Wayne University was split into warring factions today over dropping Russell L. Ackoff, assistant professor of philosophy, from the faculty.

Ackoff, the university said, is not being fired. His contract simply is not being renewed for next year.

Even the faculty was split to some extent, but the students were busy making it into a cause. Just what the cause was varied.

Whatever the real facts, one thing was certain. It was the first time that the philosophy department, traditionally regarded as a cloistered, theoretical body, was causing the big excitement on campus.

THROUGH IN JUNE

Ackoff, 30, came here from the University of Pennsylvania for the fall term of 1947 and is through next June. He continues teaching until then.

Also involved in Associate Professor C. West Churchman, also from Penn, who taught Ackoff there, but came to Wayne a semester after Ackoff did.

Churchman’s teaching contract is not involved, but Ackoff supporters charge that if Ackoff goes, so will Churchman.

Also on Ackoff’s side is Thomas A. Cowan, who was Churchman’s teacher at Penn. He is now a law school professor, and his job is not at stake.

The battle over Ackoff was expected to explode into words, at least, at a hearing set for 3 pm Monday at Webster Hall, conducted by the National Student Association committee, which was told to do so by the Student Council.

This action came after the Student League for Industrial Democracy ((SLID) had demanded an inquiry on charges that refusal to renew Ackoff’s contract was “a violation of academic freedom.”

DEAN EXPLAINS

One thing was agreeably absent. Nobody was accusing anyone else of being a communist. SLID, often noisy and belligerent, leans towards socialism, but has no truck with communists. Ackoff, too, has attacked communists.

Only official statement from the university was from Victor A. Rapport, dean of the college of Liberal Arts, who said:

“About a year ago the philosophy department recommended that Ackoff’s probation service (all faculty members are taken at first on probation) terminate in June of 1949.
“At that time I wrote Ackoff stating that decision and asking whether he accepted the terms. In a written reply to me he stated that he did accept these terms.”

The recommendation came from the philosophy department’s head, Prof. William Trap, but aligned with him was Prof. Raymond Hoekstra of that department, and the heads of other college departments on the feeling that is was up to the department head to decide which new men fitted and which didn’t.

Ackoff, however, charged that the real reason was that his notions of philosophy differed from Trap’s and that:

“In common language, it’s a question of whether philosophy can bake bread or can’t. Our interest is toward a philosophy of science that is applied to the everyday needs of people, and theirs is reflective. We think it should be useful.”

Churchman and Cowan agreed.

Other faculty members, however, denied that the difference in philosophical viewpoints of the battling philosophers had anything to do with it.

One pointed out:
“Churchman teaches the same way, but he can stay at Wayne as long as he chooses to – until he is 65 and retires. The same goes for Cowan.”
Wayne Split Over Dropping Of Philosophy Professor
By Jack Pickering, Detroit Times, February 26, 1949

CALLED IRRITATING

“The fact is that Ackoff has a knack of irritating people. Trap and Churchman can
discuss their different views and still be friends. Ackoff can't. He antagonizes people.”

Churchman is five years older than Ackoff. Trap is in his 60's. Hoekstra is in his 40's.

Latest student group to join the battle was the mathematics fraternity, Kappa Mu
Epsilon, which avoided any cry of “academic freedom,” but sent petitions to President
David D. Henry, Dean Rapport, and others urging retention of Ackoff simply on grounds
that the members think he is a good teacher and that Churchman would leave if Ackoff
left.

CHURCHMAN WILL GO

Churchman said he “assumed it would be impossible to remain,” and added that he was
engaged in some research work with Ackoff that “couldn't conveniently be done by
commuting.”

Ackoff said further that the Wayne Philosophical Society had invited four faculty
members of the department to attend a hearing yesterday but that Trap and Hoekstra
had not agreed to appear.

FOOTNOTE

A faded copy of the original article is attached.

Russell Ackoff remained at Wayne University (now Wayne State University) as an
assistant professor in philosophy and mathematics until 1951, at which point he left for
an associate professor of operations research position at Case Institute of Technology
(now Case Western Reserve), from 1951 to 1964. He was a visiting professor of
operations research at the University of Birmingham in 1961 and 1962. He left Case in
1964 for a position of professor of systems sciences and management sciences at the
Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Ackoff left Penn in 1986.

C. West Churchman joined Ackoff in moving to the Case Institute of Technology in
1951, where he was Professor of Engineering Administration. He left in 1957 to join
the faculty of UC-Berkeley.

The expression “has no truck with,” as in “SLID has no truck with communism,”
translates to “has no dealings with.”
Wayne Split Over Dropping Of Philosophy Professor

By JACK PICKERING

Wayne University was split today over dropping Russell L. Ackoff, assistant professor of philosophy, from the faculty.

Ackoff, the university said, is not being fired. His contract is simply not being renewed for next year.

Even the faculty was split on this. President of the faculty, in his statement,

"The faculty is divided on this. There is a majority opinion that Ackoff should be retained."

The majority view was that Ackoff was doing a good job and that the university was making a mistake in terminating his contract.

Through June

Ackoff was born in 1923 in Philadelphia. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania in 1947.

He taught at the University of Pennsylvania from 1947 to 1954. He then joined the faculty of Princeton University, where he taught until 1968.

In 1968, he joined the faculty of Wayne University, where he taught until his contract was terminated.

DEAN EXPLAINS

Noel Dean, director of the philosophy department, said that the decision to terminate Ackoff's contract was based on "academic considerations." He said that Ackoff's work had not been up to the standards expected of a philosophy professor.

Ackoff himself was not available for comment. He has been away from the university due to illness.

Packaging Linens for 15

Feb. 26, 1949