

## Management in higher education: Some personal reflections on the dilemmas of high office in academia

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### ABSTRACT

The invitation to contribute an article on the contemporary relevance of marxism in education threw me into a crisis of petit-bourgeois self-questioning and doubt. Having been caught up in the administrativia of management in universities for the last five years - snowed under by paperwork, bogged in deadly committees, besieged by hordes of colleagues and students seeking assistance with this or that, doing most things just well enough and hardly anything really thoroughly - my first inclination was modestly to decline. I had almost forgotten what a book looks like, let alone had the luxury to follow what had been written about or acted upon in the radical journals that used to be my intellectual haven and source of inspiration. As a middle manager in a university, by my own lights and previous analyses, I could be nothing other than a sell out. At worst I was retreating into the private terrain of personal interest, doing it for the money and superior conditions; at best I was a reformist, no different in kind from those enlightened liberals who, increasingly marginalised and depleted in number, still carry forward some progressive agenda.

The invitation to contribute an article on the contemporary relevance of marxism in education threw me into a crisis of petit-bourgeois self-questioning and doubt. Having been caught up in the administrativia of management in universities for the last five years - snowed under by paperwork, bogged in deadly committees, besieged by hordes of colleagues and students seeking assistance with this or that, doing most things just well enough and hardly anything really thoroughly - my first inclination was modestly to decline. I had almost forgotten what a book looks like, let alone had the luxury to follow what had been written about or acted upon in the radical journals that used to be my intellectual haven and source of inspiration. As a middle manager in a university, by my own lights and previous analyses, I could be nothing other than a sell out. At worst I was retreating into the private terrain of personal interest, doing it for the money and superior conditions; at best I was a reformist, no different in kind from those enlightened liberals who, increasingly marginalised and depleted in number, still carry forward some progressive agenda.

None of this was new, it had merely come to a head. Was my marxism perhaps utterly irrelevant to my practice as a manager? For the umpteenth time I scrutinised my files on the details of my superannuation package - perhaps there was some previously unnoticed clause which would facilitate a rapid exit from a locale which presents itself as increasingly alien, and preserve me from a penurious old age.... Perhaps I should just go, and to hell with penury, at least I would retain some sense of integrity? Or perhaps I should let myself be demoted, taking my place once more among

the ranks, free again to articulate opposition, and to get on with some research and writing? The very framing of these questions, I noted ruefully, is indicative of the petit-bourgeois self-flagellating angst to which academics are peculiarly and often pathetically prone. A marxist surviving in academia, like anyone else, will bear the marks of the social relations of her existence which go deep into the psyche and inhibit intellectual honesty and self-awareness.

Pondering the challenge late at night over a whisky, having just ploughed through a familiar wad of documents on quality assurance in higher education, the intellectual vacuity of which never fails to arouse my contempt, I decided that I would not squib it. I would contribute precisely my personal reflections on the dilemmas of management for those who do not share the prevailing ideology concerning what is wrong with higher education and the way forward. This after all was the main problematic I had been deploying my intellectual capital on for years. If I had anything worthwhile to say, it must be here. I had no time to do anything else anyway - which already touches on one of the central dilemmas.

The perspective from which I write is a personal one. I am not part of a collective project of dissident workers or managers who are inspired by an alternative project of renewal, socialist or otherwise. There is no such movement in existence. Whilst opposition to the corporatization of academia is occasionally voiced by the old style liberal, it is rarely organized, and fails to address the real weaknesses of the forms and structure of higher education, even in terms of a liberal critique, let alone one informed by a more radical socialist diagnosis. To me, now having to manage in these rickety and archaic institutions, the voice of the dissident liberal sounds curiously complacent, self-satisfied and self-interested, blinded by the rhetoric of the liberal academy, hence blind to its reality; an historical irrelevance. Such voices tend to emanate from arts faculties, squeezed of funds and impelled to adapt their activities to the dynamic of the prevailing definition of the national interest. No longer protected by any widespread commitment to a view of the broader civilizing function for society of a liberal arts curriculum, and blind to the broader class content of the hegemonic definition of civility and citizenship, which in an earlier era was reinforced through a traditional arts education, those who express such views now seem singularly quaint and effete. They are out of touch with both the preoccupations of, and the constraints on management, and the same goes for their students, whose moral and intellectual needs they claim to be addressing. Ironically, then, a marxist in university management has more in common with those politicians and corporate managers who articulate a need for a thorough-going shake-up and reform. At least their agenda is premised on a perception that there is something fundamentally problematic about contemporary higher education. The liberal, by contrast, sees no need for change, ignorant of the historical connection between a longed for past and the present, and the broader social forces which have both created the liberal agenda and transformed it into that of the contemporary corporate manager. At least the marxist sees that there is something profoundly wrong and self-delusory about what passes for higher education, even whilst not sharing the bland commitment to the 'national interest' espoused by those who claim to be speaking in its name.

I admit to never having internalized a commitment to a bourgeois academic 'career'. Becoming an academic was not something that I actively chose. Like many fifties-bred women, I drifted into academia unwittingly, when the need for a paid job presented itself. I became an academic at a time when women, especially those from my middle class background with husbands and children, were expected to stay at home and bloom on the ideology of domesticity and romantic love. With hindsight, one can see that for bourgeois women with qualifications the full range of middle class careers was then objectively wide open. One could have done almost anything if one had perceived its openness. All we lacked was the ideology of career choice. But we were of a generation which pre-dated the notion of gender equality in the labour market. For those of us needing to be economically independent, drifting naturally led in the direction of nursing, teaching or occasionally, medicine, or secretarial work if we lacked 'brains'. Our career aspirations, to the extent to which we possessed them, tended to be moulded by accident and chance. What we did depended far more on what was expected of us in the work place we happened to inhabit than on

any rational appraisal of the possible and desirable. I was fortunate initially, in that my drifting into academia made possible what I enjoyed doing, which was reading, arguing and getting 'high' on ideas. That it provided me with the economic means of survival was a sine qua non of my existence. I never thought of my involvement as a 'career', and indeed despised those who did so relate to their jobs and aspired to 'get on' above all else.

This ambivalence is now at the root of one of my key dilemmas as a manager. Defined by others as having had a successful career (by definition, since one has ended up with a professorship and these days that means being an educational manager), one is expected to assist others to enter and achieve well in this career, whilst fully recognizing that the means of so doing frequently involve compromise and the raising of an automatic right arm to demonstrate conformity to 'so called' institutional values, hence a retreat from intellectual commitments when it comes to the crunch. As someone who landed in a management position as a result of impulse rather than protracted aspiration, I am acutely conscious that I am not the best person to advise the ambitious. I applied for my current position after being head hunted and ignored its appeal until, on a particularly frustrating day several months later, I thought, 'why not?' and rang up to see if the job was still available. I have never embraced the self concept of academia as the pinnacle of intellectual achievement. Nor do I regard most of what passes for education in a capitalist society as having anything other than a reproductive function for capitalist social relations, credentialling the old and new middle classes with the requisite ideologies and skills which will facilitate the performance of their roles. I reject 'careerism' since I don't fundamentally identify with the idea of a career in a capitalist work place.

I have not rejected my past intellectual and political commitments in this era of the global triumph of the capitalist mode of production. As a social scientist, I remain of the view that the historical materialist paradigm is the most comprehensive and productive of those available for the understanding of human affairs. As a socialist, I regard the demise of the 'historical detour' in Eastern Europe as an opportunity to concentrate on the main goal - the transformation of bourgeois society from within. As an educator, I still adhere to the socialist and specifically marxist critique of bourgeois educational institutions, building on the marxist critique of capitalism elaborated to its blunted potential in the sixties and seventies. This critique was blunted because, as Freeman-Moir, Scott and others polemically elaborated, it was never informed by a theoretically argued answer to the Monday morning dilemma of how to link one's critique with the problems and exigencies of social movements committed to the struggle for socialism. For me, Monday morning meant a reinsertion, in order to earn my living, into much of the pettiness of academia, a diversion from what the spaces between the routines and rituals of academic life had made possible. These were the perks of the academy, the opportunity to engage in thinking and reflecting, even if sometimes merely on the dilemmas and contradictions of academic existence and the structural realities of the academic ivory tower. Therein lay the potential of academic life, and its tragedy.

Unlike most other workplaces in bourgeois society, the typical labour process in higher education is still marked by individualism and social separation. Armed with our intellectual capital, our books, and our faded lecture notes, or fixated to the word processing screen, calling up e-mail messages, or the Internet, we can still carry out our teaching and research assignments without any imperative to communicate with others in the work place. The labour process separates and divides the workers one from another, whilst the hierarchical nature of the university context and its embedded system of career rewards and ideologies of hierarchy and merit foster and reinforce the practice of competitive individualism and a fragmentation of consciousness. The specialization of academic departments, the creation of disciplinary and subdisciplinary boundaries, militate against a practice of thinking and working collectively around common problems or of seeking collective solutions. This is nowhere more apparent than in the response by academics to the increasing strategy of financial devolution adopted by university management. With management retaining control at the centre over all the key strategic priorities and devolving the rest to the periphery, those working at the periphery are then given the power to decide on what shall be done.

Department is thus set against department, squabbling over the crumbs, whilst the cake has been gobbled up elsewhere. While the covered wagons of the academy are drawn up in a circle as if to resist a common foe, as some wit has observed, the departmental guns are trained inwards and do their murderous work there. Academics have put up a mere show of opposition to the key elements of government policy which set institution against institution, researchers against teachers, department against department. They have internalised the rhetoric through which such divisions are legitimated and accentuated. Despite their professed belief that a university education provides opportunity for a broadened view, for critique, and for sharpening the conscience of the intellectual in the name of justice in the public arena, academics have literally behaved like lemmings; they have demonstrated automatic complicity with what the Government of the day, through its financial stranglehold, prioritizes. They have complained and grumbled, to be sure, as is their wont, but then so do the leaping lemmings. They have not stood and fought. Their own self-concept is that they are defeated before they even start. There has been little or no effective opposition to the erosion of institutional autonomy through enforced commitment to accountability.

The key structural division between administrative and academic workers within universities (interestingly, largely unanalyzed) prevents any concerted counterweight to the decline in living standards of those who work within academia, their growing proletarianization and relative status decline. This is despite the huge intensification of academic work in the face of the range of external and intra-institutional pressures for more reporting, accountability and quality assurance. Whilst academics complain about the shift of finances away from those directly engaged in teaching and research, in favour of administration, there is little recognition of the extent to which the burden of administration at every level has been borne largely by administrative staff and their managers, working under often intolerable conditions and with little prospect of additional staff resources. The introduction of microelectronic technology into the workplace has alone dramatically altered the nature of academic work. Few institutions have provided more than perfunctory training programmes or thought through the changes in work organization and routines that this dramatic change both necessitates and makes possible.

This example epitomises the failures of management in higher education, which become only too apparent as one gets nearer the citadels of power. I cite but one instance from my recent experience: a four month delay in drawing up a contract between a local health authority prepared to fund externally a clinical Chair, and my University. This delay was entirely due to the inability of the personnel directorate to give any of its staff the authority to work through the details of the contract or adequately to brief the officer finally landed with the responsibility of sorting out the mess caused by the delay. A departure from known rituals and routines was required but could not be negotiated. The Chair was almost lost. The hysterical concerns about government encroachment on university autonomy whenever mechanisms are proposed which would involve a wide ranging examination and audit of the management of universities, I think, also illustrate my point. If institutions have nothing to hide, they would open themselves up to critical scrutiny, especially when their senior management share the same ideological commitments as their political masters. Instead, the willingness to endorse accountability is confined to the accountability of underlings, an enforced requirement 'from above' without any reciprocal obligation.

What are the implications of management failing for the academic like myself who is now part of management? Is the choice between being a whistle blower, and being complicit in the same managerial failings of which one was erstwhile a critic? Or does one see these failings in structural terms as reflecting the contradictory pressures on any institution simultaneously expected to do more with less and faced with a sullen and unwilling workforce reluctant to respond to the challenge of change when the rewards for so doing are neither obvious nor pain-free. Certainly, from a socialist perspective such changes sometimes seem neutral. That, however, is the nub of my dilemma. Are they really neutral? Can socialists ignore questions of efficiency and effectiveness while retreating into the familiar rationalization that the definition of these terms depends on the prevailing power relations which give them their meaning? Did not the failure of the socialist project in Eastern Europe

stem, at least in part, from the failure to conceptualize a socialist theory of management practice and its operationalization? Such a theory would have to take seriously the facts of scarcity and constraint, and confront the intellectual challenge of devising an effective system of fostering incentive, motivation and reward in a moment of transition. Were not some of the obstacles in the way of forging a transition to do with the failure to effect a form of socialist planning which could both cognize real obstacles, and seek ways to overcome them? One key problem would be to extend the possibilities of human nature in a context where the real social conditions are still those of scarcity rather than abundance. Socialists have taken seriously the view that people make their own history but not in conditions of their own choosing, conditions which include the limits imposed by character structure, forged and moulded in eras structured by very different priorities.

Grasping the limits of the feasible and trying to maximize it for a progressive rather than a regressive outcome is what I take to be the central challenge for management. This does require a practice of strategic planning and long-range vision, regardless of our political stance and priorities. Disillusionment with the character of strategic planning as currently practiced in higher education should not lead to a rejection of the need for planning per se, albeit with a different political flavour. This is surely one of the profound lessons which the socialist movement has learned in the course of its chequered history. Muddled thinking is a recipe for as much disaster as the superimposition of plans 'from above' which are adhered to inflexibly, regardless of the practical experience of those trying to operationalize them. Drawing on the 'architect and bee' analogy, central to my management philosophy, then, is the ideological commitment to planning and the recognition that the decisive element of any plan is an articulation of the goals, the vision, to use the contemporary fashionable jargon and an assessment of the means to achieve them, including analysing and overcoming the obstacles in the way of their achievement. This, essentially, is a task of theory. It requires a diagnosis of what one is up against and a naming of the conditions in which we find ourselves. It is also a task of practice.

It is here that the marxist involved in management, rather than merely theorising about it (probably the more sensible option), confronts the central contradiction of her existence. Rejecting an idealist interpretation that celebrates a 'great man' theory of history to the effect that the course of history is significantly affected by the unique insights and strategic good sense of exceptional (male) individuals, in favour of a conception of human history being collectively forged and very occasionally redirected - if the conditions are ripe for more historical openness, the marxist involved in management seeks to ally herself with some progressive movement which can harness the collective wisdom and experience. But therein lies the dilemma. Wherein lies the progressive movement, the motor of history, the historical agency to which one wants to assert one's allegiance? E. P. Thompson's line on agency in any case seems overly voluntaristic in the last decade of the twentieth century. The vast majority of instances of change seems to come about largely as a result of the unintended consequences of people's conscious activities. The direction of change is structurally determined. Merely going about our daily lives we help to bring about largely unintended change, but very little of this change is change which can force history to move in other directions. We may pose the question to ourselves as to whether the changes occurring are in the right direction but, regardless of our answer or our practice, socialists feel subject to structural determination, as if the most one can achieve is to hasten the birth pangs ... perhaps managers, no longer fortified by the pressure of conviviality from others 'in the ranks' are more sanguine about what can be achieved and more cognisant of the constraints preventing the desirable from eventuating.

It is a key assumption for socialists, whether in management positions or not, that they are unlikely to be in any way effective if they act alone and cannot link their practice with some more collective grass roots activity which is seeking some improvements in, if not transcendence of, oppressive social relations. But ours is not a propitious era for collective activity or for any anti-capitalist struggles. Capitalist hegemony reigns supreme, and its opponents are demoralized, fragmented and without a coherent intellectual position with which to guide policies and practice.



This is especially apparent in those countries where social democratic parties are in office. They have moved so far to the right of the political spectrum that there is scarcely any difference between their political project and that of their traditional conservative opponents. Whilst there remain small pockets of resistance on the part of some workers to the erosion of their living standards and to the monetarist wage strategies being implemented, the bulk of the trade union movement, at least in countries like Australia and New Zealand, has gone along with the prevailing political agenda which involves a wholesale capitulation to the market and corporatist politics. Through various top-down Accords, never presented to the grass roots for approval, trade unions tend to be entirely complicit in the particular definition of the national interest that is framed to suit the needs of dominant fractions of capital.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the unions which claim to represent the interests of academics. In Australia the academic unions are, like other white collar unions, so closely allied with the Labour party and its agenda that they can rightly be seen as a vehicle for ensuring quiescence of the grass roots. They have presided over the transition to enterprise bargaining which has further accentuated the erosion of academic living standards and an intensification of work, and their sole resort to those of their membership looking for a more independent stance is to exhort political support for them and for the Labour party on the supposition that of course the other side of politics would be worse. Such cynicism masquerading as an argument is widespread in the union movement. It amounts to a form of political blackmail.

Like other marxists now in management I have had an active past in academic unionism, serving on a number of occasions as branch president. It would have been psychologically comforting to have had one's union at least expressing some alternative strategy for the restructuring and reform of higher education to which one could ally oneself, but this has not materialized. From the managerial vantage point I recognize now fully the inherent deficiencies of trade unionism in carrying forward any progressive agenda, especially in those occupations like academia which have a self concept of civility and service. The mark of a socialist politics has to be the presentation of an alternative strategy for management. This would have a very different flavour from the purely reactive and negative opposition to any management initiatives so often presented in industrial disputes. The slogan 'it is their job to manage' I think typifies the short term accommodation to the prevailing social conditions, including their oppressive face which marks the dominant forms of trade unionism. If socialism still has contemporary relevance it is because socialist social relations and the values embedded therein and the management of these social relations could better achieve conditions for equity, human fulfilment and dignity than those characterised by commodification and the pursuit of profit. Oppositional strategies therefore need to be based on a claim to have better answers to contemporary problems and the dilemmas with which workers and managers are faced. Caught up in an evasion of the responsibility of thinking about management, trade unions instead remain content to react to management and are complicit in the strategies of their social democratic political masters. The trade union movement, including its academic unions, is itself part of the problem, not just for managers but for those articulating a socialist vision. And the fact that academic unions are committed to fundamentally petit-bourgeois notions of individualism, the ideology of merit and so on, militates against the conceptualization of collective solutions to common problems. So neither within nor outside academia do the trade unions offer a source of socialist inspiration to socialists looking for immersion in a progressive movement for social support, strategic thinking and progressive political tactics.

So is the marxist in management compelled to a lonely, isolated ineffectuality, constrained by the logic of his or her situation either to jettison previous intellectual and political commitments or to be a tragic figure clinging to a radical political agenda but without the historical agency capable of making any difference?

Equally problematic for the marxist manager in universities is the direct confrontation with what management has traditionally termed unsatisfactory or under-performance. True, there are

many academics in universities who are hard working, conscientious, keeping abreast with debates in their discipline and responding to management's intensification of their labour by working even harder, with a complete devotion to maintaining standards despite the hard times and inadequate resources. Far more common, however, are those who for various reasons have retreated into the private sphere, perhaps with no great passion for any of the three areas which are meant to justify an academic's existence: teaching, research and community service.

They often reveal little commitment to anything other than being left alone. Most academic departments contain those who will not take their share of the teaching or the administration and whose effort in their jobs seems minimal. Despite attempts to involve people in the task of making the workplace more congenial, there are those workers who show little commitment, never offer to take their fair share of administrative tasks, and are protected by tenure from any effective intervention by management.

As a manager I find this extremely frustrating. In the past I have shared a commitment to tenure as essential to protect the freedom to think, to oppose and to critique, but I have also always been ambivalent about tenure in that it is rarely used for such laudable ends. Most academics do not see themselves as social and intellectual critics and are little inclined to pit themselves against the prevailing trends of the day. Academia has not distinguished itself by leading broader oppositional movements or articulating the voice of a Gramscian good sense with respect to public issues. I ask myself whether my jettisoning of a commitment to tenure reveals wholesale surrender to the ideology of corporate management now so pervasive in universities, or whether it expresses something more positive, a commitment to an ideal of collective effort and to the sharing of responsibility, so necessary when times are tough. Whilst I can see that unpleasant workplaces are conducive to individualistic withdrawal, I can have no sympathy with a stance which makes the tasks of those who do not withdraw so much more difficult and adds to the burdens which others have to carry. Much of my time in the last few years has been concerned with trying to sort out the consequences of other academics' poor work practices. If one tries to rectify matters, this often means being on the receiving end of sullen resentment when one tries to raise standards and foster an ethic of accountability. Of course I recognize that past management practices have too often fostered an attitude of complacency and laissez-faire cover-ups, but this recognition does not solve the problem. I still adhere to the view that academic work brings certain freedoms, but have no tolerance for the selfish abuse of those freedoms which is all too prevalent. I hear myself lamenting the lack of the stick available to the manager in the private sector who can hold over the worker more sanctions if the commitment to the profit motive and labour productivity is absent. Of course, there ought to be strategies which can rely on carrots and the intrinsic rewards of a job well done to create a work environment where effort is paramount but many workplaces in academia these days are rather unpleasant places to be in. Meanwhile, the work involved in management magnifies, for middle management at any rate, whilst the rewards of carrying out the role are minuscule, often non-existent and injurious to health and well being. One knows that lack of commitment is structural in origin, and that a different set of structural arrangements would be conducive to a higher level of intrinsic motivation, but one cannot change structures single handedly, and most academics do not see the source of their malaise in structural terms or identify their own individualistic academic practices as part of the problem and not the solution.

The reader will relate to my sense of cultural despair and disillusionment and to my self awareness that in another age the cultural despair of the intelligentsia tended towards fascism and a petit bourgeois longing for a past where intellectuals were thought to make a difference. As a socialist I have never looked towards the past or suffered from a nostalgia for a previous era. Neither am I caught up in a celebration of the present, including its most dazzling technological manifestations. What does concern me as a socialist is how to conceptualize the present, to diagnose the trends and tendencies therein and have some assessment of the range of the possible. This requires both an exercise in theory and retention of a commitment to science, but it also involves self-consciousness about the moral basis. of the socialist project, the connection between

a moral condemnation of exploitative social relationships and a theoretical belief in the desirability and the necessity of their overcoming.

My socialist commitment as a manager has been informed by an enduring sense of the rapaciousness and ruthlessness of capitalism as it seeks to ever extend the power of the commodity. I have always been interested in the long waves and rhythms of the accumulation process rather than in the surface ripples. I do not share the pendulum theory of history so often espoused by my academic colleagues. I do not think that 'things will eventually swing back the other way' when faced with hard times.

The key elements of the restructuring of academia experienced in largely similar form everywhere, can only be seen in structural terms, reflecting what has to be done by governance faced by the constraints emanating from the global hegemony of capitalism in this stage of its cycle. Those constraints include those emanating from the collective struggles of people opposing or failing to oppose whatever strategy is being imposed upon them. For a manager, who is also a socialist, then, the task becomes one of thinking about those constraints and possible modes of reaction to them, theorizing about which type of response has most potential to engender conditions in which a more effective response in the future becomes possible. This involves being very clear about the positive and negative tendencies in the situation with which we are confronted.

I cite only one example. Most academics are extremely sceptical about the rhetoric of accountability and efficiency and effectiveness which accompanies much of the restructuring in contemporary higher education. They correctly observe that much of this rhetoric is being used to legitimate a continued erosion of state support for higher education and its privatization. This is its downside. But its upside is that a practice of accountability forces a diminution of individualist and privatized attitudes towards one's work as an academic and replaces this with a practice of collective responsibility. By asking the question, 'Accountability for what?' and thinking strategically about to whom one ought to be accountable to, one can foster a set of academic practices which have the potential to improve the working conditions of one's colleagues and students at the same time as opening up the ivory tower to groups formerly excluded. A good illustration of this would be the struggles to institute guidelines for research in Aboriginal communities. Academic scholarship in Aboriginal communities has often taken place without any reference to whether the subjects of that research have any rights or ownership over the results. The requirement on managers these days to ensure that researchers address the ethical issues involved in their research has the potential for broadening the scope of the typical academic vision.

Almost every management issue can be resolved in a number of different ways, some of which foreclose other progressive opportunities, some of which enhance them. In my own institution, for example, there is external pressure on the institution to demonstrate its accountability by showing that the courses offered have been regularly evaluated by students. Now this process of student evaluation could concern itself in a merely fragmented way with the course offered by the individual academic, with no commitment to a group appraisal of the overall coherence and quality of the student's total programme. As a manager I have tried to foster the practice of evaluation which involves a whole group of academics taking responsibility for a range of courses, not just their own, in order to overcome that privatized practice of self contemplation to which academics are very prone. I can see too that with the enormous growth in the possibilities of communicating which come from the revolution in microelectronics, there would be ways of utilizing this technology which build on the collective experience of staff and students, and avoid a mere surface involvement in the illusion of an extension of communicative possibilities.

Thinking strategically in order to maximize the conditions for growth in collective endeavour, understanding and mutual responsibility is for me a key element of the task of a marxist in management. I do not think this makes me any different from other managers except that my analysis of the trends in the current conjuncture I think would be richer, more dialectical and deeper in its explanatory power than that informing those operating within non-marxist paradigms. I am



old fashioned enough to relate still to marxism as science, historically relative to be sure, like all science, but an open and fertile scientific research strategy none the less. I am still committed to the enlightenment project albeit refashioned through a feminist critique, and share no sympathy with the fashionable postmodernist relativism.

This brings me to a second area where I feel that marxists as managers in academia have a distinctive role they can play. Having been so often on the receiving end of knee jerk and ideologically blinkered rejection of their theoretical paradigm, marxists are well placed to try to insist that the curriculum includes a genuine commitment to the possibility for critical appraisal of different points of view and for the examination of basic assumptions. Teaching people how to think is an enterprise dear to the academic heart, even if not often accompanied by the insight that it is thinking about assumptions, rather than merely from within them, that is alone genuinely critical. I do not subscribe to the view that an academic should be free to decide what is to be taught and should not be required to lay bare assumptions for critical scrutiny by others. So for me an engagement with curriculum issues is an important part of the definition of my role as a manager. Related to this is the constant attempt to make space for the planning of new programmes, not only because of the need to make the curriculum more pertinent to contemporary conditions and to cater for the changed structure and contingencies of the labour market, but most importantly because the planning of a new programme creates the possibility for a collective debate about aims and methods to achieve these ends which does not often occur with more long standing programmes. In the latter, staff will often stick year after year with doing the same things without any need to justify what is being done. This fosters the unfortunate habit of clinging to the known rather than experimenting with new ways of doing things.

Thirdly, I think it is inconceivable that a marxist in management would not be concerned about equity issues. These may take many forms and relate to the needs of both staff and students and to the normal routines of academic life, which are not often examined for their denial of principles of equity. It goes without saying that often within academia what passes for a commitment to equity is minimal, given that the hierarchical structures of advancement and promotion are taken for granted. Yet there is a deeper commitment to equity which can enrich the work place. This may revolve around such things as the struggle for equitable teaching loads which do not work to the disadvantage of junior staff, and struggles over modes of financial management which can enclose people within an acceptance of the legitimating rationales of prevailing government policy, with their emphasis on user-pay principles as opposed to principles with at least some moral substance to them. It also involves me attempting in my discussions with younger staff to move their career horizons beyond a mere concern with getting on. What is the good of getting on if one compromises entirely on the commitment to what academia ideally should be about but is not? I try to draw on a conception of academia informed by the body of marxist scholarship when counselling younger staff. It is better for them to be realistic about a university career and its frustrations than to be suffering from false consciousness. (What an unfashionable concept!) This counselling of staff takes up a lot of my time. I do not know whether this is characteristic of management in universities or whether it is typical of women managers only, but certainly from the perspective of the other side of the manager's desk one gets some insight into the seamier side of academic interpersonal politics, its pettiness and squalor. This is perhaps one of the saddest elements of one's managerial job. So many academics are unhappy and insecure, lacking the personal strength on which to build a healthy sense of distance from the workplace and its frustrations. Given my lack of commitment to bourgeois notions of a career, I can see this as a structural accompaniment of a bureaucratic occupation to which not many are called but even fewer are chosen. Most play the academic game far too seriously. As a marxist I could never embrace completely the ideology of the institution. I believe too much in the self educational power of the collective worker and in the notion that real insights and good sense come from practice to have anything other than rather modest goals or to think that my own practice as an individual manager can make much difference. Much of my work consists in arguing with others about what might be the most sensible course of action given certain

irremovable constraints. Attempts at intellectual persuasion often fall on peculiarly deaf ears. Although I think of myself as reasonably articulate I never cease to be astonished by the proneness of academics to act against their own self interest or to see only dimly where their own interests lie. That I explain this in terms of an inability to see structures, or to discern underlying social trends, is no comfort when one's experience is of talking to the deaf who seem doomed to refuse to be educated despite their own belief in the salience of education. Maintaining a sense of distance, together with a refusal - indeed an inability - to embrace the role in a psychological sense, probably makes me a better manager than most. And that certainly comes from the marginality of the socialist in this particular phase of history. Management for me is my job, a labour I have to perform rather than something I choose to do. It is a means of self reproduction. Good management anyway is never something which stems from an individual. It can only be judged ultimately by what is achieved historically. It is a collective human achievement. Working hard to retain the possibility of collective insight, collective critique and collective practice, informed by a moral commitment and a theory whose explanatory power has not yet been surpassed, is what keeps me going.

But the costs in personal terms are high, especially for one who is still excited by ideas and discovery. I rarely have any time to follow theoretical trends or keep myself abreast of informed analysis of political events in the world. My life has become narrowed and strangely atrophied by the endless round of meetings, business and the demands of managerial accountability. That I continue to inflict on myself the burdens of managerial office says something about my psyche - its inability to detach itself from thoroughly bourgeois notions of responsibility, a legacy of my English liberal background with its constitution of do-goodism. This is far from any commitment to the socialist project. Writing this paper has been salutary. It confronts me with the contradictions of life in a bourgeois university. I should get out, there are better things to do. Indeed, I am as free to get out as any wage-slave: free to work or to starve.