

# **The University of Birmingham versus Roland Chaplain: academic justice, community service and the professionalisation syndrome**

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In a society which condones corruption all become more or less corrupt, and the traditional ideals of a calling become proportionately corrupted. As a result, what is socially permissible, or even respected, in that society depends upon expediency, not ethics. ...

In democratic societies two callings accept full personal responsibility to society for knowledge and integrity of human relations. The Judiciary is one, the University is the other.

The members of the Judiciary may be dismissed only upon the motion in public of both houses of Parliament; the academic can be dismissed upon the motion in camera of what may be a virulent corporation. ...

The power of corporations over servants exercising personal responsibility for knowledge and opinion constitutes the greatest danger to the Universities as the intellectual sources of adaptation of societies to new problems. ...

A governing body of an institution ostensibly devoted to truth and justice is obviously corrupt if it obstructs, by every means, inquiry into its stewardship, when this is demanded by significant sections of the community it is supposed to serve. ...

Such a state of affairs is the antithesis of democratic processes and places the society in imminent danger. ...[1]

## **INTRODUCTION**

Roland Chaplain came to Birmingham University to obtain a degree in theology. As with many of his socially motivated colleagues of the 1960s, he sought employment in some occupation where he could be of service to the community. Instead of pursuing a pastoral service as a member of the clergy, he choose to follow a special interest which he had had for years and he went to work in weather forecasting. He took a job in the Edgbaston Observatory, then an independent organisation within the City of Birmingham.

Subsequently, the Edgbaston Observatory became incorporated into the University of Birmingham. Mr. Chaplain found himself embroiled in conflict which arose as a result of changes brought about by transferring the Observatory from local control to an appendix of the Department of Geography of the University. Mr. Chaplain was dismissed by the University administration in 1969. This rested basically on charges brought against him by the then Senior Lecturer in Climatology who was also appointed Director of the Edgbaston Observatory: Dr. Edward Trevor Stringer.

The surprise in this case is that, only a few years later, the same senior staff member and administrator who played such a key role in the dismissal of Mr. Chaplain and who had subsequently advanced to the status of Reader in Climatology, was convicted of violations of the Trade Descriptions Act. The Judge commented that Dr. Edward Trevor Stringer had “resorted to charlatanism and eventually downright dishonesty.” [2]

The case of Mr. Roland Chaplain has three important dimensions, the significance of which is summarised here before a more detailed inspection of each in turn:

## 1. Academic justice

As capitalist economies deteriorated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, universities and other organisations employing scientists and other “information processing staff” (i.e., the so-called quaternary sector of advanced industrial societies) came under pressure to reduce their expenses. This meant that for some universities it was necessary to dismiss ‘excess’ staff, even the so-called ‘tenured’ ones. Thus, one could expect that the standards of academic justice would be subjected closer scrutiny than previously. [3]

## 2. Community service

A number of small organisations arose to supply specialised skills needed widely in the community, e.g., the weather forecasting services at the Edgbaston Observatory.

Among the modern trends of monopolisation is one that is marketed under the euphemism “rationalisation”. This involves the takeover of small independent organisations, fusing them into large bureaucracies, whether public or private. Curiously, conservatives have favoured such “rationalisation” on the grounds of reducing administration — despite the evidence that administration grows relatively faster than the size of the organisation: Parkinson’s Law. [4]

The fusion of organisations immediately raises problems about changed working conditions and objectives. When a large university takes over a small independent organisation, which has evolved to fit a particular niche in the community, the possibility arises that an important community service may be changed — not necessarily for the better [4b].

## 3. The professionalisation syndrome

As part of the “cult of the expert” some professional groups adopt a number of practices which enhance their exclusiveness; this serves to increase fees and decrease accountability to the clients. Although the scientific and academic professions lack the coherence and market control that the legal and medical professions have effected [3], the more establishment members of the scientific and academic professions have adopted some of the same strategies of exclusiveness.

One major function of universities is certification. Educational output is measured by the number, kind and grade of degrees and of other qualifications. A second major function of universities is to supply from the ranks of their staff “experts” who advise government and business. Quite a number of contradictions and conflicts arise from this ethos of professionalism — and, also, snobbery, credentialism, and disciplinary monopoly.

The highly competitive nature of some scientists and academics [5] results in a mixture of frustration and aggression [6] that is all too easily vented onto scapegoats [1]. Through no fault of his own Mr. Chaplain had the bad luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was highly original, hard-working, and extremely dedicated to community service. Thus, he stood out enough to become a target for scapegoating. He was an ideal choice in terms of his defencelessness. He was not a member of the teaching staff — protected to some extent at that time by the vigilance of the Council for Academic Freedom and Democracy. He was not a student — protected to some extent by sheer numbers, plus at that time considerable militancy in the face of unfair treatment. He was not a member of some wealthy and powerful local establishment.

Instead, Mr. Chaplain typified a sizeable class of scientists, lacking impressive credentials and occupying (at that time) an ill-defined position with neither job security nor a trade union to protect his rights.

We now examine each of these three major dimensions of the case of Birmingham University versus Roland Chaplain in more detail. There are lessons to be learned, and action to be taken, both for the benefit of scientists and other intellectuals as a group, and for the benefit of the society they must serve.

## ACADEMIC JUSTICE

At least five important questions can be asked about any dismissal case:

1. Were the procedures fair?
2. Were the charges precise?
3. Were the charges of sufficient gravity to warrant dismissal?
4. Were the charges correct?
5. Were there any mitigating circumstances?

The questions are inter-related and by no means exclusive. If charges are not sufficiently precise, it can be difficult to decide whether or not they are sufficiently serious to warrant dismissal.

We realise that in academic institutions there is a distinct hierarchical system and that this complicates the “industrial relations” aspect of university management. We doubt if this justifies the kind of attitude expressed in some of the University documents connected with this case, for example: “ ... the University was not required by law either to have or to reveal any reasons for terminating Mr. Chaplain’s employment, as the action was in accordance with his contract of employment ... Mr. Chaplain was reminded that it was necessary for him to show cause why his employment should not have been terminated, there being no burden on the University, and this point was impressed upon Mr. Chaplain ... ” [7]. That attitude seems more appropriate for court-martial under military law.

### 1. Fair procedures?

There are several aspects of the procedures utilised by the University of Birmingham against Mr. Roland Chaplain which raise questions about fairness. (We are, of course, assuming that any university, defining itself as a centre devoted to truth, would wish naturally to assume the highest standards of natural justice.)

The charges were not firmly fixed until well *after* a senior staff member had decided to dismiss Mr. Chaplain.

The hearings were in secret, contrary to the express wishes of the defendant. Given the nature of the charges (discussed below), we see no reason why the accused’s wishes for an open hearing were not met. Given the importance of mustering evidence “to show cause why his employment should not have been terminated”, Mr. Chaplain’s opportunities to show the community value of his work were significantly reduced.

Mr. Chaplain did not have legal representation during the hearings. It must be recognised that an individual who is already dismissed is not usually in a position to hire legal advice matching that available to a large institution with virtually unlimited access to the taxpayer’s money for such a purpose. This basic inequality demands recognition of the

fact that, even unintentionally, the university might violate fair procedures without the accused even being aware of his disadvantage.

So far as we can ascertain, Mr. Chaplain was not provided with a transcript of the hearings involved in his dismissal or appeal. That unfairness makes it impossible for us to ascertain whether or not the procedures followed within the hearings were fair.

## **2. Precise Charges?**

When finally formulated, in a letter given to Mr. Chaplain before his appeal hearing, the charges were, quoting in full from the Report of the Appeals Committee:

- (a) Inability over a considerable period to work in reasonable accord with other members of the forecast staff of the Observatory
- (b) Sustained refusal to accept direction by, or to carry out the instructions of, the Scientific Director, Dr. E. T. Stringer
- (c) The issue of forecasts contrary to the express instructions of Dr. Stringer
- (d) Persistent endeavours to exceed the authority delegated to Mr, Chaplain, as being appropriate to his limited professional competence, in dealings with subscribers to the Observatory's services and others. [7]

The first charge is clearly a generalisation, one that might well apply to many individuals in universities and elsewhere. Without a more specific indication it is impossible to ascertain the gravity of the situation.

The second and fourth charges are essentially the same: insubordination, although the fourth charge also carries a potentially particularisable allegation: "limited professional competence". The third charge is really the one example of the second and fourth charge.

A letter from Dr. E. T. Stringer to the Secretary of the University complains that Mr. Chaplain wanted time off "over the week-end ... to attend a student conference" and that he had "made extravagant claims as to what the Observatory could do" to potential clients — an allegation which is not further evidenced and which has a singularly ironic ring to it in the light of Dr. E. T. Stringer's subsequent conviction in Court for violation of the Trade Description Act! These charges appear to have been dropped or have metamorphosed by the time the case reached the Appeals Committee.

## **3. Were the Charges of Sufficient Gravity to Warrant Dismissal?**

The vagueness of the charges makes it difficult to answer this question. It is possible that the "inability ... to work with other members of staff" could be serious enough to warrant dismissal — but it would demand proving beyond all reasonable doubt that the fault was that of the defendant, not of other individuals or of an unsatisfactory work situation.

The insubordination charge could be of sufficient seriousness, but that likewise requires a special burden of proof, notably that Mr. Chaplain's performance was demonstrably worse than that of any other employee not considered for sacking.

The "limited professional competence" part of the fourth charge is of interest in several ways, Both in the one hundred plus dismissal cases we have studied, and in the 200 plus cases from the AAUP studied by Lionel S. Lewis [8], allegations stating incompetence are rare. The "limited professional competence" is vague; it could imply incompetence but it could also imply nothing more than the lack of some particular paper qualification.

#### **4. Were the Charges Correct?**

The Appeals Committee ruled that Mr. Chaplain was guilty of all four charges. [7] Without verbatim records of the various hearings and of the examination and cross-examination of witnesses it is difficult to ascertain the correctness of the charges.

The documents that are available to us do provide evidence that there was interpersonal conflict in the Observatory, and between staff in the Observatory and the Department of Geography. However, the documents do not establish that Mr. Chaplain was the sole, or even the primary, cause of much of this conflict. Furthermore, one document alleges that another staff member, not considered for dismissal, may have been guilty of a more serious offence than any listed against Mr. Chaplain.

There is evidence that Mr. Chaplain might have acted contrary to some directions from the Scientific Director, Dr. E. T. Stringer. There is no indication, however, for the seriousness of such “insubordination”. Furthermore, to be reasonably satisfied about a charge along these lines, we would need to be convinced about the *consistency* of managerial direction as might be appropriate. In the definitive document from the Scientific Director, [9] quoted from in a later section, the Scientific Director gave Mr. Chaplain broad — and possibly conflicting — responsibilities. Should the Scientific Director then add yet additional demands, there is the problem that the subordinate might well find himself in a “double bind” or “Catch 22” situation.

#### **5. Were There Mitigating Circumstances?**

The Appeals Committee ruled that, “there were no mitigating circumstances.” [7] We believe that, even at this point in time and with the limited material before us, there is ample evidence to challenge that statement. True, there was also one additional “mitigating circumstance” which only came to light several years later. There are, in fact, sufficient mitigating circumstances that it is necessary to take some space to provide a reasonably full description.

##### *Overworked staff*

The Observatory staff were overworked. As Mr. Chaplain had a position of considerable responsibility (if not of well-defined authority) he was the most overburdened of all. Part of his problem is that he took his responsibilities extremely seriously. It could be argued that a less dedicated individual would not have come into conflict with some of the other personnel. However, we do not wish to give the wrong idea here; the former Director of the Edgbaston Observatory, Mr. A. T. Kelley, testified that he had been able to get along with Mr. Chaplain and that he found his dedication to work very helpful.

Even a document from the Scientific Director, Dr. E. T. Stringer, admits that Observatory staff were seriously overworked. Thus, this point of mitigation appears never to have been in doubt, Observatory staff were expected to put in unpaid overtime in the middle of night and on weekends — and yet extra time needed to be spent during periods of the most inclement weather. The rigours of meteorological data collecting do not allow flexitime working hours. There is not even an allegation that Mr. Chaplain had not carried his full share — although Dr. Stringer did make that one complaint about Mr. Chaplain wanting time off on a weekend to attend a student conference. There is evidence that Mr. Chaplain had consistently carried far more than his share of extra work, including the most unpleasant times.

It should be added that the pay was considerably less than that given to comparable weather personnel in the employ of the central government (the Meteorological Office). It is obvious from the documents of the case that part of the conflict among staff had its origins in

their feelings of being overworked and underpaid. Neither of these conditions can be blamed onto Mr. Chaplain.

#### *Status inconsistency and uncertainty*

A further mitigating circumstance was the status inconsistency of Observatory staff, an inconsistency that the University created. Historically, the Edgbaston Observatory was for nearly a century the responsibility of the Birmingham and Midland Institute. From 1947 the Observatory provided an increasing number of weather forecasts and other services to firms and local authorities in the West Midlands, who in turn themselves began to play a more important part in the Observatory's development. The existence of Dr. Stringer's postgraduate courses in meteorology and climatology combined with his strong desire for the Observatory to be part of the Geography Department at Birmingham University lay behind the transfer of the administrative responsibility for the Observatory from the Institute to the University.

The original Observatory staff became uncertain about both their particular positions vis-à-vis the university hierarchy of academic and non-academic employees, and their future. New duties were added to old ones. The Scientific Director had a totally different conception of what the Observatory should do. All of these problems might have been resolvable were it not for a major change imposed by the University, a change which both increased the work load for Observatory staff and placed them under less direct effective supervision.

#### *From a full-time Director to a Superintendent plus a one-twelfth time Scientific Director*

Originally, when the Edgbaston Observatory was a separate organisation, it had its own full-time Director, who participated in some of the day-to-day routine (or, better to say, day-and-night and weekends routine). The Director had also played an important role in the training of his staff. His continual presence, and his willingness "to get his hands dirty" when necessary, meant that there was close and effective integration of the staff. Given that such a meteorological service requires both continuous monitoring and frequent extra periods of work in crises, a tightly knit organisation is vital.

When the University took over the Observatory, the new appointment of Scientific Director was not intended to be a full-time post. The situation was specified in a document entitled "A Message from the Scientific Director" [9], a quotation from which also reveals something of his attitude towards the Observatory staff:

The Scientific Director of an establishment is appointed sometimes on a full-time basis, and sometimes on a part-time basis; depending upon the cost, and therefore the importance of that establishment to the University. In my case, the appointment is part-time, and I still have my full-time duties as a Senior Lecturer to perform. ... the fact that my salary as Scientific Director amounts to less than 1/12 of my total University pay indicates that the University considers that I should spend no more than 3.5 hours per week at the Observatory. ...

At present there is no Deputy Scientific Director and no Observatory Superintendent. If an Observatory Superintendent is appointed in the future, the intention is that this post should be filled by Mr. Chaplain. ...

When I am not available, Mr. Chaplain is to act as Observatory spokesman ...

In terms of future expansion, my hope is that Mr. Chaplain will become Superintendent of Forecasts, Services and Networks ...

The Academic Staff constitute collectively the 'University'. To become a member of Academic Staff a good degree is essential. ... In the case of an affiliated institution such as the Observatory the normal procedure is to place a member of the Academic Staff as Director at the Head of that Institution. Such a person is not a member of the staff of that Institution; in effect, he is the 'University' watching its investment. Academic staff initiate and direct research programmes but do not normally do the detailed work involved.

A responsible attitude towards the commercial customers of the Observatory is essential at all times. ... A scientific attitude must be maintained at all times. In particular, all staff should make an effort to understand probability forecasting. Clients who do not want these type of forecasts are ignorant of their potentialities. Observatory staff are not to express disbelief in this form of forecasting, whatever their personal view.

Because of the attitude of certain Observatory Staff, many individuals in the University have become antagonistic towards the Observatory. *Mr. Kelley's* [the former Director] *attitude toward the University left much room for improvement* and it is up to all staff to show in their dealings with all departments of the University that a new attitude towards authority has indeed developed at the Observatory. ...

Edgbaston Observatory has, I believe, a great future. However, let us not blind ourselves to what it is in the minds of some people: *an old-fashioned, out-of-date anachronism staffed by persons of conflicting temperament and background, which for many years lived a hand-to-mouth existence on scraps begged by a man whose main qualities were enthusiasm for the weather, a love of instruments and a capacity for hard work. University affiliation demands more than these qualities*, admirable as they are ...

I have chosen to associate myself with the Observatory because I think that it can do much to further the cause of Applied Meteorology in Britain, ... This association has resulted in considerable personal losses for me. My book has been delayed for two years, my students have not been given the attention they deserve, my research has been brought almost to a standstill, and I have lost almost £2,000 in private consulting fees. There is no point in my continuing this association if the Observatory is to become a thorn in the flesh of the University. ...

The University was very loath to take over the Observatory in the first place. I persuaded them in the belief that the Observatory was well worthwhile and had fine potential. ...

You have become members of a community which is dedicated to keeping alive the principle of reason and the ideal of truth, in the dark days of British civilisation, whose decline we see going on around us. ...

(italics added by us)

This selection from Dr. E. T. Stringer's "A Message from the Scientific Director" tells us four things of importance:

1. The Scientific Director intended to spend only 1/12 the time as the former Director — and was appointed on a contract which did not permit participation in any of certain categories of "detailed work". Thus, inevitably since the position of Superintendent was to be filled from current staff, there would be *both* a heavy additional burden of work on the existing Observatory staff and far less direct supervision and contact.
2. The Scientific Director delegated considerable and diverse responsibility to Mr. Chaplain. These duties might well have had intrinsic conflicts which could result in "insubordination", a situation which would not be alleviated by the limited time available from the Scientific Director.
3. Dr. Stringer was himself in a conflict situation. On one hand, he "persuaded" the University to take over the Observatory. On the other hand, he felt a personal loss as a consequence, including "almost £2,000 in private consulting fees".
4. Despite the fact that this document came from the Scientific Director only a short time before the decision to dismiss Mr. Chaplain, there is no place in the document where Mr. Chaplain, when referred to specifically by name, is not mentioned in a context which denotes that he has been delegated broad and important responsibilities. This implies that the Scientific Director was reasonably satisfied with his abilities and his work. Certainly, the

Scientific Director was not adverse to singling individuals out for specific adverse comment, e.g., the italicised sections dealing with the former Director.

The comments about the former Director appear to us unnecessary. Whatever the Scientific Director felt about the former Director, the expression of such a view could easily exacerbate any already existing interpersonal conflicts, if not precipitating new ones. As Mr. Chaplain still showed, when interviewed by two of us in 1981, great respect and admiration for the past Director, it would not be surprising if that statement in Dr. Stringer's "message" would be resented. The statement itself must raise a question about the new Director's tact and courtesy. Accordingly, before considering the dismissal of Mr. Chaplain on the first charge, "[i]nability ... to work in reasonable accord with other ... staff ...", we would need to be convinced that the Scientific Director had not significantly provoked interpersonal conflict by his own actions.

Given the facts that the University take-over resulted in a further increase in the work load on Observatory staff, severe problems of status inconsistency and uncertainty over the future, and a Scientific Director who intended to spend only one-twelfth the time of the former Director, and given also that the Scientific Director had granted considerable and diverse responsibility to Mr. Chaplain, the "insubordination" charges require reconsideration.

It could be argued that, in such a difficult situation, *only an individual who was sufficiently dedicated as to take the risk of making decisions could keep the Observatory functional.*

It is not uncommon in many organisations besides universities for junior staff to evade or to ignore some of the commands of senior staff in order to do the job at hand more effectively. Usually, a blind eye is turned to such practices *providing the work is done well*. If senior staff make conflicting and confusing demands on junior staff, some degree of "insubordination" is inevitable.

It is at this point that the allegation within charge "d" becomes important, the allegation that Mr. Chaplain had "limited professional competence". First, there were *no* examples of significant errors by Mr. Chaplain. Mr. Chaplain had brought considerable evidence in the form of unsolicited and solicited testimonials on his behalf, including one from the former Director. Second, we suggest that the "limited professional competence" allegation crept into the charges as a consequence of credentialism rather than an indication of any specific shortcomings of Mr. Chaplain. The critical point here is that the phrase "limited professional competence" is ambiguous and might well have misled the Appeals Committee.

It does not escape us that this dismissal occurred at a time when "insubordination" in various forms was an extremely sensitive issue in universities. Mr. Chaplain was dismissed right after the University of Birmingham had made many concessions to "student revolt". This was also at a time when in the U.K. there were a number of contested dismissal cases involving academic staff — including one in the Sociology Department of the University of Birmingham which resulted in that Department being blacklisted for a number of years. The case histories of the late 1960s and early 1970s, published by the Council for Academic Freedom and Democracy, are testimony for how easily academic dissidence or conscience could be interpreted (or misinterpreted) as "insubordination" by university administrators.

We would not like to suggest that a scientist of uncertain status and lacking support from any powerful professional organisation or trade union would have been the preferred sacrifice to show that "insubordination" to authority would not be tolerated. However, it is not easy to explain this dismissal in more rational terms.

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

In this second perspective on the case of the University of Birmingham versus Mr. Roland Chaplain, we explore a remarkable contrast — one that endows the affair with some qualities of a classic Greek tragedy and also one that carries important implications for those concerned with “science for the people”.

Although Mr. Chaplain had majored in theology while at the University of Birmingham, he also took extra-mural course in meteorology, and this represented a continuation of boyhood interests in compiling and analysing data on weather. When Mr. Chaplain joined Edgbaston Observatory he thus began with considerable experience and some formal training, and he subsequently received three years of thorough training in those aspects of weather forecasting that related to the efficient operation of the Observatory’s public services. This was given by the former Director Mr. Kelley and was based on thirty years of experience developing these services.

A major development planned for the Observatory was the provision of a 24-hour warning service to its local clients, aimed to be ready for the winter of 1968-1969. Mr. Chaplain did the lion’s share of the groundwork for this service. It involved visiting local firms, highways departments, market gardens, public utilities and other enterprises, talking to their representatives, and determining what sort of weather information was most important to them. In particular, there was the question of how much advance warning they required to take effective action if threatened by snow, fog, icy roads, heavy rainfall, high winds, high dew point levels and the like.

Information on local weather conditions was to be fed to the Observatory from numerous amateur weather observers throughout the local area. Mr. Chaplain had studied in detail the data on the previous 80 years’ weather in the Birmingham area. All of this provided the basis for a sound local interpretative service built around understanding and predicting local weather variations.

Mr. Chaplain also refined, after much discussion with users, simple codes of only five digits, to be sent to clients as a quick message in threatening weather conditions.

There was considerable local interest in the service Mr. Chaplain was developing. The potential financial savings from such tailor-made advice are large, and clients were willing to commit non-trivial sums to obtain it. Typical examples include: the salting or gritting of roads in anticipation of freezing (a great expense to County Councils) and the provision of extra heating or insulation for greenhouses to avoid cold damage (lettuce and a number of other crops are grown extensively in England in the winter in greenhouses or their equivalent.)

It is necessary to emphasize that local forecasting as envisaged for the Birmingham area is not a common operation. The usual run of forecasts apply to a generalised area. Since weather conditions can vary dramatically from place to place — depending on the altitude and local topography — generalised forecasts often have limited value for particular operations.

After Mr. Chaplain’s dismissal many of the Observatory’s traditional services were preserved. However, its public reputation slowly declined as the Meteorological Office improved their local weather forecasting services from Elmdon Airport. The resultant loss of income combined with continued inter-personal differences and indifferent management resulted ten years later in the Observatory’s closure with an annual loss of what the University claimed to be £30,000. Mr. Chaplain believed that if the reforms he was recommending in 1968-69 had been carried through, the Observatory could have continued to have provided better local weather forecasting services than the Met Office and, with a

realistic pricing structure for these services, not just remained viable but indeed even have made a profit which could have been ploughed back into improved services.

Despite the adversity of being dismissed and unable to obtain any kind of reasonable employment, Mr. Chaplain continued his work on local weather forecasting. In addition, he founded the Future Studies Centre in Leeds, which became an important contact point for people around the world who were investigating alternative options for the future. The Centre's network function was served by a library and a newsletter. The library sought to obtain regular inputs from as many readers as possible, including newsletters and journals from a wide range of groups such as those concerned with renewable energy, alternative economics, communes, communications, and issues of minority groups and Third World countries.

The newsletter is both scholarly and a service. It lists and reviews sources of information, provides book reviews, and also a diary of events, including a listing of conferences. The newsletter is exchanged for other publications and, in this way, Mr. Chaplain and his wife have built up the library.

Mr. Chaplain also continued with his work in weather forecasting. He set up a series of amateur recording groups in part of the North of England. On 21 December 1981, the front page of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* paid tribute to Mr. Chaplain's group, which had predicted correctly the blizzards of snow and the extreme cold that brought most of Britain to a standstill — in contrast to the "Met Office" whose professional forecasters had erred seriously.

We contrast this community service work by Mr. Chaplain with what happened to the Scientific Director of the Edgbaston Observatory and Senior Lecturer (later Reader) in Climatology who had played such an important role in Mr. Chaplain's dismissal. To do this we simply quote from an article in *The Times* of London entitled "University chief who 'prostituted reputation' fined in heating case" [2]:

Dr. Edward Trevor Stringer, ... , who has been suspended for a year from his post as scientific director of meteorology and climatology at Birmingham University, was told by Judge Potter in Birmingham Crown Court yesterday: 'you have utterly prostituted your reputation as a man of science in this case'.

Dr. Stringer ... was found guilty on eight charges of supplying or offering to supply goods to which a false trade description was applied.

He was found not guilty on four similar charges and one of making a false statement that he was allowed to use the name of the university in promotional material, [sic!] All the charges were brought under the Trade Descriptions Act. ...

The case, which West Midlands County Council said was the first of its kind in Britain, concerned solar heating equipment.

Dr. Stringer and ... a Yorkshire businessman, made claims in their advertising which they could not substantiate, it was alleged. High pressure advertising from the company headquarters of Sunwarm Solar Systems Ltd. of Wetherby, West Yorkshire, covered the whole country.

It used the academic status of Dr. Stringer, and people were persuaded to pay hundreds of pounds for installations which, it was claimed, would save money on water heating. Tests on the equipment showed it was incapable of meeting the claims.

Judge Potter said to Dr. Stringer: ... 'You saw fit to ally yourself with a collection of business people for cashing in on a very simple device which was not even an invention ... Other people brought in extremely sharp and shady business methods. You were too naive to see that what you brought to the enterprise was your prestige as a man of science.'

The judge added that Dr. Stringer had 'resorted to charlatanism and eventually downright dishonesty ...'

At this point we return to the matter of the dismissal of Mr. Chaplain from the University of Birmingham. Since the sacking charges specified the unique role of Dr. E. T. Stringer, and since Dr. Stringer was only a few years later shown in Court to have been dishonest in his professional capacity, the whole set of charges against Mr. Chaplain may be viewed in a new light. The “sustained refusal to accept direction”, the “issue of forecasts contrary to express instructions” and the “[p]ersistent endeavours to exceed the authority” might have had a justification not entirely apparent to the University administrators at the time.

A damning indictment against the administration of the University of Birmingham is that it has refused the call from a number of quarters to reopen the case of Mr. Chaplain.

### **PROFESSIONALISATION SYNDROME: SNOBBERY, CREDENTIALISM, and DISCIPLINARY MONOPOLY**

[T]he great majority of all jobs can be learned through practice by almost any literate person. The number of esoteric specialties 'requiring' unusually extensive training or skill is relatively small. ... It has been the use of education credentials that the lucrative professions have closed their ranks and upgraded their salaries; and it has been in imitation of their methods that other occupations — have 'professionalized'. [10]

#### **Introductory Comments on Professionalisation**

There are several aspects of the social system within professions that can lead to conflict, ultimately resulting in the dismissal or banishment of individuals who espouse “radical” views or of low status. To understand better Mr. Chaplain’s difficulties at Birmingham University, it is desirable to examine briefly certain symptoms of the “professionalisation syndrome”.

This is not to defend poor quality work within professions. Quite the contrary. It is to recognise how hierarchical structure and professional socialisation predispose individuals to treat their colleagues and clients unfairly. In the academic and scientific professions, these predisposing tendencies actually retard scholarship, often reducing arguments to personalities rather than to the merits of evidence — quite apart from the time wasted in bureaucratic intrigue against dissenters.

As mentioned earlier, the fourth charge against Mr. Chaplain contained a phrase “limited professional competence”. We have already dealt with the fact that there were no examples to support one implication of that phrase, incompetence; indeed, there was evidence to show that Mr. Chaplain had been highly original in his approach to the job and had established a track record of making successful predictions in a notoriously difficult field, where even the most elaborately equipped forecasters are often wrong. However, the phrase “limited professional competence” crystallises an *attitude*, one that appeared elsewhere in various guises in the administrative documents associated with this case — not to mention passages from the long quotation from Dr. Stringer’s “A Message from the Scientific Director”, given earlier.

To us, that attitude seems a mixture of snobbery and contempt — “ ... an old-fashioned, out-of-date anachronism staffed by persons of ...”, to quote but one section where the redundancy of the message leaves only one interpretation.

#### **Academic and Scientific Snobbery**

Local weather forecasting provides a strong contrast to most high-level scientific research on weather. The most prestigious types of weather research centre on massive computer models

using involved numerical methods to solve equations expressing fundamental physical principles. Such research puts a premium on advanced understanding of physical and meteorological theory, and on sophistication in computing, numerical analysis and automatic data handling and processing. Other approaches involve complex simulation studies, sometimes exceeding the capacity of all but the largest computers.

From the point of view of some professional meteorologists working on 20-level atmospheres incorporating global circulation patterns and continental scale topography, little could be of lower status than poring over local weather data, contacting ordinary users of weather information (and doing it in person!), and receiving data from amateur observers. The snobbery implicit in such attitudes pervades many academic and scientific groups.

It is not clear to what extent this snobbery is an intrinsic part of the working personality of many academics and scientists (and lawyers and medical doctors), and to what extent it is a learned response imposed by the pressures of socialisation and selection into the professions. The two explanations are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are mutually reinforcing.

Studies on the psychology of scientists show an emphasis on cognitive and personality traits that result in a marked ability (or compulsion?) to rank order, or otherwise classify, objects. It is a common observation that many scientists [11] and academics [12] will rank order institutions, fields of study, colleagues, journals — not to mention, of course, that academics are paid to rank order students.

Furthermore, snobbery is also a protective device, necessary to some extent to sell oneself for jobs, or for research grants, in the “academic marketplace” to use Theodore Caplow and Reece McGee’s apt phrase. [12] One student of the scientific profession even has a fascinating discussion of the difference between “grantsmanship” and just “chiselling.” [13]

The tough competition for what are considered the most prestigious jobs, or the most lucrative grants, does not select for modesty. Grantsmanship has become a widespread phenomenon — one that hardly conforms to the Mertonian ideology with its norm of “disinterestedness”.

The upshot of these psychological and social pressures towards snobbery is that *we must interpret what scientists say about their colleagues, and what scientists say about fields or paradigms that are not their own, with the utmost caution.* Mitroff, after studying the interpersonal relations of 42 scientists working on the chemistry and physics of the Apollo moon rock samples, concluded

In going through the comments of the respondents with regard to their feelings toward one another, the extreme volatility of the comments is most striking. For sheer intensity of emotion, vituperation, and overall vindictiveness, none of the other areas under investigation even begin to approach the areas concerned with the scientists’ feelings about one another. So many of the remarks and judgments contained profanity and bordered on slander (if they did not cross over into it) that it would be difficult just to count them. [14]

Quite apart from the psychodynamics of scientists, and the social pressures from competition, one must also bear in mind the obvious professional self-interest that comes from snobbery: The “expert” sells his services and himself. The puffing-up of one’s self-importance, suitably publicised in the discreet way acceptable to professional codes, can result in a not inconsiderable supplementation to one’s salary.

### **Publicity in the Media**

Another factor that appears to have predisposed Mr. Chaplain to a less than sympathetic response from the academic and meteorological establishments was the favourable publicity

he had been receiving for his weather forecasting work at Birmingham. The extensive news clippings reveal that Mr. Chaplain's efforts received much local appreciation.

(Subsequently, Mr. Chaplain has appeared on television on a number of occasions, often to explain unusual weather phenomena. Two of his performances were witnessed by two of the authors of this article. He presented the analysis in an excellent manner, readily understandable without being condescending, and he showed good media presence.)

The professional attitude towards media exposure is extremely complex and, to our knowledge, not well studied. Several professional groups have formal codes preventing blatant publicity-seeking as a means of advertising their services. Diverse subtle forms of self-advertisement are tolerated.

Scientists and academics do not have formal codes in regard to writing for the newspapers or appearing on television. The informal codes vary considerably. Many academics and scientists do not like to debate issues publicly — and they look down on their colleagues who are willing to write popular articles or to be questioned by television interviewers. For some academics, reverent attention from colleagues in appropriate scholarly forums is the only proper sort of publicity.

There are some problems for those scientists who take their message to the media. Television is often a limited medium, with its emphasis on irrelevancies and with the assumption of the short concentration span of the viewer. There are occasional examples of where one finds that what seemed a reasonable interview with a newspaper reporter appears in print in a barely recognisable version.

These shortcomings, however annoying, are remediable and not a valid excuse to avoid enquiries from the media. There are grave dangers to democracy in a technological society where so many scientists opt out of answering enquiries from the media. In practice, this ethos of staying out of public sight ensures that scholarly work mainly benefits the government and corporate patrons of science and academia, who prefer to operate behind closed doors whenever possible. Public attention holds the possibility that members of the public may demand that their interests be served too.

However, there is a minority view in the scientific community that feels the public has a right to information about controversial matters involving science and technology. These are the “visible scientists”, recently discussed by Rae Goodell and June Goodfield. This is actually, however, the continuation of an old tradition, exemplified by the “visible college” of Marxist scientists in the U.K. — including Lancelot Hogben, for a time at the University of Birmingham [15].

There is also an important double bind situation for an increasing number of scholars. Much as they might eschew publicity for themselves, they are encouraged by university administrations to seek outside funding, an activity for which some degree of self-advertisement is necessary — and for which the media are important conduits to possible patrons.

Thus, Mr. Chaplain's commitment to a “science for the people” with the inevitable media exposure that involved may well have stirred a mixture of snobbery and envy in some of his colleagues.

## **Credentialism**

Credentialism is a third symptom in the “professionalisation syndrome” that contributed to Mr. Chaplain's difficulties at Birmingham University. At least in the eyes of some academics, Mr. Chaplain (and some other staff of the Edgbaston Observatory) lacked impressive credentials — “limited professional competence”.

Actually, it is surprising that the University administration took this view. Mr. Chaplain had a first degree from the University of Birmingham. At the time he was hired by the Edgbaston Observatory, it was still a quite widespread custom in the UK to regard the first degree, whether in arts or in sciences, as the major paper qualification for a wide range of intellectually skilled jobs — e.g., the Civil Service’s all-rounder. It is true that this admirably civilised British custom has been eroded over the years. Increased competition for a decreased number of suitable jobs has inevitably meant the escalation of required credentials. The UK has tended to follow the US where, as Collins details so well [10], credentialism has reached epidemic proportions, as competition for work forces the evolution of additional means of exclusion in order to protect profitable professions.

### **Disciplinary Monopoly**

The term *disciplinary monopoly* has been used by both Joseph Ben-David [16] and Harriet Zuckerman [17] for the situation of where an in-group with a particular paradigm dominates a discipline, excluding other scholars whose approaches may be equally valid, or even more valid. T. S. Kuhn’s [18] periods of “revolutionary science” may represent largely the episodes of the overthrow of disciplinary monopoly.

Disciplinary monopoly is another expression of “the cult of the expert”, one that is often dangerous for both scholarship and society. For an example of the former, there is the forty year delay in recognising that the Piltdown skull was a fake, a delay that resulted in belated recognition of *Australopithecus* as an important hominid line adjacent to that which gave rise to humans [19]. For an example of the later, there is the delay in recognising the dangers of low level lead exposure to intelligence and behaviour of some children, for the field of clinical toxicology is dominated by medical researchers whose focus was only on the physical symptoms of acute lead intoxication, not behavioural effects of chronic exposure [20].

In regard to Mr. Chaplain’s dismissal, the situation is summarised by Dr. Stringer’s quotation from his trial: “I am a climatologist, not a weather forecaster!” Dr. Stringer’s emphasis has been mainly on the theoretical and synoptic approach to climatology, as exemplified to some extent in his two books, though there is also consideration of methods of measurement as well. Mr. Chaplain represented a different paradigm: the use of historical records as a tool to refine future weather predictions.

For the particular object — and for what the Edgbaston Observatory (and later the University of Birmingham) were collecting fees — Mr. Chaplain’s historical-refined paradigm was probably the best one. H. H. Lamb [21], who takes a multiple paradigm approach of a particularly scholarly nature to the study of climatic changes, points out that even the most sophisticated computer analyses lose predictability in a matter of only a few days, basically as a result of the natural decay of measured energy states in air masses. Thus, for predictions more than five or so days in advance, local history is likely to be the best guide for what to predict from a given weather pattern. Hence, what Mr. Chaplain was doing would appear to be entirely defensible on scientific grounds. As mentioned in the previous section, Mr. Chaplain was notably successful in his predictions in the winter of 1981, whereas the Meteorological Office, despite its gigabyte computer capacity, amassed a series of failures that provoked widespread comment in the media [22].

### **CONCLUSION**

The case of Mr. Chaplain at the University of Birmingham illustrates well the problems of the dissident scientist [23]. In this case, the victim’s offences were that he was extremely

enthusiastic about his subject, lacked impressive paper credentials, possessed a strong sense of social responsibility, attracted considerable attention in the media, and acquired, in the minds of many, a record for relative success in weather forecasting in prediction.

The actions of the University administration speak for themselves. They are not especially atypical of those in other universities or research institutes [1,23]. Might makes right? The case of Mr. Chaplain, however, does have the unique twist that the senior academic who played such an important role in his dismissal was only a few years later told in Court by the judge that he had “utterly prostituted his reputation” [2]. That the administration of the University of Birmingham refused to reopen Mr. Chaplain’s case is a useful measure of the relative values of truth and fairness versus administrative “law-and-order”.

David Triesman, reviewing a set of dismissals at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, dismissals that involved paradigm and personality conflict, wrote

In summary, there are a variety of options open to academic staff faced by an establishment management who undermine their ability to enjoy reasonable conditions of employment. Most of these options are self-defeating: they require resignation or dismissal of dissenting staff. ... Unless one is fortunate enough to be in an unusually progressive department, power relations are such that those who enjoy freedom are those powerful enough to demand and retain it. This applies with equal force to the conduct of research and the framework in which it is interpreted ...

For most staff, their subordination in the department and the challenge which their work may pose to more senior members — and of course, the order which the senior members often openly serve — will mean that as individuals, they have no personal leverage worth talking about. ... *The sooner it is generally understood that different conditions of work prevail in different sectors but that this does not make the academic different from other work people ... then the sooner will a powerful trade union constituency be put together.* [28]  
(italics added by us)

It is regrettable that intellectual establishments, such as those running some universities, seem concerned with justice only when the threat of student activism or militant trade unionism is providing motivation. However, that is the main lesson to be learned from this and other dismissal cases.

## **Acknowledgments**

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1. R. D. Wright, 1961. Prologue. In: W. H. C. Eddy. *Orr*. Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, Queensland. This remarkable book is probably the most fully documented account of how a campaign is organised against an academic dissident — including evidence that Professor Sydney Sparks Orr was framed with a false charge (of what is now called “sexual harassment”) because he had been instrumental in getting a Royal Commission to investigate the University of Tasmania.

Eddy details meticulously how each staff member who joined the witch-hunt against Orr was subsequently rewarded by the administration. Eddy also shows how the few staff who dared to complain about the unfairness of procedures were themselves also victimised.

Thanks to widespread support from students, plus the efforts of some concerned staff at the University of Tasmania and elsewhere, Professor Orr’s widow ultimately received some financial compensation.

In the court case the University of Tasmania won by claiming that Professor Orr was simply a “servant” and could be dismissed at the whim of his “master”. That attitude pervades many other organisations in respect to their ineffectively unionised intellectual employees, scientists and non-scientists alike. The myth of professional autonomy dies hard.

2. A. Osman, 1980. University chief who ‘prostituted reputation’ fined in hearing case. *The Times* (London), 21 March 1980.

3. The scientific profession as a whole has clung to its mythology of professionalism. Science lacks the coherence (and clout) of the real upper-middle class professions, the medical doctors and lawyers; these professions practice “birth control” in that certification is not issued to more individuals than are needed, a practice which ensures high fees and a lack of competition. (The practice also ensures that a sizeable section of the community, the poor and the aged, receive inadequate medical care and virtually no legal protection.) Since many university scientists depend upon their (post)graduate students, or postdoctoral fellows, to do their research, there is no incentive to restrict the production of scientists.

This is not to argue that fewer people should be trained in universities. Rather, it is to argue that a *unification* of scientists, at all levels, and other intellectual professions will be necessary to ensure that individuals are not unprotected in the marketplace for their skills; the challenge is to do this without recourse to the tactics of law societies and medical organisations, tactics which (paraphrasing George Bernard Shaw) were a conspiracy against the public.

4. J. Flux, 1979. Increasing efficiency in science — a bad thing? In: *Focus on Social Responsibility in Science* (edited by Wren Green), pp 147-162. New Zealand Association of Scientists.

See also: R. Moss 1978. An empirical test of Parkinson’s Law (correspondence). *Nature* 273: 184. A. C. Villaume, 1978. Parkinson’s Law and the United States Bureau of Prisons. *Contemporary Crises* 2: 209-214.

4b. See, for a well researched example, A. M. Pollock 2004. *NHS plc: The Privatisation of Our Health Care*. Verso, London.

5. F. Reif, 1961. The competitive world of the pure scientist. *Science* 134: 1957-1962. J. Gaston, 1971. Secretiveness and competition for priority of discovery in physics. *Minerva* 9: 472-492. W. Hagstrom, 1974. Competition in science. *American Sociological Review* 39: 1-

18. D. Sullivan, 1975. Competition in bio-medical science: extent, structure, and consequences. *Sociology of Education* 48: 223-241.

The analysis of individual case histories can be especially telling of the compulsion to competitiveness: see, C. Manwell and C. M. A. Baker, 1979. The double helix: science and myth in the act of creation. *BioScience* 29: 742-746.

6. See in particular certain studies on the psychology of scientists, e.g., L. S. Kubie, 1954. Some unresolved problems of the scientific career. *American Scientist* 42: 104-112. M. J. Mahoney, 1976. *Scientist as subject: The Psychological Imperative*. Ballinger, Lippincott, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Non-scientist academics have not been as well studied for evidence of frustration and aggression; however, there is ample anecdotal evidence for these problems in certain sociological studies on the hiring and firing of academics; see: T. Caplow and R. McGee, 1958. *The Academic Marketplace*. Basic Books, New York. Lionel S. Lewis, 1975. *Scaling the Ivory Tower: Merit and Its Limits in the Academic Career*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

7. Report of the Appeals Committee, three page mimeographed document, dated 22 April 1969.

8. L. S. Lewis, 1972. Academic freedom cases and their disposition. *Change*, volume 4, July/August issue, pp. 8 and 77. In only 13 out of 217 dismissal cases “was there even a suggestion of incompetence in teaching or research.” A major cause of dismissal in the post-McCarthy era of administrative suppression in the US was along similar themes of “insubordination”.

9. E. T. Stringer, 1968. A message from the scientific director. Seven page mimeographed document, dated 23 September 1968.

10. R. Collins, 1979. *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. Academic Press, New York. Our quotation is a composite from pages 54 and 189.

11. For emphasis on ranking by scientists, see: B. Eiduson, 1962. *Scientists: Their Psychological World*. Basic Books, New York. M. J. Mahoney, 1979. Psychology of scientists: an evaluative review. *Social Studies of Science* 9: 349-375.

12. For an excellent discussion on ranking by academics, see: T. Caplow and R. McGee, note 6.

13. D. S. Greenberg, 1967. *The Politics of Pure Science*. New American Library, New York. See also Greenberg’s more recent views on the corruption of science and academe by the Faustian lust for power and status: D. S. Greenberg, 2001. *Science, Money, and Politics: Political Triumph and Ethical Erosion*. University of Chicago Press.

14. I. I. Mitroff, 1974. *The Subjective Side of Science: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Psychology of the Apollo Moon Scientists*. Elsevier, Amsterdam. The quotation is from page 90.

- 15 G. Werskey, 1978. *The Visible College*. Allen Lane, London. Even Lancelot Hogben reveals the fear that too much public attention might jeopardise his career. Hobgen attempted to get Hyman Levy to publish *Mathematics for the Million* under Levy's name for fear the knowledge of who was the true author would jeopardise Hogben's chances for election to the Royal Society.
16. J. Ben-David, 1977. Organization, social control, and cognitive change in science. In: *Culture and Its Creators* (edited by J. Ben-David and T. N. Clark), pp. 321-323. University of Chicago Press.
17. H. Zuckerman, 1977. Deviant behavior and social control in science. In: *Deviance and Social Change* (edited by H. Sagarin), pp. 87-138. Sage, Beverly Hills, California.
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20. H. L. Needleman, C. Gunnoe, A. Leviton, R. Reed, H. Peresie, C. Maher and P. Barrett, 1979. Deficits in psychologic and classroom performance of children with elevated dentine lead levels. *New England Journal of Medicine* 300:689-695.  
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21. H. H. Lamb, 1977. *Climate: Present, Past and Future. Volume 2. History and the Future*. Methuen, London. See especially p. 690.
22. See, for example, Peter Dunn, 1982. Don't trust the weathermen. *Sunday Times* (London), 29 August 1982, p. 25.
23. Brian Martin, C. M. Ann Baker, Clyde Manwell and Cedric Pugh (eds.), 1986. *Intellectual Suppression*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney.
24. D. Triesman, 1976. The Institute of Psychiatry sackings. *Radical Science Journal*, number 5, pp. 9-36.