

Strait, Louis Avrom, 1907-1975

Letter to Wendell M. Stanley from Louis Strait with enclosure of letter from Louis Strait to Dr. Troy C. Daniels: September 8, 1950
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Dear Dr. Stanley:

The reminiscence of my nylon line snakily hovering over the innocent fishing waters moved me to write to Troy Daniels the next day after our conversation anent the sequelae to the Neylan-faction's action.

I am enclosing a copy of that portion of the letter to Dr. Daniels which is germane. It was written in the heat of the moment without re-write or correction. Nevertheless upon re-reading I would modify it only slightly in the direction of reduction of emotional adjectives. Upon further thought and discussion I would like to enlarge upon and emphasize the elements of strategy and overall tactics involved in the actions proposed in the 4th and 5th paragraphs on p.1. This correspondence is obviously not intended to offer a clearly drawn statement of objectives of plan of action. It pretends only to be an expression of a number of ideas pointing to the logic of a general strategy and many interspersed specific suggestions for action with the hope that a general idea or even a particular phase may be found useful.

First I would like to add what I believe to be a clarifying statement summarizing the basic difference between the faculty, the president and the eleven-man minority of the Board on the one-hand versus the Neylon one-man majority faction of the Board on the other, namely:

1. That we all agree on what we are against, communism;
2. We disagree on what we are for. Our group is for the traditional American right of freedom of conscience and freedom of a minority to disagree with either a majority or authority and for the traditional hands-off policy of the Board of Regents in academic matters. The Neylan faction of the Board is for the cardinal authoritarian and police-state principle of permitting no minority opinion. This principle symbolized by a whip was clearly enunciated by Mussolini in his first commandment "Obey"! We should emphasize what we are against only as a preliminary to contrast the much more important declaration of what we are for as compared with what our opponents are for.

The following additional comments upon the two paragraphs describing a possible course of action may serve to enlarge the details of a program and are particularly intended to emphasize the importance of a joint action of the Academic Senate and the President.

The paragraph on direct action should include a statement as follows: Whereas the record and phenomenal growth and success of the services rendered by the University Faculty to the people of the State and Nation through teaching and research have been attained only through mutual confidence and respect between Regents, President, and Faculty.

Whereas a one-man majority faction of the Board of Regents has broken faith with the Faculty (and President) and thereby destroyed the long record of mutual respect and confidence by their action of unwarranted

dismissal of 39 members of the Academic Senate for reasons patently petulant and indefensible to the faculty.

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Therefore the Academic Senate in the interests of the proper conduct of the Academic function, which is our charge, is compelled to proclaim that it has lost faith in this faction of the Regents and challenges their fitness to continue to serve the traditional function of the Regents. The Academic Senate further wishes the people of the State to know that in its considered opinion the continued services of teaching and research, which have been acclaimed widely have already suffered seriously and will inexorably deteriorate unless balance is restored in the University Family.

The Academic Senate further painfully concludes that only the resignation of this one-man majority faction, in part or in whole, or reversal of their action of bad faith can rectify the present grievous situation and sordid record of the past six months.

Questions have been raised as to the details of the financial support backing up the retention of those unfairly fired and continuing them as members of the Academic Senate. They, if possible at all, should be retained on the rolls of the Academic Senate in their present status. If not they should be made honorary members, guests or whatever designation makes it possible to make the fact public. As for the source of financial support: I am sure that outside aid can be effectively solicited e.g. the \$80,000.00 fund offer of the University of Chicago would undoubtedly be renewed. The remainder, or all if necessary, should be raised by agreement to prorate the funds on a percentage basis guaranteed by contributions by senate and other faculty members. The court-action attempt to rectify the regents' action must be likewise supported.

Three other points have been suggested:

1. That ways and means be found of giving the students (at least the graduate students) the benefit of the teaching and wisdom of the "displaced" Senate members thru seminars, lectureships or whatever avenues can be made available by the Academic Senate and the President.
2. That some of these men who have so effectively and capably served on committees of the Academic Senate in the past be continued on such Committees as honorary members and that at least one outstanding member of the group be so placed upon the Academic Tenure and Privilege Committee.
3. That the Academic Tenure and Privilege Committee recognizing that the Regents' action was a doublecross reverse its action on any of "the six" that it believes have held their position solely through freedom of conscience.

(If there is question that the Academic Senate cannot take effective action, it has been proposed by a colleague that serious consideration be given to setting up an organization of the faculty for the "duration" in whatever form is necessary for appropriate action. Although this is a drastic suggestion and it is to be hoped an unnecessary one, it is probably not so shocking as it appears on first utterance. Because if the Academic Senate cannot act effectively in this instance it will remain a dead and meaningless organization for the future. I for one would not waste my time attending useless polemics. If it cannot defend Academic tenure and Academic freedom by having recommendations so eminently just and modest as its last to the Board of Regents be respected and sustained it becomes indeed

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useless and can be readily replaced by a few Committees. The same holds true of the position of the President of the University. If he does not in some way resist the repudiation by the "dissident" majority of regents of his approval of "the 39" he becomes in the eyes of all knowing men a mere figurehead, who certainly can not sustain, except as a fiction, the respect due an independent academic leadership and dynamic university management. This is the right and function of any good university president as desired by any good Board of Directors, Governors, or Regents.)

The latter parenthetical remark leads to a crucial point of strategy. The president unlike the faculty is not an ivory-towered unknown. He commands a vast following and popular support, especially among the alumni. The avenues of reporting to the people can repeat false charges of communism, disruptionism, etc with impunity against helpless victims like Prof. Hicks, Hildebrand or Davisson. It cannot do so against President Sproul. It is therefore essential that the President clearly, if only as chairman of the Academic Senate, side with the faculty in its action, and that he be informed by the Academic Senate leadership that it will be grateful for whatever action he deems appropriate in making his position and sentiments clear independently as the President and that we will back him up with all of our joint strength in supporting any action jointly arrived at or otherwise.

It seems clear to me that in character Mr. Neylan would be "needled" into a demand for Pres. Sproul's dismissal. Such action should be welcomed. If such were to happen it seems equally clear that he could not succeed. The alumni ex-officio member constituting the one-man majority could hardly support such an action. If Neylan does not take such action he suffers a psychological defeat which could be very important in deciding a shorter interval of terminating this sordid affair. If he pursued such action, this entire matter free from the red-herring of communism could at last have an avenue for presentation to the people. The outcome I believe is unquestionable. Neylan and company have not won an election for 20 years, once the chips were down. (Even the efforts to replace Governor Warren by Goodwin J. Knight as a candidate failed miserably.) Let us not continue to make their oft-repeated mistake of underestimating the denial of the voting populace of Hearstian headlines and distortion of the facts. If Pres. Sproul should become an object of equally unfair attack there can be little doubt as to the outcome. He would be vindicated and the esteem of the President's office would be regained. The rightful esteem and dignity of the academic senate and the principles of academic tenure and freedom would be restored.

I recognize this analysis may be wrong, even naive. I am emboldened to present it only because a review of the past year reveals that my formerly "naive," "non-realistic," etc. analyses have been in post-mortem in very large measure sustained by events.

I also am aware that you are heavily burdened these days and if you have gotten this far are swearing at my verbosity. I must take another paragraph however to discuss what I believe to be a most important principle of any action we may take. The Academic Senate must attempt to maintain its dignity and be true to its trust, which is the seeking and presentation of the truth. Some will add, and with much justification, the word dispassionately. I am aware that my letter to T. C. Daniels and much of the tone of this lengthy account is certainly not dispassionate. It is evident that in places I have mingled the elements comprising the factual record with passionately-presented conclusions. It would take considerable effort to revamp this presentation and make a clear separation of these two factors.

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I believe honest passion in supporting an important principle has a dignity of its own. However I am heartily in sympathy with the end of maintaining Senate and Faculty Dignity and would trust that greater wisdom would make the proper adjustments for use of any of the ideas here presented if they appear to be of any value whatsoever in the important conflict confronting us.

Yours sincerely
Louis A. Strait

Copy of Letter to Dr. Troy C. Daniels, August 31, 1950

There is little doubt that this one-man majority is so unscrupulous and tyrannical and so little aware of the fundamentals of academic function that it would be in perfect keeping with their dictatorial behavior up to the present to wreck the university's greatness and reduce it to an enslaved totalitarian prototype, with a degree of

assurance that they are so justified.

The fact is that they willingly admit that communism is not an issue; that their action, in clear-cut violation of their expressed agreements, is purely punitive against those who have had the temerity to disagree, including the president of the University. This fact means that if this one-man majority is not combatted the great University of California will be a second rate or worse institution to which men who cherish freedom of thought and honest belief will disdain to come, or will only accept with tongue in cheek; an institution where the whim of an uninformed political appointee-group determines academic policy and function—the president and academic senate remaining enslaved lackeys to their (the regents') prejudices— or else.

If it were not for the fact that they would willingly wreck the university, it would be my view that we, the president and the academic senate, should resign en masse. However, since they obviously do not have the university's interests at heart, for whatever reason, we cannot play their game for them. We must remember that they are a one-man majority only, and that they are vigorously opposed by the remainder including the governor and the prexy. Therefore I feel that our action is to maintain our unanimity or great majority to oppose this tyrannical one-man Neylanish majority and maintain the support of the others.

We must make a ringing denunciation of their dishonesty and deceitful practices in breaking their agreement even after the communist bogey was admittedly allayed. We must further unequivocally state that we do not recognize their abuse of the legal power which they have captured by one-man majority. We do not strike nor resign as a body because it would be an injury to the university (and the people of the State) by those who really carry out its major function and would be futile against conscienceless totalitarians. I say "totalitarians" advisedly. Their power is held by no democratic process. They are not removable by anyone—even the officer who appointed them—and they have acted in true totalitarian style. Given us this assurance they said and we ask no more. Indeed, we promise to do so and so and such and such. So the faculty on assumption of honesty, make concession after concession, appeasement after appeasement, one Munich after another. There are no further small spots for an appeaser of Neylan to stand upon. In my opinion, one must now frankly say: I am for this tyrannical power—or at least I accept it, and thereby I am against a free university and will pay the price of freedom as ordered.

The faculty must as a body state that it does not accept such barefaced tyranny and destructively petulant abuse of power. It must state that it continues to carry out the academic function of the University under a state of siege to be lifted only when this one-man majority no longer controls. It must state that it still holds the 39 members it has cleared of any charges as continuing members of the Academic Senate and will see that their salaries are paid until they are returned by the decent and loyal board members supplemented by new or revised membership to a majortotalitarianfunction—theWethisity.

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If the prexy is attacked or removed by this power-crazy element, the same holds true. We will follow no other prexy and assume another an upstart until ours is returned. The "dissident" majority of Regents may wield complete legal power. The president and the faculty can make them powerless by passive action and restore the balance which has prevailed among the three functions in the years until Neylanism hit the deck.

This is one man's opinion of the best action and I am sure that if the present leaders of the Academic Senate and faculty do not take a strong stand and tell the truth about this whole business in a forceful and shocking manner, calling a spade a spade, joining battle against this kind of interference with the President and the Academic Senate by the members of the Board of Regents, the results will be disastrous.

If our present leadership takes this lying down, or appeasingly, if it makes some begging request from this totalitarian group, the leadership will and should, pass into the hands of those who will fight this degradation of the university's functional group. The time is long past for appeasing requests. They can be expressions

now only of abasement to tyranny. That is not the way to sustain the battle our American forefathers won. It is the same first step that Mussolini and Hitler initiated in cementing tyranny. It is the first step in making the University of California a counter-part of the University of Moscow.

Considering the seriousness and the urgency of the problem of what action the Academic Senate shall now take, I request of you, Troy, as Chairman of the Faculty of the College of Pharmacy, that a meeting of that faculty be called, or a joint meeting of the Medical Center Faculties, say during the week of Sept. 5 - 10, or as soon as possible, to discuss this matter. I would like the above or closely allied view to be presented. Since this is the only copy, please keep it for me. I would be happy to have you pass it on to Bud, John and Frank, for their consideration preliminary to such a meeting.

Yours

[Handwritten note:] 9/8/50

Faculty Meeting date not yet set - probably next week. LAS.

Postscript, September 8, 1950

9/8/50

P.S.

A colleague (non-Academic Senate) who apparently was stimulated to action by discussion has presented to me another statement: "A Suggested Plan of Action." There is some repetition. He has stated his views much more concisely, you will be relieved to know. I will take the liberty to send it to you in the next few days when typewritten copy is made.

The story of the action of the Psych. Assoc. Board of Directors was not carried by The Examiner nor the Call Bulletin — and maybe not by The News. Looks like we will have to hire radio time and set up a Speaking Bureau to get our story to the people. Incidentally, there is no mention in the accompanying of "Job Security" as an issue. I think that is an important technique and should certainly be used.

The material sent you is for your use and needs no reply. If you do not mind I will send copies, however, to G.P. Adams and S.H. Holmes at Tahoe. If I do not hear from you to the contrary I will assume an O.K.

Yours

Louis S.