

Wayne Spilt Over Dropping Of Philosophy Professor

By Jack Pickering, Detroit Times, February 26, 1949

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.

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“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 it was up to the department head to decide which new men fitted and which didn’t.



Detroit Times Photo

PROF. BUSSELL L. ACKOFF

... not fired but out ...

DIFFER ON PHILOSOPHY

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.

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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."

copy to Robert S. MacKay (right), superintendent of the DSR's Wyoming

Terminal won the trophy for the best safety improvement record in the system.

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Taxis in Ann Arbor Hike Prices April 1

ANN ARBOR, Feb. 25 — Taxi passengers in Ann Arbor will have to pay increased fares beginning April 1 when local cabbies install meters in their vehicles for the first time.

PACKAGING LINENS FOR IS



DETROIT TIMES
 Feb. 26, 1949

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