

Did Jonathan Mirsky Quit Or Was He Thrown Out?

Editor's Note: The following is the first part of an article submitted by two students to *The Dartmouth* dealing with the sequence of events which had led to the imminent departure of Professor Jonathan Mirsky from the College. The article is based on letters and files supplied by individuals involved in the case. The *Dartmouth* does not necessarily agree with any of the charges or views expressed in the article. The concluding section of the article will be presented in Tuesday's issue.

By DAVID DOLLAR
and LYNN ZORN

Jonathan Mirsky, Associate Professor of History and Chinese, is leaving Dartmouth at the end of this term. Most people do not understand the reasons for his departure after nine years of teaching—to many it is not even clear if he has been fired, hounded into resignation, or has resigned by choice.

We have before us a file of letters between Jonathan and the various faculty and administrators whose actions, exchanges, and personal relationships determined whether Jonathan would stay at Dartmouth and in what capacity. We want to make it clear to everyone exactly why we are losing another good professor. The circumstances of Jonathan's departure can tell us much about the ways in which professors are hired, appreciated, unappreciated, and gotten rid of, and also about the conditions under which our professors work.

Students do not think and talk about the politics of appointment and promotion. They see their passivity as an inevitable result of a system too complex for them to understand or control. In submitting to the intricacies of the system, they excuse themselves of responsibility for it and abdicate their control of it. Students are passive consumers. We are the ones who lose most when good teachers leave, and we have a responsibility to ourselves and to each other to change a system of hiring and firing which clearly does not work in our common interest though it directly affects us.

Chinese Status Uncertain

Jonathan came here in 1966 as an Assistant Professor of Chinese. He was brought here to help develop the East Asia Center and the Chinese language program. Three years later an ad hoc committee was set up by the Humanities Division to evaluate the Chinese program and to make a recommendation on its future. The committee praised the program and strongly recommended its continuation. The administration, however, received the report with reservation and continued to talk about dropping Chinese as an academic program.

In April of 1970, Henry Kuo, Assistant Professor of Chinese, resigned from Dartmouth, citing as his main reason for leaving the College's reluctance to commit itself to Asian Studies. Kuo is one of six China specialists who have left Dartmouth since 1968; that the administration would not

grant the Chinese program more than an uncertain status was a factor in all of their decisions to leave.

Promotion Without Tenure

In 1969 another ad hoc committee was set up to make a recommendation on Jonathan's status at Dartmouth. The contracts for all faculty who do not clearly fit into one department

present contract expired. It is not College policy to offer a teacher a tenured appointment or even a long-term contract in a program that is considered tentative. The College will, however, award half-tenure in a program as long as a department picks up the other half.

A half-tenure appointment does not affect a department's normal FTE allotments, but serves only as an administrative device which allows the College to give a long-term contract to a senior professor in a tentative program. If the program has to be terminated at short notice, the professor still has a departmental base in which to serve out his or her contract.

In order to make the tenure decision in 1973 that the CAP had required, Leonard Rieser, Dean of Faculty, appointed Professors Robert Huke, Howard Erdman, Charles Wood, and Neil Oxenhandler as an ad hoc committee to evaluate Jonathan's work in Chinese and Asian Studies, and also asked the History Department to make a tenure decision.

Committee Report Favorable

The ad hoc committee, in its unanimous report, described Jonathan's teaching as "innovative and original, making unusual demands on the time and spirit of independence of the students. Conversely, he is wholly generous with his own time and knowledge, breeding close ties with his students. Such exceptional teaching skills should be recognized and rewarded."

They also found that "Jonathan's publication record is excellent," and further acknowledge his service to the whole Dartmouth community: "His leadership in political activities on the campus and in the broader community, while occasionally unpopular and disturbing to some, have always made each of us think out our own positions more deeply than otherwise would have been the case. As gadfly to us all Jonathan plays a very important role, one the College can ill afford to lose."

Finally, they recommended that "he be appointed to the rank of Associate Professor with tenure, or, in the event he continues absolutely to refuse tenure, that his present term appointment in the rank of Associate Professor be renewed for a period of not less than five years."

Misleading History Decision

It was now up to the History department to make a tenure decision. Rieser made it clear that the half-tenure position in question would not affect the slot for a Far East historian in the Department, nor would it affect the number of tenured positions allotted to the Department. In a letter to the Dean of Faculty, Louis Morton, then Chairperson of the History Department, indicated his understanding that "Mirsky's tenure would not be counted against the Department's allotments."

Jonathan did not understand that as far as Rieser and the CAP were concerned, an affirmative



JONATHAN MIRSKY

are determined by ad hoc committees such as this one. The committee decided that Jonathan could best serve Dartmouth with a dual appointment in History and Chinese. The committee's recommendation was sent to the Dean of Faculty Leonard Rieser, who presented it to the Faculty Committee Advisory to the President (CAP).

It was agreed at the time that Jonathan would receive an Associate Professorship without tenure; this was compatible with Jonathan's intention to never accept a tenured appointment on the grounds that "professors should be subject to periodic and professional review."

Though disheartened at the still uncertain status of Asian Studies at the College, Jonathan accepted a four-year contract which promoted him to Associate Professor of Chinese and gave him in addition an official appointment in History.

Tenure Decision Required

Despite Jonathan's position on tenure, the CAP stipulated in 1969 that a tenure decision would have to be made on him when his

(Continued on Page 5)

Why Is Mirsky Leaving Dartmouth?

(Continued from Page 4)

vote by the History Department was necessary for Jonathan to retain his dual appointment in History and Chinese, whether he would accept tenure or not. He also did not know that the vote was on half-tenure only.

Leonard Rieser did not explain to Jonathan the significance of the History Department's impending vote. Louis Morton told Jonathan that Rieser was forcing the History Department to make a tenure decision that was bound to endanger the position of young, untenured faculty in the Department. Jonathan specifically had refused to be considered for tenure because he did not want to become involved in this kind of competition with his untenured colleagues.

He sent Louis Morton a letter stating his intention to resign if a normal tenured appointment for him jeopardized anyone else in the Department. The senior members of the History Department voted not to offer Jonathan a half-tenure position. Jonathan received the decision without dismay; the context in which Louis Morton had originally explained to him the significance of the vote precluded the possibility of Jonathan accepting a tenured appointment.

Unpopular Political Activities

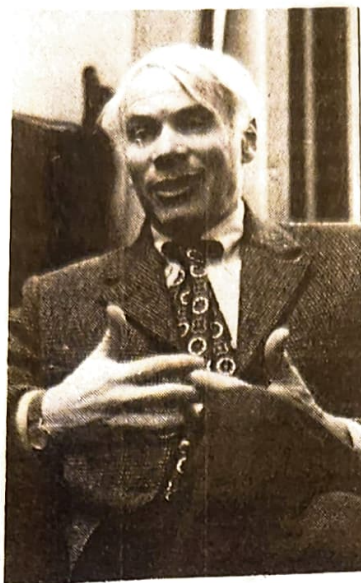
Since Rieser had assured Morton that a half-tenure position for Mirsky would not jeopardize other untenured History faculty, it is difficult to understand why Morton told Jonathan otherwise. It is possible that Morton, suspicious of the administration and concerned with departmental autonomy, did not believe Rieser.

It is more likely, though, that Morton and some of his colleagues really did not want Jonathan in their Department. Jonathan's anti-war activities and scholarly publications on Southeast Asia did not meet their standards of objective scholarship. Jonathan makes important and unpleasant historical connections which "objective" American scholars would not want to make.

For American scholars of Asia, it is personally and politically expedient to self-deceive; to acknowledge the nature of our involvement in Asia would expose their apolitical "objectivity" as criminal. Just as the

"novelty" of Southeast Asian Studies had worn thin by 1973, so too had the value of Jonathan's tenure as a gadfly. For Louis Morton, though, it was convenient to cover up the History Department's refusal to support either Jonathan or Southeast Asian Studies by obscuring the nature of the tenure decision.

Leonard Rieser, in a recent



LEONARD RIESER

interview, emphasized that once the History Department had declined half-tenure for Jonathan, it was impossible for the CAP to offer Jonathan a dual appointment in History and Chinese. Thus he recommended to the CAP that Jonathan be given a three-year contract as Associate Professor of Chinese; the uncertain status of Chinese made a longer contract unavailable.

Rieser also says that he expected that by the time that this contract expired, the Chinese program would have been absorbed in a formal Asian Studies Program in which Jonathan could get a long-term contract.

Jonathan was unaware of the reasons behind Rieser's administrative maneuvers. Morton had led him to believe that the History Department's vote served only as an effective counter to Rieser's pressure to give Jonathan a tenured position that neither Jonathan nor the History Department wanted him to have. Jonathan did not understand that it was regarded by Rieser and the CAP as a vote on his competence as an historian.

Jonathan expected to continue teaching as an Associate Professor of History and Chinese. No one explained to him why this might not be possible. A few days before the CAP made its decision on the nature of Jonathan's new contract, Leonard Rieser told Jonathan in private conversation that either he would be terminated, which was "unthinkable," or his new contract would be for five or more years. This certainly implied to Jonathan that his appointment would continue to be in both History and Chinese since the uncertain status of Chinese made a single appointment for five years impossible.

When the CAP, acting on Rieser's recommendation, voted to offer Jonathan a two and one-half year contract as Associate Professor of Chinese, Jonathan felt betrayed.

Contract "Anxious-Making"

Jonathan found the contract unacceptable for several reasons. The single appointment in Chinese meant that his position at Dartmouth was tied only to a program whose status was still very much uncertain.

Jonathan is also first and foremost an historian. He felt at the time that his position at Dartmouth was shaky, and that in the event that he had to find another job, recognition as a member of the History Department here would be a crucial factor in determining whether he could get a position in History at another college.

Jonathan also found the shortness of the contract "meager and anxious-making," and "measly recognition for a faculty member whose retention for much longer periods has been urged by the senior colleagues who know his work best."

Through our
Department
Down the
To the
ha