

## **Australian universities' shift to green left ideology**

By Nic Cater, The Australian, 12 May 2015

Who does Paul Johnson think he is? The University of Western Australia's vice-chancellor or something? It must have been something of a shock for Johnson to discover that despite what it says on his business card, he doesn't actually run the university.

The withdrawal of UWA's offer to host Bjorn Lomborg's Australian Consensus think tank offers an insight into the ungovernable, undisciplined and unenlightened world of the modern university. Real authority within does not reside with its appointed executives. It derives from a mandate from the masses, like the autonomous collective King Arthur encounters in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

One imagines Graham Chapman as Arthur reining in his steed on Stirling Highway and pointing at the vice-chancellery cloisters: "Please, good people. I am in haste. Who lives in that castle?"

Woman: No one lives there.

Arthur: Then who is your lord?

Woman: We do not have a lord ... we are an anarcho-syndicalist commune.

## **Political correctness on Australian campuses**

The objects of the Python satire were the dreamers of the early 1970s, a ragged group dedicated to overturning the cultural hegemony that legitimised capitalism. Today's utopians are defenders of a new culture that maintains the doctrines of sustainability and social inclusion, and enforces the rules of political correctness on Australian campuses.

The old Left presumed to represent the workers. The new Left claims to defend stakeholders, community leaders and expert opinion.

Johnson's mistake, they say, was to stitch up a deal with Lomborg's think tank without consulting "key stakeholders". He was naive to expect the deal would stick without the approval of Ray Willis, for example, an adjunct professor in something or other who *The Sydney Morning Herald* says has been "a spokesman for the university on climate change - issues for the past seven years".

## **Spokesman on the science of climate**

Older alumni will be surprised to learn that the university now has a spokesman on the science of climate or indeed anything else. Does UWA also have an official stance on say, dark matter, or does it allow other multidimensional theories to be aired?

Could a student major in nonsymmetric gravitational theory without being branded a heretic?

In climate science the orthodoxy prevails and Willis — not, it should be noted, a full-time member of any faculty — is one of its many enforcers. "The appointment tarnishes the

reputation of the university,” he told the *Herald*. “It’s like appointing Brian Burke to look after your economics.”

### **Lomborg would be a misfit on every Australian campus**

The sad truth is that Lomborg would be a misfit on almost every contemporary Australian campus. His dispassionate, empirical approach to economics and public policy fell out of favour some time ago. Lomborg is further handicapped by incurable optimism, confidence in free markets, his belief in the benefits of trade and his benign view of corporations.

Unfashionably, he adopts the classical liberal view of scientific, technological and industrial progress which he regards as the solution, not the cause, of humanity’s problems.

In short, Lomborg is temperamentally ill-suited to contemporary academe, a fact the hipness of his T-shirts was never going to hide. He is cursed with an open mind that makes him reluctant to bow to conventional wisdom, as a successful academic must.

Conventional wisdom has become synonymous with sound scholarship making its position impregnable. The scholar of conventional wisdom, wrote John Kenneth Galbraith, “walks near the head of the academic professions; he appears on symposia; he is a respected figure at the Council on Foreign Relations; he is hailed at testimonial banquets”.

The sceptic, on the other hand, is disqualified since “were he a sound scholar, he would remain with the conventional wisdom”.

### **The object of witch-hunts pursued with medieval fury**

Today’s intellectual dissenters become the object of witch-hunts pursued with medieval fury.

There has been no attempt to explain why the centre’s intention to compare the costs and benefits of development goals was a bad thing. There was no need: this was an inquisition, not an inquiry.

The protocol of academic discourse is ignored; argumentation has been replaced with accusation; disputation has given way to denunciation.

Among those overjoyed with the backdown is Guild of Students president Lizzy O’Shea, who was elected last year on a platform that included free premium Wi-Fi and “a long-term vision for catering”.

“It’s a really good sign as far as community action goes that if enough people have mobilised against something, and don’t support it, that people will change their minds,” she told the ABC.

O’Shea claims “students, staff and alumni alike are outraged” that the university would flirt with a man such as Lomborg. But how do we know? There has been no plebiscite or indeed anything approaching an open discussion.

We are told that the 150-seat venue for a staff protest meeting was full. “Others (were) turned away because of health and safety concerns,” the *Herald* reported.

OH&S notwithstanding, one assumes the other 1400 academics on UWA's books had better things to do than join the posse against a mild-mannered, quirky Dane.

Many, one suspects, would have been cowered into silence, as dissenters frequently are. Moral panic, incubated in the bubble-wrapped, navel-gazing environment of a comfortably endowed sandstone university, is a frightening force.

Whatever the objections to the Lomborg centre, this is not the way that reasonable people behave. Nor does it assist the growth of knowledge. "The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race," John Stuart Mill wrote in *On Liberty*, a text that is no doubt thick with dust in the UWA library.

### **"The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion"**

"If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."

A crusade that was supposed to protect UWA's standing has ended up by damaging the institution's reputation more than these deluded vigilantes will ever know.

Its consequences for the reputation of Australian universities in general are dire.

If a liberal-minded institution such as UWA can be captured by the forces of unreason, what hope is there for the rest of them?

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