

# Radical left has won battle for lecterns



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What's all this hoo-hah we used to hear about the defeat and extinction of the 1960s counterculture? As we learn increasingly, the left won the most important battle — the battle for the college lectern. "Tenured radicals," to borrow the title of a new book, today gnaw and natter at those Western norms whose transmission once was the main business of any respectable college.

Too many profs view teaching as a political pursuit, the politics often being neo-Marxist. The perceived rights of approved victim groups — minorities, women, gays and so on — outrank in many academic venues the right of free inquiry and expression.

The tribulations of Alan Gribben come immediately to mind. Alan Gribben, 48, is a nationally known Mark Twain scholar who teaches at the Austin campus of the University of Texas. He received his doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley, where, like nearly everyone else back then, he was anti-war. He demonstrated for civil rights and married an Asian-American. He is a prolific writer, lecturer and editor.

Does the department esteem and encourage Dr. Gribben? To all appearances, the department wishes he'd pack off to the University of Timbuktu. Hostile stares and denigratory notes are his lot. Recommended salary increases have been pared to the bone.

Dr. Gribben's apparent offense is upholding traditional academic standards. It goes back almost three years. As the elected chairman of graduate studies, he voted against creating a concentration in ethnic and Third World literatures at the master of arts level. He suggested, not unreasonably, that entering graduate students need the English and American classics as foundation for the study of more exotic works.

These days, at UT and countless other campuses, you don't talk like this. What you do, at the mention of multiculturalism, is fall worshipfully to your knees. Women's studies, black studies, Hispanic studies, Third World studies, gay-lesbian studies — what is any of this but reparation for the discredited past, when we imagined that the likes of Hardy, Hawthorne and Balzac were of more enduring importance than, oh, Alice Walker and Salman Rushdie?

Dr. Gribben's friends in the department soon reported to him that the multiculturalists were calling him a racist. The censure has since been enlarged: He's a sexist, too. When the dean of liberal arts refused to hire a particular woman as assistant professor of literature, the English department roared with wrath. Dr. Gribben wrote a public letter supporting the dean's record. Following this, he says, "I became a virtual nonentity."

Over the past two years, his <sup>recommended</sup> salary increases have averaged 0.75 percent. He was defeated for re-election to the chairmanship of graduate studies. Friends continue to report fresh rumors and insults. When an out-of-state English department interviewed him for a chairmanship (an offer subsequently extended but declined), his Austin "fan club" duly let the interviewers know what a reprobate they were thinking of taking on.

Isn't free thought wonderful? Smiles and cordiality all round — provided everybody buys the party line. Let someone deviate, and out come the daggers.

Dr. Gribben, in long, respectful letters, has sought redress from his chairman and new liberal arts dean. No meaningful response has come. I called the chairman, Joseph Kruppa, to ask about the Gribben case. Dr. Kruppa declined to comment on a "personnel matter." He said the department has "a lot of interchange and dialogue going on."

Damn right it does, what with various English department members throwing a party (as I mentioned in a recent column) where a Texas flag was burned out of contempt for the state that issues the arsonists' paychecks.

What are independent thinkers like Alan Gribben supposed to do anyway? Knuckle under to the prevailing orthodoxy, at whatever cost to conscience and self-respect? And if they don't knuckle under, what then? Not everyone has a vocation to martyrdom.

The persecution of Alan Gribben — what else is there to call it? — is disgraceful in an institution that pretends to cherish free thought. Dr. Gribben is a victim of the new McCarthyism, which this time comes not from the right but the left. Keep him, and other academics like him, in your thoughts and prayers. They're fighting not just their battles but ours.