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Interview with Dr. R.S. Ellis Questioned by Dean J.D. Hoskins

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IN RE

DR. R. S. ELLIS

(SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY OFFERED BY THIS MEMBER
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE FACULTY.

This member of the University Faculty, upon being examined by Dean Hoskins, made the following material statements:

1. He attended a meeting called by Dr. Radford to arrange for an investigation of Dr. Sprowls' case (B.1)
2. He sought to get other members of the University Faculty to sign a letter addressed to the Association Of American University Professors asking for an investigation of Dr. Sprowls' case. (p.1)
3. He, himself, signed the letter (p.2)
4. He refuses to give any information regarding the connection of other members of the Faculty with this letter, claiming it to be a matter of confidence. (p.2, 11)
5. He sought outside interference in the Sprowls case without first making any attempt to get the true facts of the case from the University authorities. (p.3)
6. He believes that a member of the Faculty should not be discharged until his case has been "taken up and threshed over by a large number of people-disinterested." (p.3)
7. He does not approve of the present organization of the University with respect to engaging and dismissing members of the Faculty, holding that once a member is engaged the University should not discharge him "without trial". (p.4,5)
8. He is dissatisfied with the organization and methods of procedure of the University. (p.6)
9. During the recent disturbance he criticized the University in conversation with one of his neighbors. (p.7)
10. He claims to be loyal to and vitally interested in, the University (p.8)
11. He has criticized the University policy respecting his department, before his students. (p.9)
12. Acting solely on information coming from Dr. Sprowls and Dr. Radford, he advised Dr. Sprowls to seek an investigation of his case. (p.11)

INTERVIEW WITH DR. R. S. ELLIS
June 18, 1923.

Questioned by Dean J. D. Hoskins.

Q. Doctor, I want to ask you about some things with regard to the trouble we have had here in the University. Did you attend any of the meetings held to arrange for an investigation of Dr. Sprowls' case?

A. I attended one meeting that was called by Dr. Radford in his room to take up the question and consider it, the result of which, as far as I know, was several members of the faculty came over and talked to you about the proposition. As I understand the matter that is as far as it went. I also attended another meeting which was not at all for the purpose of considering that question and I don't remember that it was especially discussed. It was one of the regular meetings of the local chapter here. Dr. Glocker talked on the question of teachers' insurance, and the questions that came up there for active discussion did not concern Dr. Sprowls- one was of salaries and I was also one of the committee that talked the matter over with you. As far as I know there was no regular meeting of that kind. In fact, as I understand the policy of the A. A. U. T. it is not customary for local chapters to take action in such fashion. They consider it outside of the territory of a local chapter to do a thing of that kind. I may be mistaken about that but that is my understanding.

Q. Did you ask any member of the faculty to sign a letter asking for an investigation?

A. Yes sir, I asked a member if he would be interested in signing such a letter.

Q. What did he say?

Well he said that-- I could not tell you exactly what he said. He offered some reasons, saying he thought the thing should be taken up and threshed out. For some reason he did not care to take part in the matter.

- Q. He did not sign the letter?
- A. No.
- Q. Who was the man you asked?
- A. I was thinking at the moment of Dr. Hesler.
- Q. Was that letter signed or written when you presented it?
- A. I don't think so.
- Q. Did you sign that letter?
- A. I will answer that question, Dean, I did, but I would not answer a question involving any other member of the faculty.
- Q. You would refuse to answer any other question with regard to the faculty?
- A. I think that is fair. I was willing to sign such a letter myself but I don't think I am called on to make a statement with regard to any other members of the faculty.
- Q. You are Head of the Department of Psychology?
- A. Yes sir.
- Q. Do you consider your obligations to individuals in cases of this kind greater than your obligation to the University?
- A. No sir, I don't consider the obligation greater than to the University but I do consider my obligation as to the confidence of a Professor--
- Q. Suppose the Board of Trustees should ask you this question?
- A. What Question?
- Q. The one I asked you about signing the letter?
- A. I could not answer that for anyone simply because I think it is unfair to ask a man a question of that kind. If I have a confidential dealing with you, Dean, and somebody comes along and asks about that I don't feel free to expose your name, otherwise it would come down to this: the only thing necessary to bring out a thing of that kind would be ask a question and every person would tell everything he knew and if we were to follow that out I can see how no confidences

could be kept- simply get a person into a tight question and he would have to come out and tell all he knows about a thing. I may be mistaken, but that would be my attitude in a question of that kind.

Q. Did I understand you to say that you signed the letter?

A. Yes sir.

Q. To whom was that letter addressed?

A. I am not sure that I could give you his name. He is chairman of the committee who usually handles such cases.

Q. Of the American College Professors Association?

A. Yes sir.

Q. What were the contents of the letter, Doctor?

A. It was simply a routine statement as to the situation as some of us understood the matter and request that it be taken up in the ordinary way.

Q. Had you come to the President or to me and asked what the circumstances surrounding the case were?

A. No sir, I hadn't. I had heard a considerable number of statements as to what the situation was, of course- different opinions. It seems to me we will never have a teaching profession until when a man takes a position in a university he can have some kind of assurance that his case at least can be taken up and threshed over by a large number of people- disinterested- before he can be discharged. I have told Dr. Sprowls there were certain things about his teaching that were objectionable. I do not believe it is the thing to take up a man and discharge him without more formal notice than this.

Q. Do you know what he was told as to why he would not be reappointed?

A. No sir, but I know what he said- I know what some members of the faculty said which was practically that he did not fit into the organization- was not the sort of man to do satisfactory field

work. That is substantially all that I heard on that point.

Q. Your letter asking for the investigation was sent out after this information came to you?

A. Yes sir.

Q. The method of procedure in the University in the employment of professors is for the Head of the Department- I mean professors under the head- to make recommendations to the Dean and the Dean to the President and they all agree on it and then that recommendation goes up to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees and then to the Board of Trustees. Now when changes are made the head of the department makes recommendations with regard to the changes, stating reasons why the change should be made. He makes that recommendation to his Dean and that recommendation takes the same course as in the first case mentioned. Now are you in sympathy with that organization?

A. Well, I think there is this objection to be raised to its operation. I would like to make myself clear on this particular case. When Dr. Sprowls was brought here in the middle of the year to fill out the unexpired term of Dr. Clark he was definitely understood to be on trial- that was my understanding of the situation. I believe that at the end of this time his capacity in the way of field work was pretty thoroughly understood. I talked that over with Professor Thackston at that time myself and I am sure Professor Thackston felt sure he would never make a successful follower of Dr. Clark. In fairness to Dr. Sprowls and the teaching profession he should have been discharged then and not now. He had come here on trial and if Dr. Thackston had simply not recommended him for reelection I don't think anyone could have said a word. He had been brought on trial and knew this thing at that time. On the other hand, he was put on the pay roll presumably as a regular man and then told he did not fit in. In fairness to the man and the teaching profession, I think he should have been told that he did not fit in at that time. If

if had been done then I should not have had one criticism because that was what he was brought here for but it seems to me that to bring him here and take him on and discharge him without trial it is unfair-- to discharge him without bringing out something new- nothing has been brought out either directly or indirectly. He knew he was not a public speaker and could not take the place of Professor Clark.

Q. On what grounds would you say we should continue to keep him on?

A. My point is that you should not necessarily keep him. If in fairness this was going to be done at that time and if it was going to be done after that time it was as much a criticism of Professor Thackston as it was of Sprowls. I am also sure it was thought he was not a public speaker. There are certain things about his methods of teaching of which I do not approve. Looking at it from the standpoint of the teacher, unless a man can have some surety of going into a place that he will be kept after he has been on probation it is bad for the profession- that is the attitude of the A. A. U. P. It is not interested in taking a man and keeping him when he should be fired. In some cases where an investigation was made it was reported against the professor and said that he should have been kicked out. Some are found against the Administration. It is simply for a fair investigation on all sides.

Q. Isn't it a fact that you have been dissatisfied with the organization and methods of procedure of the University?

A. I will tell you the cause and extent of my dissatisfaction.

Q. You have been dissatisfied?

A. Yes, I will give the details because I want it to be a frank statement. Dr. Thackston came to me a year or two years ago and asked me if I would take Professor Duggan into my class and keep him there two or three years and give him a class in Psychology. I objected to that because I knew nothing about Professor Duggan and to say that I would keep him in class

two years and then turn over a section to him was entirely contrary to my position as to scholarship teaching. I objected very strongly but that is what happened. Dr. Sharp was brought here after I had told Professor Thackston that I knew he could not teach Psychology because he had not had enough training- one-fourth course in General Psychology- one four hours course of three months. He had also had a course in educational psychology. I looked over his record and told Professor Thackston he could not teach general psychology. I was instructed to give him two courses one term and one course another term. I objected to that and finally I took over both sections for the second term and get along pretty well despite of the fact that I had a large number. I arranged to get Dr. Sprowls to come over and take some of the work. I have no objection to Dr. Sharp. He was trained in rural psychology. He had a hard time in one section of psychology. After I had protested I did not think it was fair to give him that work any way. This year the same thing has happened except with some little deviation. I am interested ~~with~~ in my work and I don't like to see a man put in charge of a college class unless he has had pretty good training for that course. There is one other thing and this will conclude my dissatisfaction with my end of this situation. Professor Thackston has been working to get the Departments of Psychology and Education combined.

Q. How do you know that?

A. He made the suggestion to me. He talked the proposition over with Dr. Sprowls. I know, though nobody has told me so, that he has talked the matter over with you?

Q. At my request?

A. I don't know who broached the subject. I know he talked the matter over with me the first year I was here. As I have pointed out, I believe you will find if you will take time to go into the matter that psychology whatever its defects may be is aiming to be a science

and as such is more closely related to physiology than anything. It is in no sense dependent on education as a science. And here at the risk of being egotistical, I object to being placed under Dr. Thackston. I don't object to being placed under some man thoroughly trained but I do object to being placed under a man who has not had as much training as I have had. In the past two years I have had that situation to deal with. I feel that I would like to have a quality of work of a high order. I can't have unless I have somebody there qualified to do good work. I have been dissatisfied on that account. I don't see how any man could be otherwise.

Q. Did you have anything to do with furnishing material for the publication "Truth" either directly or indirectly?

A. No. I had no notion of anything like that coming out until Dr. Sprowls asked if I had seen the "Truth". I got a copy and looked it over and I have had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Q. Did you have any talks with Mr. Paul Cameron about the University in which you criticized the University?

A. I had a talk with Mr. Cameron in which I criticized the University- I would not say directly. Mr. Cameron and I are neighbors on the same street, and often discuss things. At the time this matter came up I discussed it but could not tell you what I said or did not say to him. I remember the question came up, however, and we discussed it some little time. We have a little card club that meets every week and we are members and see each other frequently and there were discussions and I could not tell you what I said because I attached no significance to it.

Q. Tell us what you have had to do with drawing up of the constitution of the University?

A. Frankly, very little. The fact of the matter is I might almost say nothing. At one of the meetings where the question of salary was considered Dr. Mulvania said he had written a letter to the President

suggesting certain changes and that was about all there was to that. At another meeting the question was brought up again and he said he either had a letter or had seen the President and the President had invited him to go around and talk to the members of the faculty and get their reaction. Some time later, perhaps a week, he came to my office and said he had seen about forty men and I judge I was about the last man, and he spent most of the time telling me what had been suggested to him and I made no additions to what he said. I believe this- that an institution like this would get along better if the faculty felt a little more interest and a little more responsibility in the organization of things.

Q. Are you expressing your own feelings when you say it would be better if there was a little more interest in the faculty organization?

A. Yes sir. There are a good many members who take this attitude. They go to their classes and ~~then~~ teach their classes and go home and feel that that is about all there is to it. It may be a defect or not of my own character but I am vitally interested in the University. You seem to gather I am hostile to the University but I want you to understand I am a native of the State and interested in the University.

Q. You can not assume that I am thinking anything. I am just asking you some questions to see what you have to say about it?

A. All right, to come back to this, I am vitally interested in the state and would like to see the educational system of Tennessee equal to that of any other state. I want to be perfectly frank about this as it is part of my business to think about educational problems. I am interested in the application of mental tests in operation and as a result of that I see things I don't believe other people see and I believe it is my duty to express freely such criticisms as I may have even in my classes with the idea that unless things are criticized we shall never have any improvement. I don't know of any system by which those defects can be removed.

Q. What do you mean by system?

All the way from elementary school to University.

The other day I was discussing mental tests and pointed out that as public schools had become more popular and the enrollments increased we have dropped out the study of Greek. As have also, as a matter of fact, cut down very materially in the enrollment of our Latin classes. We have in various other places eliminated mathematics. It isn't a question of whether Mathematics is good, Greek is good, Latin is good. It is a question of if we go on and increase the number in our schools whether we can teach them algebra. There is only a small number of the population qualified to do algebra as I understand it. If we get the average student to go on we must revise our system so he can do the work. I know you and Dr. Porter are strong advocates of mathematics and I agree it is essential. At the same time there is a large number of our students who are incapable of doing mathematics.

Q. I don't think that particular thing is relative. That thing we took before the faculty and threshed out and the College of Liberal Arts by vote decided to put it back.

A. I understand that but I want you to understand my attitude. It is a question that comes down to this. We are going to be forced to feel the increased number of failures in mathematics or to change the restrictions. I can't keep from disagreeing and I can't keep from criticizing. It is a part of the University program.

Q. Here is a thing that has been decided by the College of Liberal Arts of which you are a member. You may disagree with that just as I disagree. Do you go before your classes and criticize that?

A. Not as a matter of the University- as a policy, yes.

Q. Did you make the statement that you were sorry that you purchased property since you had become dissatisfied with the University and discouraged?

A. I may have done something of that kind.

Q. Did you ever come up and talk to the President or myself or anybody about your dissatisfaction?

A. I have talked to both the President and you and have written you letters at various times about which I was dissatisfied, particularly the matter of getting more help, that is, the help caused me dissatisfaction. If I could have some assurance of maintaining a high type of department it would be different.

Q. We told you it was a matter of funds and that we were doing the best we could do.

A. I don't feel that the employment of Dr. Sharp was a wise use of funds.

Q. We employed him at a very small salary because we did not have the funds.

A. There were some students who could have taken that work and handled it more satisfactory because he did not have that work.

Q. He was employed for only one year.

A. I am up against the same proposition this year and this arrangement that was made was in some respects worse.

Q. Did you attend any of the meetings that were held at Dr. Schaeffer's house?

A. No sir.

Q. The only meeting you attended was the one held in Dr. Radford's room and ^{at} which Dr. Radford presided?

A. Yes sir, and also another meeting of the local chapter of A. A. U. P. at which other things were discussed. No meetings were held for the purpose of discussing this proposition in any phase except the one at Dr. Radford's and I attended only that one.

Q. Were you on the committee of three urging Dr. Sprowls to have an investigation of his case.

A. I have not been on any committee.

Q. Did you urge him?

A.- I told him it would be a desirable thing. I would not urge him to do it.

Q. You told him it would be a desirable thing to have the investigation?

A. Yes sir.

Q. You told him that not knowing what the circumstances were but from hearsay?

A. Well I thought that was correct.

Q. In other words it came from Dr. Sprowls?

A. And from Dr. Radford.

Q. Dr. Radford and Dr. Sprowls?

A. Yes.

Q. As to the contents of that letter that was sent out- did you say that you sent that letter Doctor?

A. I did not say.

Q. Did you send it?

A. As a matter of fact, I don't believe I mailed it. I signed it.

Q. The letter was sent?

A. I take it it was.

Q. Do you know anything that was said.

A. Nothing only the ordinary form of request.

Q. Who sent the letter?

A. I told you earlier I could not answer a question like that.

Q? What were the contents of that letter?

A. Asking for an investigation.

Dean Hoskins: That is all.