

REVIEW OF HANS-JOERG TIEDE'S *UNIVERSITY REFORM: THE FOUNDING OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS*

JONATHAN R. ALGER¹

A century ago, our country was undergoing a period of dramatic change marked by increasing industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and new forms of specialization of labor. In what we now refer to as the “Progressive Era,” institutions of higher education were also evolving rapidly to meet the changing needs of a society in flux. In his new book, *University Reform: The Founding of the American Association of University Professors*,² Hans-Joerg Tiede discusses how faculty members were struggling at this time of rapid change to define their roles not just in teaching and research, but also in governance.

One hundred years after its founding, Tiede’s scholarly approach provides a fresh, well-documented analysis of the larger societal and higher education context in which the American Association of University Professors (“AAUP”) came into being. He brings this story to life through an in-depth review of the early cases and personalities that shaped the Association in its formative years. While the specific political and cultural disputes of the era were not identical to those of our current time, many of the issues of this period have clear parallels to the challenges in higher education and our society today. For this reason, Tiede’s work will serve as a resource not only for scholars of the history of higher education, but also for researchers and practitioners who seek to gain a long-term historical perspective and context

1. Jonathan R. Alger is President of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA. He served as Associate Counsel and Counsel at the American Association of University Professors from 1996-2000.

2. HANS-JOERG TIEDE, *UNIVERSITY REFORM: THE FOUNDING OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS* (2015) [hereinafter *UNIVERSITY REFORM*]. Tiede is a faculty member at Illinois Wesleyan University. He is also the chair of the AAUP’s Committee on the History of the Association, a member of Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and the editor of the AAUP’s *Policy Documents and Reports*, eleventh edition.

on important topics such as shared governance, academic freedom, tenure, and due process.

As institutions of higher education (especially major research universities) grew and became more professionalized during this period, Tiede describes how the various constituencies that make up these institutions were struggling to define their positions and authority within a changing landscape. For example, Tiede reminds us that faculty members at the time were not all in tenured or tenure-track positions.³ In fact, faculty members before this era were not necessarily professionalized or permanent.⁴ The current system of faculty ranks began to develop during this time, as the concept of disciplinary specialization took firm hold in the academy.⁵ With differences in rank came disagreements about differences in status and authority within the academic governance structure, which might sound very familiar to higher education leaders today. And at a time when white males held virtually all of the positions of power and influence, disparities of race and gender were reinforced in the academy that still haunt higher education today.⁶

Presidents continued to play a central role in overseeing governance, but the composition and character of external governing boards shifted with the addition of many more business leaders and lawyers—professionals who were playing an increasingly powerful role in a modern, industrialized society.⁷ These developments foreshadowed battles among these various constituencies about priorities and decision-making that continue to play out today in our colleges and universities.

Tiede argues that the major impetus for the founding of the AAUP was to “promote the professionalization of the professoriate,” with a focus on “changing the balance of power in the American university.”⁸ There were concerns at the time about faculty salaries and benefits, as well as retirement ages and protections. The numbers may have changed, but these issues are still very much alive and with us today. Early AAUP leaders were also deeply concerned with the nature and content of outside political influences on the academy—another debate that continues to rage a full century later. Indeed, Tiede’s realistic portrait reminds us that the quaint notion of an isolated ivory tower, untainted by outside influences, has probably never been an accurate representation of America’s colleges and universities.

University Reform instead suggests that the founding fathers of the AAUP were not unlike the founding fathers of the American republic, in the

3. *Id.* at 11.

4. *Id.* at 13.

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.* at 14–15.

7. *Id.* at 11–12.

8. *Id.* at 21.

sense that they were struggling to help define a system of checks and balances to provide a governance system that would protect certain rights (in this case, of faculty members individually and collectively). They were not alone in this endeavor, however. Tiede notes how a variety of national organizations and associations were formed during this same general time period to represent varying interests within the higher education framework (such as the Association of American Universities for research institutions and their presidents in 1900,⁹ or the Association of Governing Boards for board members in 1923¹⁰).

One of the interesting tensions of the time identified by Tiede involved the rise of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which he characterizes as a manifestation of a Progressive Era reform movement to advocate for increased “efficiency” in higher education (efficiency being a watchword of the times as reflected in Frederick Taylor’s theory of “scientific management”).¹¹ This tension from a century ago reminds us of the ongoing 21st-Century debates about standardization of the curriculum and faculty workloads, and their relationship to efficiency in higher education.

Even within the AAUP, from the start there were tensions among faculty about the Association’s organizational structure, as well as about participation and status within it. Early AAUP meetings were dominated by faculty members from the leading research universities, some of whom sought to exclude faculty members from less “prestigious” institutions.¹² While many of the situations cited as evidence for the need for the AAUP involved individual faculty members and their treatment by forces in and outside of the academy, Tiede asserts that “[t]he argument for organizing an association was . . . based [on] a central Progressive article of faith of the advantages of community over individualism.”¹³

This movement toward a collective voice almost immediately created concerns that a national faculty association would become a narrow-minded “trade union” for professors, an argument that would continue to play out through many decades as the AAUP struggled with the issue of whether and to what extent to engage in collective bargaining with its members.¹⁴ The tension between the individual academic freedom rights of faculty members on the one hand, and the collective interests of the professoriate as a whole on the other, has arguably been a defining characteristic of the AAUP throughout its history.

9. *Id.* at 10.

10. *Id.* at 175.

11. *Id.* at 45.

12. *Id.* at 79.

13. *Id.* at 87.

14. See AAUP POLICY DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS 321 (11th ed. 2015) [hereinafter AAUP DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS].

For many people in higher education, the AAUP has long been synonymous with the protection and enhancement of the academic freedom rights of individual faculty members. Yet Tiede makes clear that the founders of the AAUP were not necessarily in agreement that academic freedom should be the primary focus of the new organization. John Dewey, for example, initially favored an emphasis on institutional governance and the faculty role within it.¹⁵

The early leaders also had sharp disagreements over the definition and extent of academic freedom, including whether grounds for dismissal should include issues such as “discourtesy.”¹⁶ These are the types of issues on which the AAUP would proceed to spend many decades to define model policies, as reflected for example in the 1999 statement “On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation.”¹⁷

Tiede recounts the early academic freedom cases in considerable detail, illustrating how the AAUP modified its approach over time to the investigation, analysis, and resolution of these cases that would become its hallmark in many respects. These carefully researched accounts reveal that the personalities and biases of early AAUP leaders played a central role in the cases selected and the decisions they ultimately made, just as the personalities and biases of judges on the Supreme Court have made a significant impact on the cases selected and decisions made by that body over time. These early academic freedom cases also offer other parallels to the development of legal concepts. For example, disagreements about the extent to which matters of process and procedure should take priority over substantive judgments mirrored similar arguments in the development of legal standards regarding due process.

University Reform also tells a cautionary tale about the protection of academic freedom, reminding us that this history is not one of unalloyed forward progress. Almost immediately after the AAUP’s founding in 1915, World War I and the Red Scare created serious threats to academic freedom in the wake of concerns about patriotism and disloyalty in the academy. The AAUP retreated from its staunch position on this issue, and even retracted some of the principles it had just enunciated in its *1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*¹⁸ in the subsequent report on “Academic Freedom in Wartime.”¹⁹ Tiede does not pull his punches here; he makes clear that the Association’s leaders were pragmatic in worrying about the future influence of their organization in a society dominated by

15. UNIVERSITY REFORM, *supra* note 2, at 103.

16. *Id.* at 117.

17. AAUP DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS, *supra* note 14, at 227–28.

18. *Id.* at 3–12.

19. UNIVERSITY REFORM, *supra* note 2, at 147.

patriotic fever. Furthermore, many professors were themselves involved in government as experts of various kinds²⁰—a reminder once again that the wall between academe and the society at large has never been solid or impermeable.

Tiede also spells out the fascinating early history of the tensions between the AAUP and the Carnegie Foundation with regard to the development and administration of a pension program known as the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association (“TIAA”), which would eventually become a critical source of retirement security for many faculty members.²¹ While the details of this early history have long since been forgotten by most leaders in higher education, it’s an intriguing example of how alliances can shift over time as circumstances and expectations evolve.

By its own admission, *University Reform* takes on the founding myth of the AAUP and the centrality of academic freedom by describing the Association’s early emphasis on governance and the power dynamics in higher education at the start of the previous century. This history is important to understand, as power dynamics within higher education have been both an organizing force and a source of inherent tensions for many decades. This history does not and should not, however, detract from our understanding of the importance of academic freedom and its importance to the core mission of higher education as a marketplace of ideas. Instead, it provides clear examples of how academic freedom issues and cases have always been inextricably linked to issues of authority and power—and of how these issues and cases have reflected larger societal debates throughout our history.

The evolution of the concept of shared governance in higher education stands in sharp contrast to the governance structures of for-profit corporations and many other types of entities in our society. It reflects the messiness of an educational mission that is all about nourishing free expression, vigorous debate, and the search for truth rather than the maximization of profits or the development of products on an assembly line. Just as Progressive Era leaders searched for ways to make higher education more efficient in their time, political leaders today decry what they perceive as a lack of efficiency in colleges and universities that pride themselves on a certain level of autonomy. Through its longstanding efforts to provide a strong and cohesive faculty voice in these recurring debates, the AAUP has made an important and lasting contribution—while serving as a beacon for an educational mission that, at its best, transcends the political and social currents of any given moment in time.

20. *Id.* at 169.

21. *Id.* at 201–09.

