

**Tom Rainey**  
**Interviewed by Stephen Beck**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**August 9, 2017**  
**Part 2 of 2**  
**FINAL**

**Beck:** So, you think the way around that is that the college needs to have more flexibility around enrollments in the upper-division programs?

**Rainey:** Absolutely.

**Beck:** One way that people have tried to do advanced work is to have all-level programs or multi-level programs, where there might be part of the program that would make possible advanced-level work.

**Rainey:** Right.

**Beck:** In your experience, has that sort of thing been successful?

**Rainey:** No. Also, not looking at this strictly from a union standpoint, it's a form of what they call in the cotton mills "stretch out" for the faculty.

**Beck:** What does that mean?

**Rainey:** It means that you've got to spend more time with a smaller number of people, and at the same time, do what you're supposed to do in other parts of the program. It's a form of stretch out, as I see it.

**Beck:** Really, it's basically unsupported faculty work.

**Rainey:** Right.

**Beck:** It's an ongoing problem.

**Rainey:** It is, and I don't see how it's going to be solved. That's another reason why I'm not so sanguine about our future.

**Beck:** The last area you mentioned when we were talking the other day was that one of your concerns is the routinization of charisma. What do you mean by that?

**Rainey:** Well, I was a Marxist for about a year and a half, but I've always been a Weberian since I read Max Weber—Max Weber—talking mostly about religious movements. There are two parts to this, two sources of wisdom, at least as far as I'm concerned. The other one is Isaiah Berlin's *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. And there's a great study of the German Social Democratic Workers Party by, I can't remember his first name—Michael—but he was a student of Weber. But Weber's argument about bureaucracies—and I see this absolutely in the Russian Revolution, and certainly—certainly—in the Chinese Revolution,

and with Christianity and so on—is that mass movements based on charismatic leaders, or charismatic visions, or that sort of thing, in two or three generations, become bureaucratized. Routinized.

That happened to the Catholic Church. That's one of Luther's major problems with the Catholic Church. It became less spiritual and more political, largely because this bureaucratization occurred. And it happens with labor unions in the United States. It happens with virtually every mass movement. If it's successful, every revolution has become routinized in this way. So, you eventually end up with an institution where the actual function of the institution is less important than the perpetuation of the bureaucracy that's created. And I see a lot of that happening at Evergreen over the years.

The other thing that comes from routinization is the series of what I would call "institutional noes." It almost verges on undermining academic freedom. One of the institutional noes is that you cannot run a program if it doesn't have an enrollment at a certain level. I don't know whether this is the impingement of State laws, or regulation, or that sort of thing that have pushed this institution into what I consider, and what some faculty consider, an excessively bloated administration. Frankly, one of my major concerns about creating a vice president for this, and a vice president for that, and some of these newer initiatives to deal with equity, is what it means is that administrators will be hired at a higher price, and they then need staff to help them. That's where the money goes. That means that you can't be subsidized with a lower student ratio. It means all sorts of things.

The other aspect of that for us as faculty is that we have become our own secretaries, we have become our own organizers. I finally agree with Patrick Hill that the continuation of the evaluation process that we have is largely a bureaucratic relic. So, if there's two cultures at Evergreen, it's the administration and the faculty. They've kept up well with salaries; we have not. What happened in Russia in two generations after the revolution is the creation of a post-revolutionary bureaucratic elite, whose major concern was keeping their jobs, and expanding their bureaucracy, and I see that as happening at Evergreen, and it's very disturbing to me.

It's why, in some ways, I was sort of halfway—not all the way, I want to say—that seemed to be one of Bret's early concerns, which was opposed by a group that engaged in riotous behavior; that will create now more administrators; that—as a Board of Trustees friend who will remain nameless, and should—said, "It seems that what we have is a series of administrative fixes to something that cannot be fixed by creating one more office, or one more vice president." That's what I mean.

**Beck:** So, growth of the administration.

**Rainey:** The growth of the administration, and the fact that the charismatic vision—which, there was never a unified charismatic vision. There were a lot of charismatic visions. But, you could at least dream. Right? [laughing]

**Beck:** Yeah.

**Rainey:** It was easy then to approach other dreamers amongst the faculty and say, “Let’s do this.” It’s much more difficult to do now. You could say, “Let’s do this.” It might require going out and talking to some loggers. I mean, you have to go through a whole office now that says okay to that.

As I say, some of that may be imposed by the State, it may be imposed by Federal government in the kind of way we get money, and that sort of thing. I understand that, so I’m not saying it is a sort of pernicious conspiracy to create a bureaucracy. I just think it happens. It certainly happened in China. In a sense, that’s what the terrible, terrible thing that Mao dreamed up called the Cultural Revolution was all about [laughing] was to attack the bureaucracy, was to loosen the bureaucracy. By making that criticism, I should also add that I think it’s pretty much inevitable in any charismatic movement.

**Beck:** Bureaucratization.

**Rainey:** Yeah, routinization.

**Beck:** I’m hesitant to end on a dark note. [laughing]

**Rainey:** Okay.

**Beck:** I’m wondering what . . .

**Rainey:** I guess I could maybe say this. I consider myself an Evergreen success story. Had I stayed at Duke, or had I stayed at Buffalo, I would have been able to teach Russian history, Balkan history, European history. I would not have been exposed to minds like yours, I would not have been exposed to minds like Bob Sluss, or Byron Youtz, or Rudy Martin or that sort of thing, and learned so much that’s been important to me as a person, and as a historian. That’s one of the reasons I’m happy I’ve spent my 45 years here.

**Beck:** What advice would you have to faculty members of my generation, or younger than me? I’m not exactly all that young anymore. [laughter] But what would you recommend to the successor cohort of faculty to your cohort? What do you suggest we strive for, or do?

**Rainey:** As trite as it may seem, keep abreast in your discipline, because that’s one thing you have to bring to the table is your knowledge of philosophy, to use you as an example. Take chances with yourself. Open yourself to learn from other colleagues. That’s the best part of it, for me, of Evergreen, my reflection. As I said, I’ve had the best of students I’ve ever had here, and I’ve had the worst. I taught at Duke, and there were no bad students, because it was an elite school. It was hard to get in, so there

were no bad students. There were no C students. I trust that I've become somewhat adept at teaching C students, Evergreen style.

I guess the last piece of advice would fit in with this other thing, and that's the advice that comes from Bertrand Russell—and that is where you said one time—whereas a dogmatist is dangerous, a cynic is useless. I am not Pollyannish in my optimism. I'm not saying that. But I've always promised myself—and this is not why I'm quitting school—that if I became cynical, I should step out of the classroom. I have nothing to teach, and I'm not going to go before young people and spill my cynicism on them. That is unconscionable, as far as I'm concerned. So, stay reasonably optimistic about the future of Evergreen. But [laughter] *illegitimi non carborundum* —don't let the dirty bastards grind you down. [laughter] Every time I get a little bit cynical about the school—and sometimes I do, I confess—I talk to Oscar Soule, and Oscar calms me down. [laughter] He calms me down.

But I have continued to teach largely because of my optimism about what we do in Evening and Weekend Studies. Yeah, I would end certainly on a positive note. It has been a great experience for me, and I am delighted that I spent my life here. I didn't get as much published as I thought I would, but I've learned more about love, life and the American way. [laughing]

**Beck:** I just remembered a question that I wanted to ask you. This is as much for my own personal curiosity as it is for recording for posterity. I heard a story, secondhand, about your role in bringing what is, in effect, tenure to Evergreen.

**Rainey:** Yeah.

**Beck:** I can at least start the story, and maybe you can complete it. Apparently, it came before the Legislature, I understand, the question of whether Evergreen faculty members had tenure.

**Rainey:** Right.

**Beck:** It might have been through the courts or something, but the word came through to the faculty that it had to be something that the faculty affirmed, that they did not have tenure, and it needed to be unanimous.

**Rainey:** Yeah.

**Beck:** The way I heard the story is you stood up and said, "Well, I'm going to make this a short meeting, because I want tenure." I don't know if that's true, but I wanted to see if you have a version.

**Rainey:** Yeah, that is. Well, yes. There are two parts to that. I never liked the designation of—we have, essentially, a six-year up or out. If you're not converted, you're out. Anybody who survives that, I think, should have tenure. And I think we should have tenure, not necessarily for any clear and present thing that's happening, but what could happen. With the atmosphere we're in now, with the attacks on the

university by the right, I'm glad we have tenure. I'm glad. I think any faculty that gives up tenure is idiotic and stupid, because the reason for tenure in the first place—and for the most part, I think this has fulfilled its promise—is to protect academic freedom.

Let me use a kind of reverse example, and many of my younger colleagues would agree, and many would not agree. If we didn't have something like tenure, the President could dismiss Bret Weinstein as an inconvenient problem for him. We've had certain examples, where we've had to hold on to somebody too long. Jorge Gilbert is an excellent example of that. But tenure, I believe, offers a certain level of latitude for a faculty member to say anything they want to say. Not yell fire in a crowded theater, but within reason.

The other thing is that you have to understand that, in some ways, I'm a real traditionalist. Maybe this is because of my Southern upbringing. Maybe it's because I'm a historian. I don't know. But my ideal, if I could be anything else in the world, if I could choose a historical figure to be, I'd be a Renaissance Pope, because I love the ceremony, and I love the dress. I would gladly give up the designation of "member of the faculty" for "professor," because I have something to profess.

I thought that that tilt toward egalitarianism was not good. So, I use the title now, "Emeritus Professor of Russian and Eurasian Studies." The reason for that, as much as anything else, is you go to a conference, or you want recognition of a paper or something like that, and you say member of the faculty and they think you're an adjunct faculty member or something like that. And because I frankly like the title, and I think it fits.

But I am strongly in support of tenure, even though I knew I would probably, on the basis of my own performance, never be fired. But I was denied tenure at Buffalo, and denied even a second contract, because I spoke out against the war, and because I spoke out against inequality. I was arrested in the largest civil rights demonstration that's ever been done, in North Carolina. I'm a strong advocate of civil rights. I saw, throughout the South, those people who were not protected by tenure who stood up for civil rights being dismissed from their positions, so I'm strongly an advocate of tenure.

I was denied tenure for bad reasons. I had published a monograph and three major articles in refereed journals, but it was purely political. But they could do it, and everybody who had involved themselves in trying to get the police off campus, or trying to get the administration to back off on some of the sort of draconian ways they were dealing with students at Buffalo, did not get renewed.

So, that's the history that I came to Evergreen with, and I thought, as long as we didn't have tenure, we would be vulnerable to any shift in the political winds. Tenure will probably protect both faculty involved in our recent fracas. And rightfully so. I don't think either one of them should be fired.

**Beck:** When was this discussion about tenure?

**Rainey:** You know who brought it up? What started the whole discussion was Patrick Hill came back from a conference somewhere, and the conference was about tenure, and about contracts and things like that. There was a case, I think in Boston—and Patrick was Boston Irish, and almost never left [chuckles] except to go to Stony Brook. I really liked Patrick, you know, but he was one of those people you had to take a lot of time with when they stopped you. He's the one who gave me the idea of evaluations being bureaucratic nonsense.

He went to a conference there—and this is from a Provost, so I think that's significant—came back from a conference—Olander was the President then—and one of the discussions was about a case where a group of faculty were denied tenure. And the case, in some wonderful Massachusetts Commonwealth State of court, said that a professor who had been in a job for a certain length of time had a property interest in their job. That's what started us to talk about it again, and discussing it again, when Patrick brought that back to the faculty. He was the one who organized that. He was the one who carried through on it.

Then, we redid the whole evaluation thing. I think the other part of that is to do an evaluation with everybody every . . . was occupying 40 percent of the deans' time, and to clean that up some so we had some kind of cycle. At that point, it was decided that after two contracts, if a person was not converted, then they were gone. If they were converted, they had tenure, and that's how that worked out.

**Beck:** That must have been in the late '80s.

**Rainey:** Yeah, late '80s. I give Patrick credit for birddogging that one and getting it before the faculty to discuss.

**Beck:** I know you have to get going, and I should probably get going, too.

**Rainey:** Okay. Any other questions?

**Beck:** You know what? I can't think of anything right now. I think I've gone through the questions that I had for you. I wanted to see if there was anything else that you wanted to say before we end the day.

**Rainey:** I just want to thank you and Sam and Nancy to put the thing together. It's long overdue. Just one point. If I were 10 years younger, and not otherwise occupied, I would get back into this. David Hitchens and I talked for years about writing a history of Evergreen. David Hitchens, the two professionally trained historians, right? David was on the planning faculty, and David knew where all the skeletons were buried, and it would have been great. David had the knowledge of the planning faculty

conflicts, which were immense; people who made enemies then that they never forgave. We talked about that, as he lay dying, and many other things.

One, I urge you to put this in Sam's ear. Somebody needs to talk to Joan Hitchens, because she recorded some of that, and that's the only thing you're going to have on David. Plus, his records, and it includes about a 50-page thing that he wrote about why he came to Evergreen. He talked about the conflicts, particularly over art, and Sid White's view and other views. I think that part of it needs to be raked over a little bit by anybody who is going to do a history.

The other part of that is why I think it's splendid that you all are doing this. It's that I had a conversation with Chuck Nisbet. No two people could be so different as Chuck and I, but we taught very well together, because we believed that things ought to happen on time, and you had to do some planning, and you had to organize it, and had to hold people accountable.

About four years ago, he was through here, and we had dinner together. I told him that David and I were thinking about working on this. He says, "You and David can't do it." I said, "What do you mean, Chuck?" And he said, "You can't do it because"—and he used this specific example—"you can't do it because you don't know all the experiences of all the faculty. You and David will do it from your perspective, but that won't be the true history of Evergreen."

So, I hope somebody in the future picks this material up. I don't have time to do it, or I would say I'd help do it. I'm trying to get Nina to write her family history.

The other part of that is that I have decided that I am going to write something about my experience at Evergreen, as soon as I get this book finally out the door. I'm just going to call it *My Evergreen*. [laughing]

**Beck:** I take E. H. Carr to heart on this. "The historian is always present in the history."

**Rainey:** That's right.

**Beck:** That's just unavoidable. It's as unavoidable as being human.

**Rainey:** That's right. You have to be careful that you're not a hero in your own novel, though.

[laughter]

**Beck:** That's a point, yet.

**Rainey:** And that's the tendency.

**Beck:** That's true. Yeah, I think that's one of the valuable things about the oral history project is that we get multiple voices.

**Rainey:** I do, too.

**Beck:** If anybody ends up writing a history about Evergreen, it's still going to be that historian writing it, and it will be from that person's point of view.

**Rainey:** Right.

**Beck:** But if that person does so responsibly, we'll have to draw upon all the voices, and there are a lot of different perspectives.

**Rainey:** Yes.

**Beck:** Thank you again, very much.

**Rainey:** Oh, you're welcome.