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A CHANGE OF STATE

After two years as a freelance research worker I changed my status, on September 1, 1978, not merely to nine-to-fiver but to state public servant (or at least as close to that role as I'm ever likely to achieve). There were, I now reckon, three reasons for this, and one of them is related to fandom.

The non-fannish reasons are fairly conventional - the job is with a new organization with considerable potential and my previous attempt to work with the organization as a freelance failed because they are not yet really able to cope with non-standard people, and at the time I applied the free-lance market looked slim in prospects. By the time I was interviewed for the job the market looked much better, and in fact work through the end of 1979 is/was clearly visible. But the third reason, the fannish one, begins to cut at this point.

Just before Easter '78 John Bangsund telephoned me and suggested that I stand as a candidate for GUFF, a fan fund to transport an Australian fan to SEACON '79. After some humming and hawing I decided that I should stand, and hastily put together the necessary pieces of paper and persons.

One of the less appreciated aspects of fan funds/international travel of this kind is that for a salaried employee the associated problems are not too great - getting appropriate leave, and so on - but for the freelancer the associated problems can be more substantial. Firstly there's the loss of income which since one wishes to wind up not too much out of pocket tends to mean that trips are cut to minimum length (unless one has the sort of business which is portable and I don't). Secondly there is the problem of being uncontactable - or relatively so. I wasn't particularly well-established, and had to keep my ear to the ground to find out about likely jobs. (Even when people wanted to give me work they frequently ran into obstruction from people who weren't so inclined: last week I found out that an offer of a year's work in England didn't reach me because my former employer wasn't very good - to put the best light on it - at forwarding my mail.) Once again, as I've indicated above, this possibly would not have turned out to be so serious a problem - work does always seem to turn up - but depending on just what work I had at the time (or didn't have) I might have been awkwardly placed had I to make the GUFF trip, even though there would have been several months' warning. So, when the crunch came, I felt that standing for GUFF was enough to tip the balance. I've regretted the change several times (the pay is regular, but there's less of it, for example, and one doesn't choose with whom one works), but I'll probably be able to manage for a while yet.

The good side is that although I presently have to travel into the business district of Melbourne to work, by the time you read this our office will have been relocated within walking distance (about two kilometres) of home, and I'll be enjoying that change (I hope!) The bad side is that I have never before worked in an institution in which authority and incompetence have been so highly correlated: I'm used to the boss not knowing too much - I find it difficult to work with a boss who doesn't know anything. Probably this situation is the result of the political nature of the top appointments, but it certainly makes life difficult to report to people who not merely don't understand the problems, but don't understand the answers to the questions they

manage to formulate. In a few more months I will have to have worked out a way to cope with this environment, but just now the future looks a little gloomy.

MAILING 165: MAILING COMMENTS

Fantasy Commentator 29 This is only the second copy of this old-timer I have seen, and as I recall the earlier one was better. Even with a supposedly interesting subject, Sam Moskowitz not only induces boredom rapidly - he does so in prose to which the adjective 'fatuous' if applied might seem like praise: 'Not unexpectedly, Olaf proved to be a wonderful father. He was an easy person to live with and would help the children with their problems and later with their studies.' (page 10).

The item which drew most of my attention, however, was the review of THE FUTURIANS by 'Lincoln Van Rose' which shows someone peddling a bicycle so hard he (?) has no time to look where he is going. The reviewer is far less interested in dealing with Knight's book than in providing a revisionist history, with the result that the critical comments appear only in passing. As LVR says, many of the comments are 'trivial' (page 43), but on the other hand the comment that '(this book) is one of the most entertaining and valuable additions to fan history we have seen in a long, long time' (page 46) is far more a reference to the dearth of worthy fan histories than praise for Knight's little squib. THE FUTURIANS is indeed a ghastly piece of work, hastily thrown together (or at least giving that appearance) and suggesting that Knight's thinking is almost as shallow as his writing: it's the kind of writing which would be rejected by any decent fanzine, and the only value lies in the occasional remark which presents a formerly-unknown fact.

None of this emerges from the review, which as I have said is devoted to presenting another version - a peculiar version which hints at more than it says. For example, on page 43, in a paragraph which describes the Futurians as 'individualistic, Leftist Bohemians', James Blish is labelled as 'pro-Nazi'. Given the changing attitude of the left towards Hitler in the period in question (1937-1945) I'm inclined to feel that this remark requires some expansion - or is draft-card burning, in this case, tantamount to being 'pro-Nazi'? It just isn't clear from the review.

There's also a curious selectivity in the enumeration of the achievements of the Futurians. Thus 'Pohl and Lowndes became well known as able editors' (pages 43-44) but Don Wollheim is not mentioned even though his career has been longest and, in commercial terms, most successful. In the following sentence Asimov, Kornbluth and Merrill are noted as being 'familiar to readers today' (while names such as Pohl, Knight and Wollheim are not, I wonder? Come to think of it, are there any Merrill books in print currently?) and two works of the late forties/early fifties ('The Little Black Bag' and 'That Only A Mother') are identified as 'among the field's classics' - but a slightly earlier work which has frequently topped polls as the numero uno sfinal short of all time, Asimov's 'Nightfall', doesn't rate a mention.

The rest of the review is devoted to derogations of individuals - and how charming it is to learn that the most successful were those who had least contact with the Futurians (Asimov, Knight, etc): presumably the best and most successful or all were those who had no contact with the Futurians at all - people such as S. Moskowitz etc.

What isn't in the review - and might have been - is a consideration of how being a Futurian (or having been one) affected the writing of a significant group of science fiction writers - probably, if one looks at the matter objectively, the most successful group of science fiction writers ever. But objectivity is something in which the reviewer had no interest.

Horizons 155 I hope that your suggestion that problems arise for convention organization when bidding is two years in advance (and thus committees have to get together for three or four years) doesn't have universal application. The national conventions in Australia are about to go over to 'two years in advance' bidding - no reason, just a whim of a numerous clique of fans in Sydney - and we don't need more trouble than we have now. The AUSTRALIA IN '75 Committee had a six-year life, and not too much blood was shed then, so I guess your rule isn't universal (at least retrospectively). // You'll obviously never be a successful entrepreneur, Harry: if you had applied yourself to writing out lists of sins for your school friends for use at confession, and selling them to the little blighters, by now you could have been running a multi-national business writing confessional-prompts. // 'Building Society' is indeed 'something like the bank-type private institutions in the United States'. My own rule of thumb when translating from United Statesian to Australian (or vice versa) is to assume that the same word references the same object until a blindingly obvious counter-example appears. But as Marc Ortlieb remarks in this mailing, asking an Australian girl which team she roots for can be risky, not to say risqué. // 'But I dislike the double standard, by which politicians and policemen and industry leaders are expected to be incorruptible, while the average man feels justified in breaking any law he disagrees with.' I'm sure it isn't often you are so careless with words: I'm sure that you really believe that public officeholders, such as politicians and policemen, should be incorruptible. The question you raise refers rather to whether or not they are obliged to keep laws which other citizens feel they can break. I don't see that as an appropriately-phrased 'double standard' at all. What I at least object to most strongly is the activities of public officials who, either publically or privately, persecute/persecute other citizens for acts of which they, the public officials are themselves guilty. We have had enough examples of this in Victoria in recent years to be particularly touchy. Your comment does raise much broader issues than this, but a set piece would be needed to deal with the matter suitably. // We may be called upon to pass judgement on people we've never met but we don't, despite your suggestion, have to do it. Thus I don't vote (voting is compulsory in Australia, as you probably know) and certainly wouldn't serve on a jury: there I go, breaking laws I disagree with. // This issue was disappointing because you devoted so much of it to an aspect of Western culture from which I have cut myself off as much as possible.

Floccipaucinihilipilification 4 Writing letters of comment is something I have always been terrible at, and while your notes don't do much to explain my incompetence, they do comprise a reasonable Letterhack's Apologia. Of course, the amount of time you put into your fanac gives you the opportunity to pile up the enviable record you have, but based purely on hours devoted to the subjects, you would seem to be a convention fan rather than a fanzine fan. How many hours a week do I put into fandom? It doesn't add up to much - say an hour a week on various apazines, 2½ hours a week on Chunder!, a tri-weekly newszine, and about 1½ hours a week on conventions. Probably there's another hour in letters and other stuff. Does this make me almost an inactive fan? I wonder just how many hours other Fapans - other fans - put into fandom? (I am beginning to see why I'm not a letterhack - four hours for a single loo would just about exhaust my weekly ration!)

Helen's Fantasia August 1978 Variety is the spice of life in FAPA, and the contribution of Chauvenet which you refer to is one which brings this home very strongly to me. It makes it All Worthwhile, even though there are dull patches in places.

The Speed Of Dark 17 I don't think I've seen a STAR TREK game reported in such detail before. I'm puzzled as to why you bothered. //Silverberg's PRESTER JOHN was remaindered out here in 1974 or thereabouts.

The Nasachist 1 Please do continue to include the stuff from NASA/JPL. At first I wasn't too interested in that, but now I've become addicted.

Damballa 34 I hadn't noticed that Aussie fanzines contained more than average numbers of Anglosaxon words, but I assume your estimate may be correct. As for guessing why it might be the case - perhaps it is something to do with the age of the Australian fans or perhaps a chance result of the subjects being discussed.

The Definitive History Of Iguanacon Self-referencing fanzines aren't too common: congrats!

Shelf Life In your comments to the late lamented Joutillier you suggest that FAPA has no ostracism mechanism: I disagree. While ostracism implied exile, it didn't imply execution, which is what expelling a member of FAPA amounts to. It is quite possible to ignore completely a member's contributions - and this is a policy I have pursued in the past (thpugh not in FAPA). Mind you, there are some people who ignore the whole apa - Moskowitz is a prime example - and ostracism isn't going to get too far in any form other than expulsion.

Mutterings From The Teapot I thought that Australian novels had to be about one's Catholic childhood. Australian short fiction, on the other hand, is devoted to country pubs.

Synapse/FAPA 165 I occasionally manage to understand United Statesian Jack, but in choosing 'wrench' and 'spanner' you have identified one of my many weak points. I can tell the difference, but don't like using either. My failures with such things make me unhappy about definitions of humanity as 'tool-using'. // Leigh Edmonds may not be the world's greatest speller, I admit, but I think Lee Harding was justifiably upset when a book editor changed 'abyssal' to 'abysmal' in one of his novels. // 'Are there really a bunch of libraries that subscribe to your publications?' (page 10) 'Are', Mr Speer?

OLD BORING ARTICLE

The following is an example of the sort of stuff I find myself writing in my present job: is it any wonder I'm looking for greener fields? I called the following 'The Art of the Possible', but that was removed by a no-doubt-wise editorial decision.

Early in 1978 a Committee which had been appointed to review research reports on the impact of the Radford scheme in Queensland secondary schools presented its report and recommendations.

The report, "A Review of School-based Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools", made suggestions for dealing with many of the problems which the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education has to solve. VISE invited Professor E. Scott, Chairman of the Committee, and Mr L. Winkle, Executive Secretary of the Board of Secondary School Studies in Queensland, to take part in seminars on school-based assessment, and in particular the Queensland proposals. The seminars were held in Melbourne on October 25 and 26.

Professor Scott and Mr Winkle began these sessions by defining carefully their position in attending these seminars. "We have come here" they said "as much to learn as to disseminate", and went on to warn against the idea of casually applying Queensland's solutions to Victoria's problems.

The seminars commenced with a description of the environment within which the recent report had been prepared.

The Radford Report, which had recommended a freeing-up of secondary education in Queensland and the replacement of external examinations by a system of moderated internal assessment, had appeared, according to research reports of 1975-75 (the Radford Scheme having been implemented in 1971), to rely upon three assumptions each of which was later seen to have been false.

It had been assumed that:

the public wanted a change from external examinations;

teachers would welcome and were ready for a new system involving increased professional autonomy; and

the tertiary institutions would co-operate fully with the new scheme.

With time, it became possible to overcome some of the ensuing consequences. But as acceptance of the principles of the Radford Scheme increased, so did the number of suggestions for alternative schemes.

There were, however, other criticisms of the Radford Scheme, which did not relate at all to the unjustified assumptions referred to above. In particular, while the pressure of external examinations decreased, there appeared to be intensified pressure on students as schools assessment became not only continuous but also continual.

Furthermore, while in the external examination processes teacher and student were a joint team opposed to the hidden enemy of the external examiners, teacher and student were now perceived (especially by students) to be in adversary roles, with a resulting decline in teacher-student relationships.

In addition, the Scott Committee was not commissioned to review all secondary education in Queensland (it was only to deal with implications of the earlier research reports). Just as the Scott Committee was completing its work another committee (the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry) was being established with a broader charter.

Therefore the Scott Committee was constrained both by its own charter and by the existence of another committee with a broader operating basis.

At present the Board is seeking reactions from those people most likely to be affected by the Scott Report.

CONTENT OF THE SCOTT REPORT

While accepting the criticism of the Radford Scheme as implemented, the Scott Committee worked to preserve the spirit of the "Radford Report". As a foundation for their work the Scott Committee adopted a statement of the aims of secondary education, and from these derived three main ideas upon which its own report is based:

the curriculum should consist of core plus electives;

assessment of students, which would remain school-based, should be based upon notions of competence rather than comparison with other students;* and

"standards" should be maintained by a system of accreditation of subjects.

The intention of the "core plus electives" structure is to meet more satisfactorily the needs of a multicultural society. This recommendation is to be implemented through a continuation of the Radford Scheme's three categories of subjects - Board subjects (used statewide), Board-

*Note to FAPAns: the idea of printing all this crap is to give you some clearer idea of how education in Australia works. At the asterisked point it is suggested that in future teachers should no longer 'grade on the curve' which is more common in the US than out here.

approved subjects (school-devised and accredited for certification by the Board), and school subjects. Increased emphasis would be placed on school-devised subjects (the second and third categories) and it is recognized that support services were needed to encourage this kind of development.

Professor Scott was asked whether, since part of the problem of the Radford Scheme seemed to derive from lack of teacher experience/training, he felt teachers had the necessary abilities to develop syllabuses for school subjects. He answered that the three-year phase-in period recommended in the report, together with appropriate training in pre-service courses and (for teachers already in the field) "in situ" training, should result in a better-prepared teaching service.

In the new scheme, assessment will remain school-based, but the principles upon which this assessment would be carried out are to be changed.

The need for this change stems from a different understanding of assessment. The Scott Committee believed that the purposes of assessment were five-fold:

- feedback to students to enable self-assessment;
- feedback to teachers and students to assist the modification of teaching/learning programs;
- to provide students and parents with information relating to the student's achievement and potential;
- to provide students and parents with information which will assist in determining future educational pathways;
- to place students in an order of merit.

In the present system, which is norm-referenced*, this last purpose predominates. In this system there have been abuses - use of the notion that certain ratings (relative to other students) can be termed 'failure' (in the sense that less than a fifty per cent score is sometimes regarded as failure), and (particularly by tertiary institutions) the adding together of ratings to determine a final 'score'.

The Scott Committee believed that another approach to assessment was required, and to that end has recommended a system of competency-based assessment.

In this scheme, allocation of a student to one point on a five-point scale is based upon the student's attainment (or non-attainment) of previously -specified and published criteria.

Teachers in Queensland recognize that to some extent they already use such a system. The major change will be that staff who develop syllabuses will be required to make the criteria by which students will be assigned ratings of various levels of competence available in advance.

Moderation has been less successful than was desired, particularly since it is open to abuse by people who are skilled at dominating meetings. In the new system moderation is replaced by subject accreditation (and since this involves accreditation of the criteria for the levels of competence, moderation of assessment is 'built-in'). In this way standards in subjects will be monitored.

*Note to FAPAs: Most of this is unreal to me, too. But 'norm-referenced' means that students are assigned grades not on the basis of their knowledge of a subject, but on the basis of their knowledge compared with the knowledge of the other students in the class, school, or state.

In addition, it is proposed that competency-referenced tests* will be administered, sometimes on a statewide basis, and sometimes with a sample of schools. The purpose of these tests, which are to be prepared by subject specialists, is to enable teachers to obtain a second opinion on the competency of their students. However, results for individual students will not be recorded on any certificate.

A Tertiary Entrance Score is derived separately, and while there may be some transition problems, these are not thought likely to be substantial. Discussions are to be held with tertiary institutions on the incorporation of assessment of school subjects in the Tertiary Entrance Score.

The misuse of the Tertiary Entrance Score has not been limited to tertiary institutions. Employers have tended to use this score to select their staff. The Board has worked hard with employer groups to improve this situation, pointing out the wide range of factors which employers need to take into account in hiring personnel, and has had considerable co-operation from these groups.

The Queensland Institute of Personnel Management, for example, has devised a profile-matching system in which educational attainment is only one of many aspects considered. The problem remains for small employers who do not have the resources for selection procedures of this kind, and fall back on the easy one - educational attainment.

DISCUSSION

Discussion at the seminars was vigorous, and on each occasion time ran out before all questions were answered.

At one of the seminars Mr Winkle spent considerable time discussing the problem of information-dissemination in relation to the Radford Scheme. He felt that insufficient work had been done in public relations with teachers, parents, and other decision-makers. This was taken up by a participant who challenged the notion that education should be marketed.

Professor Scott and Mr Winkle then indicated that the term 'public relations' was perhaps a misnomer and that what was intended was an operation to increase the quality and scope of public information.

Both men said that under the Radford Scheme severe problems had arisen as a result of misinformation or a lack of information.

COMPETENCY CRITERIA

The question of the level of detail required for criteria in a competency-based system was pursued by several participants. Professor Scott and Mr Winkle agreed that in some specific subject areas checklists or behavioural objectives may be involved. They emphasized that decisions about which criteria were to be used were not in the hands of the Board but in those of subject committees and others preparing syllabuses. They stated that whatever the Board's views were it was not in a position to pre-empt decisions of subject specialists.

Another matter on which Professor Scott and Mr Winkle were cross-examined was the restricted range of enquiry and recommendations of the Scott Committee. Professor Scott and Mr Winkle made it clear that while they may personally have been interested in broader questions they had no powers to make recommendations in those areas, and that in formulating recommendations they had to pay careful attention to political and social issues. For example, the high mobility of

*FAPAns: Don't even ask.

of students and teachers in some parts of Queensland means that the rate of syllabus change has to be braked by various mechanisms such as long-term subject accreditation and the requirement that curricula must make allowance for student transfers.

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Gripping stuff, eh? Sometimes I know I'm wasting my time. On the other hand, the political content of the above is pretty high: nothing is misreported, but everything is selectively reported. The message, if there is one, is what my employer would have liked (or at least, my faction of my employer, would have liked) the speakers to have said. I've been away from office politics for a couple of years, and I'm finding it hard to adjust: I'm not sure that I want to adjust.

And now, a message from W Rotsler.

