891-1910 Sydney University Act of 1899, which introduced the concept of the university council in the United Kingdom.


18. UTS 14/4/1977, Committee of University Board.

19. For Sydney University, see Sydney Morning Herald, 9/27/1917, p. 304 for Miller's advice to Oglivy.


22. C. XIII, 202/222/24/1977, Fogarty, p. 30. To record this, the 1977 University Act (C. 1. P) was brought in to keep in return to the tradition of the Federal Act 1934 for Tasmania, p. 27.

23. In the early 1960s the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney had experienced similar improprieties; see Blainey, p. 120 and Morrell, p. 86.


28. For details see Eddy, Ov, possis a useful summary of the issues is provided by Boves, J, 5 December, 1979, p. 5. A useful list of publications on the Ov case is given in E.L. Wieland, ed., Higher Education in Australia, Sydney (AUSPRESS), 1965, pp. 52-53.


30. For Wilson, see UTS 21/9/1969.

31. See Eddy, The State and the University; Wilson, The University of Sydney; C. VII 66/15/15/1969 (Wilson appointed as the same day).

32. See Eddy, The State and the University; Wilson, The University of Sydney; C. VII 66/15/15/1969 (Wilson appointed as the same day).

33. For Wilson, see UTS 21/9/1969.

34. See Eddy, The State and the University; Wilson, The University of Sydney; C. VII 66/15/15/1969 (Wilson appointed as the same day).

35. See Eddy, The State and the University; Wilson, The University of Sydney; C. VII 66/15/15/1969 (Wilson appointed as the same day).

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37. See Eddy, The State and the University; Wilson, The University of Sydney; C. VII 66/15/15/1969 (Wilson appointed as the same day).

