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Section 2

May 1, 1991
Volume XXXVII, Number 33

OPINION

How Non-Ideological Has the Opposition Been to Nominee to National Humanities Council?

By Peter Shaw

BOTH THE AMERICAN COUNCIL of Learned Societies and the Modern Language Association have opposed the nomination of Carol Iannone to the National Endowment for the Humanities' National Council. According to a report in *The Chronicle* (April 10), they profess to be concerned that she "does not have a distinguished record as a scholar or administrator."

In letters to Edward M. Kennedy, chairman of the Senate committee that must approve nominations to the council, and to Lynne V. Cheney, chairman of the N.E.H., the executive director of the M.L.A., Phyllis Franklin, gave assurances that despite her political disagreements with Iannone, her organization's opposition was not "ideological." Let us see.

Franklin objected that Iannone, who writes literary criticism for a broad audience rather than strictly for scholars, published articles "that are not contributions to scholarship." Yet in a valuable article on the development of English studies as a discipline, Franklin herself a few years ago concluded:

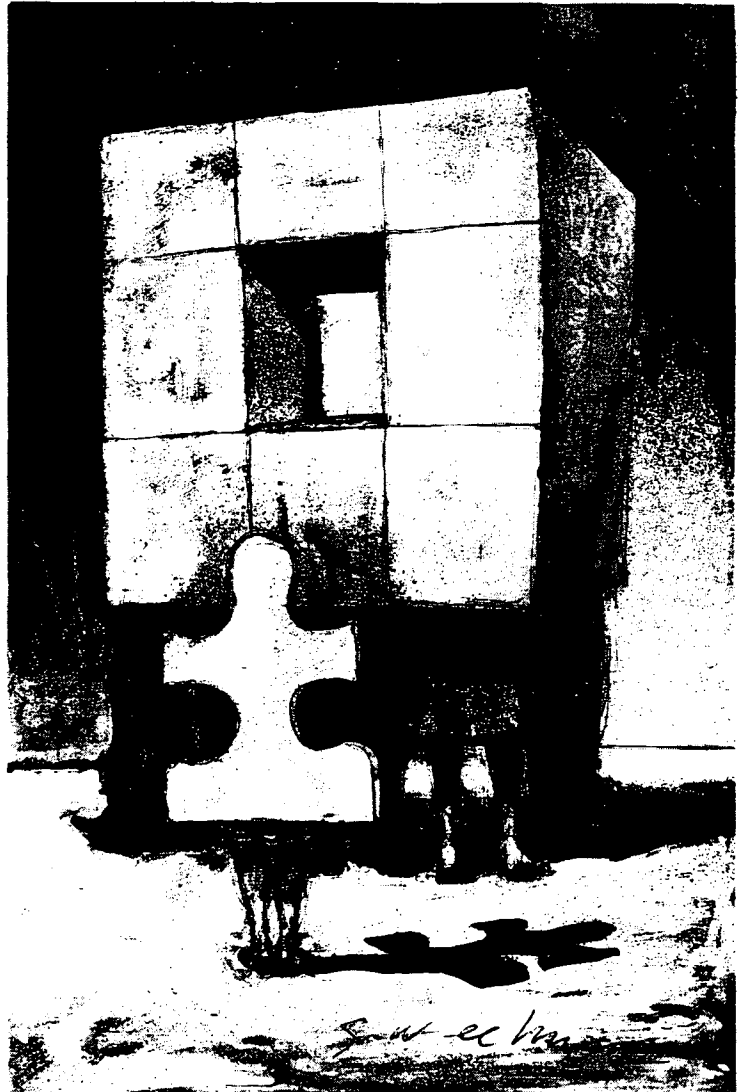
"The professional's view of his work

"If Franklin's own criteria had been applied, she would certainly not have been appointed" to head the M.L.A.

seems finally to have been so modified that studying the humanities—especially teaching and writing criticism—are regarded by many in the discipline as though these were in themselves humanities and as though the audience for such work was the broad audience of art."

One would have expected that in view of the ever more broadly humanistic trend noted in her article, Franklin would have welcomed someone with Iannone's approach to membership on the council.

Franklin also found Iannone's publication record "slim." Yet in 1985, when she—then older than Iannone is now—was appointed executive director of the M.L.A., she had published 24 items to Iannone's 31. Franklin had not then, nor has she since, written a book. She did publish a slim, pamphlet-sized monograph in 1969, which was assessed by the eminent scholar Richard Beale Davis. "Half the work is pretty obvious truth," he wrote in 1969, in the annual *American Literary Scholarship*, "half misleading conclusion." Was Franklin, then, qualified to head the M.L.A.—a



DAN SWEETMAN, FOR THE CHRONICLE

scholarly organization, as the N.E.H. National Council is not?

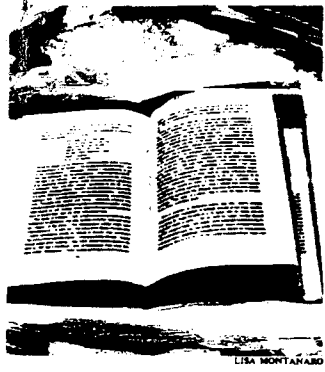
My guess would be that Franklin was qualified, as her subsequent tenure in the job seems to have confirmed. Yet if her own criteria had been applied, she would certainly not have been appointed.

IANNONE, on the other hand, qualifies on every count. In widely circulated letters discussing the nomination, the Yale dean and respected classicist Donald Kagan calls her "one of the most interesting literary and social critics of our time," and Lynne Cheney observes that "Iannone, a teacher of undergraduates, an editor of a periodical that addresses issues in

undergraduate education, and a well-published writer on contemporary cultural matters, is well positioned to advise the Endowment."

The two professional organizations claim also to oppose the nomination because the representation of college and university faculty members and administrators on the council has precipitously fallen—from 57 per cent to 30 per cent, according to Franklin—and Iannone, presumably, will not bring a full-fledged academic point of view to its deliberations. But the council is made up of 16 members with Ph.D.'s, all of whom, like Iannone, have taught or been administrators in the humanities, and eight public

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LISA MONTANARO

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among several that sued Kinko's; the judge in that case ruled that Kinko's had infringed on the publishers' copyrights by reproducing, at the direction of college and university faculty members, portions of

"The appropriation of material that consumed substantial amounts of our time, energy, and resources is tantamount to theft."

various books that Kinko's then sold to students as anthologies.

ONE OF THE FIRST salvos fired in the battle against the unauthorized use of copyrighted material in custom-produced anthologies involved one of our textbooks, *Modern Radio Production*, published by Wadsworth Publishing Company. Shortly before formal action was brought against Kinko's by other publishers, a Wadsworth official came across an

wholesale appropriation of about a month's worth of our labor.

The publisher wrote to the professor who had commissioned the anthology, asking him to supply a copy of the document that granted him permission to use the material. When no response was forthcoming, a telephone call revealed that no permission had been sought.

The professor felt that he was abiding by the fair-use provisions of the copyright law, and therefore had just gone ahead and used the material without a second thought.

After the professor's understanding of fair use was improved through his conversation with the publisher's representative, he agreed to pay a fee of 10 cents per book page—a total of 47 dollars and 60 cents for the 17 copies of the anthology he had already produced and distributed.

When the publisher notified us of the incident, we shared a sense of indignity that our work had been repackaged into an entirely new format without a thought that we should be informed.

Therefore we take satisfaction in the court's ruling because it restores a measure of dignity to the relationship of author

stances other than we intended. In this way the ruling reinforces the idea that intellectual property deserves as much protection as physical property; it cannot be "borrowed" without the consent of the owner. The appropriation of material that consumed substantial amounts of our time, energy, and resources is, in our minds, tantamount to theft.

Strong language? Perhaps, but anyone who has written a textbook realizes that the work is tedious, demanding, and not always particularly rewarding. Scholarly credentials are generally built on research-based publication. While textbooks sometimes do produce substantial royalties, that cannot be taken as a given. Advances are typically small in comparison with those offered by publishers to authors of trade books, and a textbook may not earn anything beyond the advance (much of which may be consumed by the authors' expenses for photography, photocopying, travel, and research activities). In essence, a textbook is a crapshoot with about six months to a year of your working life at stake—and the only real reward, other than personal satisfaction, is monetary.

Is Opposition to NEH Council Nominee Truly Non-Ideological?

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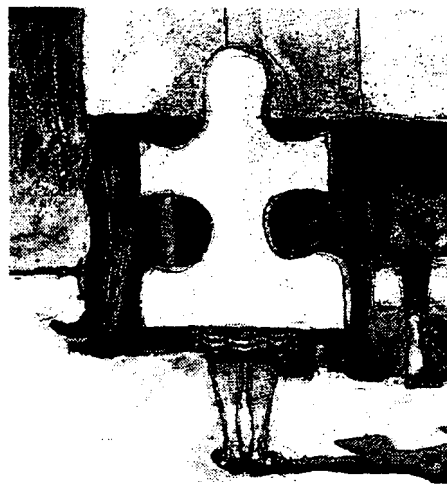
members, who are not expected to have Ph.D.'s.

Phyllis Franklin's figures could have been arrived at only by narrowing the definition of the humanities so much that, as Chairman Cheney pointed out in a memorandum, members with backgrounds not strictly in the humanities, such as Henry H. Higuera, a political philosopher, are not counted. Yet the broad interests of these members surely qualify them to be counted, like Iannone, as academic humanists. Higuera, for example, wrote his dissertation on *Don Quixote* and teaches Plato and Thucydides. One could understand, though not necessarily agree with, opposition to the nomination of Iannone on the ground that the *public*, which makes up only one-third of the council, is underrepresented. But to link the appointment of another academic to the mistaken notion of a decline in the number of academic members once again points to a search for pre-

THE POLITICAL MOTIVATION behind the opposition to Iannone's nomination peeps out everywhere. Take, for example, the inappropriate comparison in Franklin's letter to Cheney: "I will not quarrel with your view that she is 'well-published,'" she writes, "but I hope the Senate committee understands that as a writer on contemporary cultural matters,

Carol Iannone is not a George Will or a William Buckley." Surely Iannone should be compared with other literary critics, not columnists known for their conservative politics—unless, that is, the real concern is ideological.

Iannone is certainly opposed to the policies of Franklin and the rest of the solidly



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liberal-to-radical M.L.A. leadership. She has written critically—often devastatingly—about "Feminist Mysticism," "The Barbarism of Feminist Scholarship," and the follies of the cultural left—including the M.L.A. It is entirely understandable that the M.L.A. board is not happy with her nomination.

Similarly, there are those of us who

would rather not have cultural leftists running the M.L.A. Nevertheless, we are not challenging anyone's credentials, even though a better technical case could be made against some of them than they have succeeded in mounting against Carol Iannone.

As testimony to her lack of ideological motivation, Phyllis Franklin volunteers that the M.L.A., far from objecting to those conservative scholars who have "a profound understanding of the academic enterprise and the wisdom and experience needed to carry out a council member's responsibilities," approves of Robert Hollander. He will retire from the council in January, but when he "is eligible for reconsideration, we would welcome his reappointment." More effectively to demonstrate its tolerance for conservative views, the M.L.A. should do two things. First, nominate Mr. Hollander to its executive council. There he could serve as its lone traditional scholar in English studies. Second, withdraw the self-contradictory, ill-considered opposition to Carol Iannone. She is highly qualified by every measure save the M.L.A.'s current standard of ideological purity.

Peter Shaw is professor of humanities at St. Peter's College and author of The War Against the Intellect: Episodes in the Decline of Discourse (University of Iowa Press, 1989).