

Reports

Six Months of Experience with Accuracy in Academia

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The precise birthdate of Accuracy in Academia (AIA) is obscure. Someone in Texas claims to have founded it—together with former government economist Reed Irvine, who has been chairman of Accuracy in Media for nearly 17 years—back in 1983. The first president of AIA, a retired Foreign Service officer named Malcolm Lawrence, states in his resume that he was elected to the AIA office in April 1985. Press accounts about the new organization began to appear in July, what might be called its founding statement was published by Irvine in the August 1985 edition of his newsletter "AIM Report," and an executive director named Laszlo Csorba III, a 1985 B.A. in political science from the University of California at Davis, set up office in Washington on August 15.

AIA was established, according to its introductory announcement, in order to "combat the dissemination of misinformation." It said that it would do so by encouraging students to record bothersome things that professors were saying

in university classrooms and to send these statements to AIA headquarters. AIA would then determine inaccuracies, would invite professors to admit their alleged errors, and would publicize them if the professors did not recant. AIA initially called upon "mature adults," especially retired people, to enroll in courses and serve as volunteer monitors, but the notion of enlisting senior citizens seems not to have been pursued. An AIA officer remarked at one point that there was an ample supply of students already enrolled who were coming forth.

By the time the 1985-86 academic year was under way, AIA had become a major media and campus item. Television viewers saw it treated and debated on the Today Show, Late Night America, the MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour, the CBS Evening News, and Nightwatch. The newspapers and magazines covered it abundantly in stories, editorials, op-ed pieces, syndicated columns, cartoons, and letters to the editor. Campus press coverage was also heavy, and campus meetings and debates proliferated. The AIA officers were indefatigable in accepting campus, television, and radio engagements. For a while, scarcely a day went by without AAUP's being asked to recommend someone to debate with Mr. Irvine or Mr. Lawrence or Mr. Csorba in New York or California or countless points in between. Indeed, Mr. Lawrence resigned from the AIA presidency in October, stating that he was overly besieged by requests for interviews. The media, themselves long under attack by Reed Irvine for alleged irresponsibility, may have welcomed the opportunity to focus on his pursuit of a new target. Perhaps they simply saw a good story in students spying on their professors. AIA may not have become the biggest threat to academic freedom since

Jordan E. Kurland, Associate General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors, follows the activities of Accuracy in Academia for AAUP.

"Accuracy in Academia": A New Obstacle to Academic Freedom

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Committee A notes with concern the announcement by a recently formed organization, calling itself "Accuracy in Academia," that it intends to monitor the classroom statements of college and university faculty members. The monitoring is to be done by students and auditors, particularly senior citizens, who are to record statements which "they believe to be seriously in error" and to report these to the organization. The organization will in turn use this information to confront faculty members with it and to publicize their alleged "errors."

Committee A believes that this intended activity is antithetical to the freedom of faculty members to teach and of students to learn, as well as a threat to the freedom of the academic institutions themselves. The monitoring of classrooms for an outside organization which arrogates to itself the prerogative of determining accuracy from what is reported to it, and which will then publicize alleged errors, can only inhibit the process through which higher learning occurs and knowledge is advanced. The university classroom is not a place where teachers advocate concepts and expect students to embrace them uncritically. Teaching is not a form of proselytism, nor is learning a form of discipleship. A university classroom is and should be a place where ideas are purveyed, explored, and challenged. In the process, much that is false is necessarily assayed.

Some of what a professor says in class is for purely didactic purposes—to draw students into discussion, to provoke, even to outrage, and so to stimulate. Also, some things known today to be error were once taught as truth. Epidemics were once explained by "miasma" and combustion by "phlogiston."

Moreover, although the stated purpose of "Accuracy in Academia" is to correct error in teaching, the organization has made clear its assertion that the source of error is to be found in "liberal-left" views. It thus intends to decry not departure from truth, but rather departure from the organization's own ideological perspective. Any move to cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom, whether that effort derives from the political right or the political left, whether from the government or from self-appointed vigilantes, is inimical to academic freedom.

Implicit in the agenda of "Accuracy in Academia" is the assumption that college and university teachers are not now accountable to their institutions or to the public. In fact, and properly so, teaching and scholarship in the academic community are regularly evaluated by academic professionals through established procedures. Boards of trustees are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the process and for protecting the public interest while preventing undue public interference.

External monitoring of in-class statements not only presents the prospect that the words uttered will be distorted or taken out of context; it is also likely to have a chilling effect and result in self-censorship. Would an early believer in the germ theory or the theory of oxidation have been so bold as to challenge the received truths of miasma and phlogiston in the face of some external nineteenth-century monitor of truth? Would a twentieth-century scholar of economics or sociology be affected differently? Almost thirty years ago Justice Frankfurter, adverting especially to the social sciences, stated that "for society's good—if understanding be an essential need of society—inquiries into these problems, speculations about them, stimulation in others of reflection upon them, must be left as unfettered as possible." The proposed program of "Accuracy in Academia," if undertaken and accepted seriously, will lead toward the deadening of discourse and the stultification of learning. It is not to society's good.

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the days of Senator Joseph McCarthy, but it certainly became the most publicized threat.

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The threat posed by AIA to academic freedom was summarized by the American Association of University Professors in a statement issued in response to AIA's initial announcement. AAUP provided three reasons for opposing AIA's activities:

The classroom is a place of learning in which the professor serves as intellectual guide, but all are encouraged to seek and express the truth as they see it. The presence in the classroom of monitors for an outside organization, which intends to decide what is accurate and to publicize what is not, will inhibit academic freedom. Students will be discouraged from testing their ideas. Professors will hesitate before presenting new or unpopular theories that would stimulate robust intellectual discussion.

AIA's claim that it can assess the correctness of what is said in the classroom is not only arrogant but hollow. The quality of academic performance is necessarily judged and controlled through peer evaluation by skilled professionals. Supervision of the evaluation process resides in boards of trustees that are responsible for ensuring both accountability and academic integrity while safeguarding the university from undue interference by politicians and pressure groups such as AIA.

AIA announces that its interest is in combating misinformation, but, in seeking accuracy in the complex world of ideas, it approaches its task with a clear and narrow mindset. Its founding statement names and attacks (with dubious accuracy) a Marxist professor, brands another faculty member as a propagandist for Castro and socialism, and goes on to characterize certain graduate students as "even more liberal-left in their views than the media elite." AIA's president claims to know of 10,000 alleged Marxist professors, and he speaks of drawing on rightwing student groups for assis-

tance in exposing them. The call is for accuracy in academia, but the goal is conformity with AIA's particular cast of mind. We have consistently opposed efforts by persons and groups, whether from the right or the left and whatever their special interests, to shut down classes or prevent speakers from being heard.¹

Within a few weeks after this statement was issued, the chief officers of 12 Washington-based higher education associations joined AAUP in a similar statement denouncing AIA. A number of learned societies either endorsed AAUP's statement (e.g., the American Historical Association) or issued their own statement (e.g., the American Sociological Association). University president after university president spoke out during the fall of 1985, denouncing AIA's intended activities as unappreciative of and inimical to the real purpose of higher learning. Particularly eloquent addresses on the subject were delivered by the presidents of the University of Pennsylvania, Texas A & M University, the College of William and Mary, and Georgetown University, and the chancellor of the City University of New York. Secretary of Education Bennett, after a little prodding, spoke out against AIA, as did numerous long-time critics (e.g., Sidney Hook) and neoconservative critics (e.g., Midge Decter) of alleged left-wing politicization of the American academic community. Among the presidents of America's institutions of higher education, only Boston University's John Silber was reported nationally as speaking out in favor of AIA. Among organizations of faculty members, only the minuscule University Professors for Academic Order has been similarly reported.

AIA upon its launching had attributed its fears about "the dissemination of misinformation" to an unverifiable magazine comment about some 10,000 Marxists who are supposed to be included among the third of a million or more faculty members in American higher education and to a couple of named professors,

¹"On 'Accuracy and Academia' and Academic Freedom," *Academe*, September-October 1985, page 1a.

already pretty well known in their fields, described respectively as Marxist and pro-Cuban. It remained to be seen, however, who and what that was new to the public AIA would claim to unearth through classroom monitoring by cooperating students. I had been quoted earlier as stating that I did not think Harvard, Yale, and Princeton would be quaking at the prospects, but I was not so sure about the results for a teacher attacked by AIA who was at a campus lacking great prestige and prone to outside pressures.

AIA unveiled its first case in a story that consumed most of its first newsletter, issued in November. Entitled "Prof. Mark Reader Won't Talk," the story charges Professor Reader of Arizona State University's Political Science Department with the double sin of being obsessed in his course on political ideologies with the danger of nuclear war and of refusing to discuss the matter with AIA's interrogators. ("We called him 18 times," AIA complains. "We sent him a registered letter. He hasn't replied.") Actually, the assault on Mark Reader predated AIA. An Arizona State undergraduate named Matthew Scully had been attacking him in the student newspaper the year before for ignoring the "pro-nuclear" point of view. Mr. Scully took a job in AIA's Washington office at about the time AIA's story on Professor Reader appeared.

The AAUP staff promptly informed Professor Reader, as it has other professors who have been the object of AIA's accusations, that AAUP's advice and assistance were available if any steps adverse to him were to result. President J. Russell Nelson of Arizona State immediately made it clear, however, that he was not impressed with AIA's interest in the contents of the university's political science course. Saying that he was "skeptical of self-appointed watchdog groups," he told the press that he would not pay any attention to the AIA newsletter. Reed Irvine himself went to Arizona State and continued AIA's attack on the Reader course at meetings on and off campus. He received some local support, but by and large administration, faculty, and student leaders spoke out in defense

of Professor Reader's academic freedom and against the AIA intrusion. Professor Reader's position at Arizona State University appears to remain secure.

Another case in which AIA declared an interest, and which occasioned a campus visit by Mr. Csorba, involved Professor Mary Karasch of Oakland University in Michigan and a course she was teaching in Central American politics. It seems that an unidentified student reported her to AIA headquarters, claiming that she spoke favorably of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and harshly of the Contras. Unlike Professor Reader who chose to ignore his AIA accusers, Professor Karasch chose to respond to them, asserting that her classroom was open to all points of view. Mr. Csorba, presumably somewhat mollified, told the press that he had spoken with her and "we've had a good exchange. . . . If we find that this professor is doing her best to present a balance and allow for other views, we have no complaints." Professor Karasch, whose specialty is the social history of Brazil, was firm in her denunciation of AIA's tactics, however. She informed the press that she had "been through this before" as a Fulbright lecturer at the University of Brasilia in 1977-78 during a period of military dictatorship: "There were spies and bugging devices in the classroom. I have seen what could happen under the worst circumstances. People would go to prison because of the spies in the classroom." The Oakland ad-

*"The call is for accuracy
in academia, but the goal
is conformity. . . ."*

ministration stood with Professor Karasch in denouncing AIA's methods. Provost Keith Kleckner, in a memorandum to the Oakland faculty, responded as follows:

Recent activity on campus by outside individuals or organizations attempting to function as an academic "truth squad" gives us cause to reconsider the precious commodity we call academic freedom. Our academic community must remain one in which anyone may discuss any issue from

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any point of view. Faculty members should feel no obligation or pressure whatsoever to modify scholarly approaches to their teaching or studies in response to stances advocated by outside groups.

While AIA may not yet have resolved its doubts as to the quality of Professor Karasch's work, she learned in January that she is receiving a National Endowment for the Humanities award for research and study next year in Brazil.

Later editions of AIA's newsletter have not provided the kind of detailed assault on a particular professor that characterized the first issue. Pieces did appear on a "self-professed Marxist" professor who went to Nicaragua during college recess to help harvest crops, with a professor dropped from a Catholic university allegedly for being too Catholic, and with an American-born professor holding Mexican citizenship who is contesting deportation. (What any of these cases have to do with accuracy in the classroom was not well explained.) The lead story in the December newsletter was headlined "AIA Worries Moscow," with the text neglecting to mention that AIA has also been treated as a worry in the newspapers of London, Amsterdam, and several other European capitals. The January-February newsletter leads with a story on a controversy among historians of modern Germany that has been exhaustively treated elsewhere; "radical and Marxist" historians are depicted by AIA as supporting one side of the controversy, and AIA, to no great surprise, takes the other side.

The AAUP staff, in advising faculty members who find themselves under questioning by AIA, has discussed with them the advantages and disadvantages of refusing to reply, as did Professor Reader, or of engaging in debate, as did Professor Karasch. Either reaction can be effective, and the approach to take depends a good deal on individual temperament. The choice should be left to the individual, and most university administrations who have spoken out on AIA have made this clear.

As I write this report, a half year after AIA began its activities, the organization seems to be in somewhat of a lull. One would like to hope that the strong opposi-

tion voiced by the academic community to AIA's tactics of monitoring, taping, and exposing those with whom it disagrees has cooled the ardor of its crusade. We can ask, as a student did in Trudeau's recent *Doonesbury* strip, "What kind of scuz-bag would turn in his own. . .?" But another student in the strip was in the process of doing just that, and we have to assume that AIA adherents are still seeking out classroom heresies. Any chilling of academic freedom that this activity may cause is to be deplored, and any professor who may suffer injury from AIA's tactics is one too many. □

Advanced Placement in Political Science Begins in 1987

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Secondary school students seeking college credit and/or placement for work done in high school political science courses will be expected to answer multiple-choice questions like those in Table 1—as well as to write essays—when they take the Advanced Placement Examination in Government and Politics, to be given for the first time in May of 1987. The Advanced Placement (AP) Program, sponsored by the College Board, permits students who have undertaken college-level study in their high schools to take an examination that measures their achievement. Although the AP program encompasses 24 courses in 15 fields, there has never been a program in political science.

Origins of the Program

In March 1984, the College Board convened a Task Force to consider the

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