

Letter published on March 19/March 20 2005, Financial Times, Leaders and Letters (page 10).

Right to free inquiry trampled

From Prof Willem H. Buiter

Sir, This week, 218 members of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted in support of a no-confidence motion against Lawrence Summers, the university's president, motivated by their disapproval of/disgust with his informal discussion of possible causes of the under-representation of women in high-end scientific and engineering professions.

The 218 (outvoting 185 who supported Dr. Summers) join the inquisition, the perpetrators of Lysenkoism, the thought police and Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee in a sorry parade of enemies of academic freedom.

They trample on the right, and indeed the duty, of a scientist and scholar to pursue any and all lines of inquiry, wherever they may lead, to propose and offer up hypotheses for analysis and testing, and to think to unthinkable out loud, without fear or favour.

It is incomprehensible that at least 218 people so manifestly incapable and unworthy of running an academic wheel stall obtained faculty appointments at what until Tuesday was considered by many as the world's leading university. Political correctness is threatening to do to US universities what the Reichskulturkammer (Goebbels' ministry for propaganda) did for the arts and the media in a different time and place. It must be fought wherever it rears its ugly head.

Willem H. Buiter
(Professor of Economics, University of Amsterdam),
Visiting Professor, London School of Economics, London WC2A 2AE

Exact version submitted to FT without the edits by the FT.

On Tuesday, 218 members of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted in support of a no-confidence motion against President Lawrence Summers, motivated by their disapproval of /disgust with President Summers (off the record) informal discussion of possible causes of the underrepresentation of women in high-end scientific and engineering professions.

The 218 join the Inquisition, the perpetrators of Lysenkoism, the Thought Police and the McCarthy Committee in a sorry parade of enemies of academic freedom. They trample on the right, and indeed the duty, of a scientist and scholar to pursue any and all lines of enquiry, wherever they may lead, to propose and offer up hypotheses for analysis and testing, and to think the unthinkable out loud, without fear or favour and regardless of whom it may please or offend.

It is incomprehensible that at least 218 persons so manifestly incapable and unworthy of running an academic wheel stall obtained faculty appointments at what until Tuesday was considered by many to be the world's leading university.

Political correctness is threatening to do to American universities what the Reichskulturkammer did for the arts and the media in a different time and place. It must be fought wherever it rears its ugly head.