

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



newspress.com

The left monopoly

Thomas Sowell

January 9, 2005

Recently Albert Hunt's last column for the Wall Street Journal mentioned how he was recruited by the late and great Robert L. Bartley, who made that newspaper's editorial page unsurpassed in quality.

What made the hiring of Albert Hunt especially significant was that Bartley was a staunch conservative in the Reagan tradition, while Hunt is a standard issue liberal.

It was precisely for that reason that Bartley wanted Hunt to write for the Wall Street Journal, so that readers would be sure to get more than one side of the issues discussed.

Many years ago, when I was teaching economics at UCLA, we likewise had a staunchly conservative department.

We were sometimes called the west coast branch of the University of Chicago, because so many of us had studied under Milton Friedman and other leaders of "the Chicago school" of economists.

Like Bob Bartley, we wanted our students to see more than one way of looking at economics. One young, liberal-minded economist was regarded by some as a possible permanent member of the department, to add variety.

He never really measured up to our expectations, but he was probably kept on longer than he would have been if he had been a conservative economist, because of hopes that he would turn out to be better than he did.

Even though the word "diversity" has become a mantra on the left, there is no such drive for intellectual diversity in bastions of the left, such as academia or the mainstream media.

In recent years, the liberal media have at least added some token conservatives, but our colleges and universities are content with whole departments consisting solely of people ranging from the left to the far left.

In academia, "diversity" in practice too often means simply white leftists, black leftists, female leftists and Hispanic leftists.

Perhaps it was the remarkable popularity of conservative talk radio and the meteoric rise of the Fox News channel that led liberal TV networks to begin adding some conservatives to their lineups. No such competitive pressures operate in academia.

There are a few good small conservative colleges like Hillsdale or Grove City, but Ivy League schools have no conservative rivals of comparable size and prominence, and neither do most state universities.

A student can spend four years at many colleges and universities and graduate with no real awareness of any other viewpoints than those on the left.

College and university faculties do not simply happen to be leftist. Too often ideological questions are asked at faculty job interviews and ideological litmus tests are applied in hiring.

One reason for the prominence of conservative think tanks is that so many top scholars who are not leftists do not find a home in academia and go to work for think tanks instead.

Not even visiting speakers with a conservative viewpoint are tolerated on many campuses.

It seems incredible that there would be fears that a one-hour lecture would undo years of indoctrination.

But perhaps it is just sheer intolerance that creates hostility to anyone expressing ideas contrary to the prevailing notions of the left.

Students often report that their professors react against them for stating a viewpoint different from the prevailing orthodoxy of the left. They can be ridiculed in class discussions or given low grades on exams.

Dartmouth College has been carrying on a running battle with the conservative student newspaper, the Dartmouth Review, from the moment it was founded many years ago.

On some campuses, conservative student newspapers are destroyed by leftist students or even burned publicly, with little or no effort by the college administration to maintain freedom

of speech.

A student at Lewis College in Colorado was actually kicked by a professor for wearing a sweatshirt proclaiming his Republican views.

This happened at a birthday party, of all places, and the professor has been quoted as saying that her only regret was that her kick was not "harder and higher."

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which monitors campus intolerance, is trying to get some action taken against that professor. Good luck.

Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University