

"In One Word, It's Been TOUGH": Prof. Martin

by Maria E. Heywood

Traditionally, ENVOY graduating Editors are granted space, which they may fill as they choose.

I decided to grant my space to Professor Milton L. Martin, in gratitude for having enough interest in me as a SEEK student to pull me aside when I was a freshman indulging in negative distractions, which sometimes make us forget that college is for learning.

I am of the opinion that Prof. Martin has been unfairly slighted by the press, the administration and many, who judge him via hearsay.

Prof. Martin thank you for caring ... thank you for the inspiration and for instilling in me, confidence in myself. This confidence has aided in my acquiring the desire to SEARCH for intellectual ELEVATION through EDUCATION and the KNOWLEDGE to accept that at times, I know not.

One of the most controversial persons in the CUNY/SEEK vs. City Legislators (organized to dismantle minority education and end free tuition at CUNY) war and also one of the first to feel the pangs of the dismantling of the city-wide SEEK Program is Hunter SEEK Director Professor Milton Martin.

The designation "controversial" has been acquired by Professor Martin, following his numerous battles and stances. Last May, after having served five years as Director of the Hunter SEEK Program, Professor Martin

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Envoy photo/Doris Stepanian

Speaking freely with Prof. Martin

amounts to ... it is still an unusual thing to do." Another way one might look at it is that it provides another chance for those in command to get a better look at my work."

Professor Martin is reported to have sought the advice of counsel on this issue. He says, "it is a national problem, this is happening to us throughout the country, mine is not an isolated case. Those in control somehow through their institutionalization process manage to move against minorities in the same way—nationally—at the same time ... this is reminiscent of the reconstruction period, when minorities who had gained a

sizeable amount of political

each other. In fact, education in its truest sense humanizes. In colleges and institutions today, we merely become trained to do specific tasks. I'm very much concerned about the humanization of education ... making it real to people. It's possible for our colleges and universities to become the most humane institutions in the world. All we need is the leadership—the students are ready to move."

Many SEEK students have expressed that Prof. Martin is sometimes "too harsh." During many of the SEEK demonstrations at Hunter one could see Martin's tall frame towering above the heads of demonstrators as they rallied against the budget cuts that the program has been threatened with throughout its existence.

Prof. Martin and at times his entire staff were frequently there observing, involved and very much concerned with the students' struggles. It was their struggle also. Prof. Martin agrees that he is sometimes "hard on SEEK students ... I endeavor to explain to them that it is the person who pressures them to do well that cares about them. They sometimes don't understand, it is my job to prepare them for the struggles and disappointments which they will eventually face. Many of our students are very idealistic about the world out there. They are not aware of the harshness of racism, particularly within this system. They have to be told that people will move against

Creative painting is one of Martin's many talents. He also enjoys writing poetry and working on his paintings when at home in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. He also devotes time to innumerable professional societies, in which he serves as a member or on the board of directors. Among these are The National Association of Social Workers; The Association of Afro American Educators; Board of Directors of Africare and The Board of Directors of the National Black Theater.

According to Prof. Martin, "there is nothing I would do differently given the chance. We did many rewarding things for our students. We gave them the opportunity to study abroad in the Caribbean, Africa and Puerto Rico. Many also travelled throughout the U.S. southern universities ... we also held a summer remediation camp which was of tremendous benefit to our students ... generally in middle class families, children are often afforded the opportunity to travel. These parents are aware that travel in itself is education. The opportunity to travel abroad aided in broadening the horizons of our SEEK students, freeing them of the limited scope of their immediate communities, usually that of small, poor communities as Harlem, Bed-Sty and East New York.

Amid the unrest of the entire Hunter community encountered by Prof. Milton Martin (considering that he began his task as director at the peak

his tenure bearing associate professorial rank. Elaborating on the issue, Professor Martin stated, "those in command have made me the only higher education officer (HEO) in the

entire system to have the distinction of Department chairman ... there's no question in my mind about what this means. Yet, I am still grateful for the opportunity to be here and continue the work I started but, at the same time I sometimes feel a bit awkward. It is an unusual position for me and I suspect for administration. I preside over a personnel and budget committee (P&B); voting on faculty retention, and evaluating faculty and staff. I think that one should have equal rank and status. Some of the people working under me outrank me academically. The College decided that they didn't give tenure for administrative work. I don't see my work as simply administrative ... I have been teaching, and I hire and evaluate teachers. Precedent and the board guidelines clearly point out that once it gets into this realm—it is no longer simply administrative work."

Professor Martin continued, "I was raised to have a great deal of respect for authority, but authority ain't always right. To place one on the HEO line, deem him department chairman and give him an assistant deanship is in error. This has NEVER been done before, I'm a first. It is *dispirate* treatment! But again, I'm very happy to be employed. I am being treated differently than all others and to me this is a form of unequal treatment. I don't think this is or was the intent of the college ever, but that is what it

is. A sizeable amount of political power and jobs of repute throughout the country ... those in control began to move against that potential power; it's a backlash." What is actually happening is that minorities are being thrown out—disenfranchised—we are being "put in our places" and every kind of guise in the world is being used to maintain and continue the process.

"The SEEK Program is in fact being dismantled, gradually. In two years time we'll have been reduced by almost a million dollars. The program cannot operate with such cutbacks. This is merely one example of the dismantling process. These are cutbacks that we're being forced to take. We (SEEK) must take the same percentage of cut as the university, a cut between 10 to 15%."

During the time that Professor Martin has been at Hunter, he has been attacked politically on many occasions. Asked to describe his experiences at Hunter, Professor Martin appearing somewhat drained after a moment of reflection replied, "... in one word it's been TOUGH. It has also been exciting. I've learned an awful lot in respect to the workings of a university and based on my experiences it has become abundantly clear to me, that the university is politically oriented. Politicians run them not educators. He who controls the money controls the game, in this case, the institution.

However, when one is attacked he is either destroyed or he is made stronger. I really believe that the latter has happened to me. I'm an extremely durable person, I'm able to handle extreme pressure. I'm

justing and re-adjusting their positions ... becoming more visible. It's very interesting—watching some of the movement on all levels within the university—on the other hand, outside the university as well. Have you ever seen a buzzard soaring around. A buzzard never makes a spontaneous move—he's a very calculating, high flying, flesh eating bird. He's pretty much a coward, unlike the eagle—a buzzard watches you while you die. He hovers around, coolly riding the breeze until you die. Buzzard watching used to be one of my favorite pastimes when I was a child in Georgia.

Ranking high on Prof. Martin's most difficult situation list is the recent task force report on the SEEK Program. The report cited Prof. Martin as "anti-intellectual" and accused him of "having fired intellectually gifted people."

Prof. Martin declared "... this is a very difficult situation to live with, but I have and will continue. The writer of the report is the biggest tool and fool I know. In many ways it's been very helpful. I now have support that I had not dreamed possible, I'm being supported nationally and internationally. It's clearly a stupid report, a set up, the work of a spastic madman, Dr. Dum Smitz. Incidentally the task force was comprised of Black people; they wrote the worst reports on us ... It was somewhat embarrassing. This is clearly a clear example of the pitting of one Black group against another. There is such a thing as Blacks hating other Blacks. I'm sure this statement will cause me a lot of trouble. Nevertheless, this is my experience. In becoming educated, some of the rules we learn really pit us against

them ... as they have been doing throughout our history. I realize that black students, like many of us have grown up most of their lives reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and believing in justice and freedom for all ... I believed that also. I still have a lot of faith in the idealism of American Democracy, but when I look at my experiences and those of my people, I cannot forget. This system, from a historical perspective, is and has been pitted against all minorities. In terms of the Hunter campus it is a racist institution. I have been told by white people here that there is a strong anti-Black feeling here. Some instructors still believe that Black people cannot learn. There are a lot of Blacks in the world who were rejected by white institutions causing them to leave in despair and travel to Southern Black colleges, only to return as successful leaders of their people.

Prof. Martin attended Agricultural & Technical College of North Carolina where he earned his B.S. degree in Sociology. His next educational venture led him to obtaining his Masters in Social Work at the Atlanta University School of Social Work, then to Rutgers University School of Alcohol Studies where he received a certificate. Martin acquired all of his past education on scholarship and is presently a Ph.D. candidate at Teachers College of Columbia University. Prior to accepting the directorship of the Hunter SEEK program, Martin acquired some experience in relation to the building of a minority education program while serving as consultant to the AIMS Program at Stony Brook University.

of the bloody student demonstrations of the seventies) "coupled with the fact that we were all relatively new in the holocaust of academia, I feel we have managed to do a superb job here at Hunter. I just wish that all concerned would take time to evaluate what we have done in human terms and with honesty ... look at our work in a more realistic less biased sense. In judging me I wish they would pay less attention to my style and grade me on what I have been able to produce. I'm a productive effective person, really good. Not superficially good, good for real.

According to Satasha Millin, a graduating SEEK student, "Prof. Martin sets aside his title and really talks to you as a friend ... that is essential when it comes to encouraging our students to pursue their college education. He is highly misunderstood."

Regarding the question of being controversial, says Martin, "I am that, I've been this way or termed this way all of my life. I'm used to the designation. It's not bad, it's not good, it just is. In lots of ways it can be seen as good, it provides one with visibility, although I prefer being private. Thinking about my life and how I've lived it, I've earned both the distinction and the reputation of being controversial. So, now what, I am.

Envoy
wishes
everyone
a happy
summer