

# Overview

Writing in the spring 2000 issue of *Thought & Action*, John Connolly wondered if postmodernists might be treading on shaky ground when they challenged the academy's traditional commitment to a search for truth. In his prize winning article, "The Academy's Freedom, the Academy's Burden," Connolly asks "If there is no truth and only politics, will the courts continue to protect the academy's cherished academic freedom?"

Well, as we report in the June *NEA Higher Education Advocate*, the courts have spoken, and the answer—having nothing to do with postmodernism—is no, at least as far as the professoriate is concerned. A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has ruled that the California University of Pennsylvania was within its rights when it fired a professor who refused to change a student's grade at the behest of the administration.

The court reasoned that academic freedom and First Amendment rights belong to the academic institution. Faculty members have First Amendment rights as teachers only insofar as they are acting as agents for the institution, says the court.

Our attorneys tell us this is only one of a string of bad court decisions weakening the faculty's claim to academic freedom. This is

pretty sobering news for those of us who've made the search for truth our life's work.

All is not lost, however. Most of our *Thought & Action* readers work under collective bargaining agreements—and collective bargaining can ensure academic freedom for faculty in the classroom, in their utterances, and their scholarship.

Yet, Victor Devinatz reports in this issue, the majority of the faculty at Illinois State University, when offered the opportunity to choose collective bargaining through a state labor board supervised election last spring, voted no.

Why did these scholars reject a vehicle that strengthens their autonomy and protects their academic freedom? Devinatz argues that the faculty at Illinois State were victims of their own campus culture—a culture of competition—that the administration and anti-union faculty group capitalized on.

It should be no surprise to anyone that the freedom and autonomy of the professoriate is under attack. What is surprising is the seeming reluctance of so many of the nation's faculty to take up a vigorous defense of the profession and to tackle the major issues facing the academy.

In the Overview to the fall 2000 issue of *Thought & Action*, guest editor Jim Sullivan wrote: "With this issue, we launch an

extended discussion upon how to build a more nationally unified, self-determining, and powerful professoriate.”

We believed then and believe now that Sullivan is correct. The discussion he calls for continues in this issue.

William Scheuerman and Thomas Kriger, from the nation’s largest academic union, the United University Professions, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, representing faculty and professional staff of the State University of New York, present an in-depth review of a major work in the field of academic governance: *Campus Inc.: Corporate Power in the Ivory Tower*.

Scheuerman and Kriger wrestle with the same question the book’s editor, Geoffrey D. White, and its contributors attempt to answer: What does corporatization mean to higher education?

Other titles in this issue suggest willingness to take on other tough issues. In *Unity in Multiplicity: Lessons From the Alhambra*, one of this year’s Excellence in the Academy award winners, for

instance, Randy Schwartz, a mathematician, examines the *opportunities* for multiculturalism.

Luz Claudio’s *Reaching Out to the Next Generation of Scientists*, another Excellence in the Academy award winner, looks toward “the changing face of science.”

Also in this issue, as in past volumes, effective teaching and learning looms prominently. Henry Abramson writes of how studying the Talmud profoundly influenced his own approach to teaching at Florida Atlantic University. In a significantly different vein, Denise Heinze relates how talk show hosts provided inspiration—and style—for her “entertaining” classes.

Our readers, we know, are committed to the highest quality learning experience for their students—and they believe the faculty needs its traditional autonomy, academic freedom, and, yes, power in order to ensure that quality learning is not compromised.

What’s important to us at *Thought & Action* is that our readers use the pages of their journal to pursue this quest.

— Con Lehane, editor