

PROFESSOR ADMITTED COMMUNIST

Explosive Academic Freedom Case Confronts UC Regents

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Times Staff Writers

SAN FRANCISCO. — The UC Board of Regents today is confronted with the most explosive academic freedom case to arise in the state since the UC loyalty oath fight of the early 1950s.

It must decide whether to fire Angela Davis, a young Negro philosophy professor at UCLA who is a member of the Communist Party.

The regents have a policy against hiring Communists. It has never been tested in court, but in similar cases in other states the U.S. Supreme Court has declared such policies and laws unconstitutional.

The dangers of the Angela Davis case are magnified by the fact that she is a militant black who has strong support from black students and faculty members at UCLA.

Case Widely Discussed

The case has been widely discussed within the university in recent weeks. However, it was not general knowledge until Robert Singleton, director of the Afro-American Studies Center at UCLA, stood up in a regents' committee meeting at the UC Extension Center here Thursday afternoon and asked permission to discuss the Davis case.

Singleton was refused permission to speak, but he then held a corridor news conference in which he accused the regents of "a paternalistic effort to prescribe for the black community a political litmus test."

The regents will decide Miss Davis' fate at a closed door meeting today. It is considered probable that they will fire the young professor

even though they know their 1949 policy against hiring Communists is not likely to hold up in court.

"We just couldn't stand the heat of being called 'soft on communism,'" one board member said in explaining the regents' probable course of action.

UCLA Chancellor Charles E. Young has warned that the dismissal of Angela Davis will cause a row "that will make the loyalty oath fight look like a Sunday School picnic."

Chancellor William J. McGill of UC San Diego said the firing would "cause a great deal of trouble throughout the university and nationally as well."

'Constrained by Policy'

On Aug. 26 Young, acting at the direction of the Board of Regents, wrote Miss Davis a letter that contained this sentence:

"I am constrained by regental policy to request that you inform me whether or not you are a member of the Communist Party."

On Sept. 5, Miss Davis, hired by the philosophy department last spring to teach such courses as dialectical materialism and existentialism, replied:

". . . It would seem plain that you are without authority to require answers concerning mere membership in the Communist Party or to deprive me of employment on such grounds.

"However, and without waiving

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my objections to the question posed, my answer is that I am now a member of the Communist Party.

Until Thursday UC officials thought about the Davis case largely in terms of academic freedom, but it became apparent Thursday that black students and faculty members at UCLA consider it an important racial issue as well.

When Singleton sought to speak at a meeting of the regents' educational policy committee, he said the case would have "a desperate effect on the rest of the black community at UCLA."

Later, in his corridor remarks, Singleton said "this move against a qualified black teacher raises grave doubts as to the regents' desire to encourage black participation in the university."

Lamar Lyons, vice chairman of the Black Students Union at UCLA, said, "many black leaders, to whom black people look as symbols, have been connected directly or indirectly with the Communist Party."

Henry McGee Jr., an acting professor at UCLA law school, said Communist Party membership is

"a white obsession—it's not relevant to black people."

Ed Maddox, another BSU member, said blacks will consider the Angela Davis case "a threat to developing the kind of leaders we need and not the kind white people think we ought to have."

UCLA officials expressed concern that the case might lead to a coalition of black students and white radical students, an alliance that has not formed on the Westwood campus in the past.

Miss Davis went through the usual recruitment proceedings and was hired nearly two months before the possibility that she might be a Communist came to the administrators' notice.

Although one official says there was "a little hearsay" in late June on the question, the first definite statement was made in the campus newspaper, the Daily Bruin, July 1 by William T. Divale, a 27-year-old student who shortly before had been revealed to be an undercover agent for the FBI.

"The philosophy department has recently made a two-year appointment of an acting assistant professor," Divale mentioned in a lengthy article.

"The person is well qua-

lified for the post and is also a member of the Communist Party."

"The day I read this, I felt we were starting on a road to conflict," says one of the UCLA administrators most charged with dealing with the Davis matter.

Subsequently, the San Francisco Examiner identified Miss Davis as the person referred to by Divale, and at an executive session of the regents later in July Chancellor Young was directed to ask her whether she indeed was a Communist Party member.

On June 30, the regents had adopted an appointment and promotion policy which included this declaration:

"No political test shall ever be considered in the appointment and promotion of any faculty member or employee."

Who is Angela Davis? On first meeting, she is an attractive, tall, bronzed-skinned woman of 25 with a natural hair-do. She is direct, soft-spoken and self-possessed.

She majored in French literature at Brandeis University, where she did undergraduate work, taking her junior year abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris. She was graduated from Brandeis, magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, in 1965.

From 1965 to 1967, she did graduate work in the

field of German idealism at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, West Germany. Later in 1967 and in 1968 she continued her studies at UC San Diego under famed "New Left" philosopher Herbert Marcuse, becoming a teaching assistant there in the 1968-69 school term.

Having been awarded a master's degree, she passed her qualifying examination for a Ph.D. in philosophy at UCSD in September, 1968.

The UCLA figure most

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instrumental in hiring Miss Davis last spring was Prof. Donald Kalish, chairman of the school's philosophy department.

Kalish since 1965 has been extremely active in the anti-Vietnam war movement and a variety of other New Left causes. At present, he is an important organizer of militant demonstrations planned nationwide against the war on Nov. 15.

Kalish was vice chairman of the Peace Action Council which, in 1967, spearheaded a massive antiwar march at the Century Plaza where then-President Lyndon B. Johnson was appearing.

In two lengthy interviews in the last 10 days and as often as he has been asked elsewhere, Kalish has said he had no idea Miss Davis was a Communist when he hired her and that the first he heard of it was from the Divale article.

Wouldn't Matter

But even if he had known she was a Communist, the professor adds, it would have made no difference.

"If somebody had given me concrete evidence that she was a member of a political party, I would have brought that information to the whole department," he says. "But my prediction is, I know what my own feeling would be, it would have been considered irrelevant.

"It would have been brought into discussion, and it would have been considered a positive point in that she was involved and an irrelevant point in that she was a Communist."

Kalish said that pursuing a need for an instructor in the fields Miss Davis will teach, and conscious of the drive at UCLA to hire more black professors, he had immediately decided to seek her out when he had learned in a telephone conversation with the chairman of the philosophy department at Princeton University that Miss Davis was being considered for employment there.

Swarthmore Offer

Princeton eventually decided that Miss Davis was not far enough along in her work to be hired. But Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania did make her an offer. The chairman of that school's philosophy department, Daniel Bennett, said last week that she had impressed him as "a first-rate intellect.")

There appears to be general agreement at UCLA that she is well qualified academically for the \$9,684-a-year temporary appointment she has received.

Kalish said the first person he had called for a recommendation on Miss Davis was Marcuse, who not only was her mentor at San Diego but also had instructed her at Brandeis.

The other said, "I've tried to work that through in my mind . . . What would my own position have been at the time if I'd known, I don't know."

The administrator explained that he had to balance off his knowledge that the regents and the people of the state would not approve of such an appointment with the consciousness of changing attitudes toward Communists, attitudes on the campus and moral, legal and practical questions of many varieties.

He went on to point out that important court decisions in recent years had ruled out tests of Communist Party membership as

a condition for employment.

And the administrator pointed out an irony. If Miss Davis was not a member of the U.S. Communist Party but was instead a Maoist—a member of such a pro-Chinese group as the Progressive Laborites—then he felt her appointment would now not be nearly so controversial.

Marcuse called her one of the five top graduate students he ever had. Other recommendations were of comparable enthusiasm. Many recommendations mentioned Miss Davis' interest in black studies and 'blackness' in general terms.

According to Kalish, none said anything about her being a Communist or even suggested there was any possibility of it.

Routine Hiring

In any case, her hiring went through routinely after discussion in the department and approval of the pertinent academic dean and administration.

The administrators, insofar as they thought about the appointment at all, were extremely pleased that such an apparently well-qualified young black teacher was being recruited in a formerly all-white department.

In interviews last week, two high-ranking administrators were asked what would have happened if they had known about Miss Davis' Communist Party affiliation. Would they have tried to sidetrack the appointment?

Both gave vague answers. One said that by the time such an issue got to the chancellor's office it would be "non-trivial" and it would have been almost impossible for the administration to act against Miss Davis without sparking a serious kind of campus row.

"There'd be no problem (getting her accepted) and yet I'd be a lot more concerned if she were a Maoist," he said. "Hell, she's pretty conservative."

This point was brought up in several interviews on the campus.

A law-school professor who is helping prepare legal arguments for Miss Davis if her case should go to court remarked, "The surprising thing to so many of us is that such a radical could be a member

of a square organization like the Communist Party."

This summer, as the issue over Miss Davis' appointment slowly gathered steam, the members of the philosophy department successfully sought aid in her behalf from leaders of the UCLA Academic Senate, the American Assn. of University Professors (AAUP) chapter on campus and other interested faculty members.

Administrators and other observers believe an impressive consensus has gathered behind her.

Most of these professors are very forceful in their expression of support, last week's interviews indicated.

Miss Davis, on the advice of her attorney, would not agree to an interview on the dispute surrounding her.

However, a copy of her letter to the chancellor was obtained from an independent source.

In the letter, Miss Davis gives a brief explanation of why she is a member of the Communist Party, saying:

"While I think this membership requires no justification here, I want you to know that as a black woman I feel an urgent need to find radical solutions to the problems of racial and national minorities in white capitalist United States.

Widens Horizons

"I feel that my membership in the Communist Party has widened my horizons and expanded my opportunities for perceiving such solutions and working for their effectuation. The problems to which I refer have lasted too long and wreaked devastation too appalling to permit complacency or half-measures in their resolution.

"It goes without saying of course, that the advocacy of the Communist Party during my period of membership in it has, to my knowledge, fallen well within the guarantees of the First Amendment (to the U.S. Constitution).

"Nor does my membership in the Communist Party involve me in any commitment to principle or position governing either my scholarship or my responsibilities as a teacher."

She did not say how long she had been in the party or what activities she had participated in there.