

D I S S E N T

Remarks by

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My few remarks are labeled simply "Dissent" on the program. It must be obvious to all of you I cannot speak in the context of the program of the day, for inherent in the term is an orthodoxy held by a majority against whom the dissent is directed -- this is clearly inapplicable to monetary policy. As a non-economist who has been searching anxiously for an orthodoxy in which he can find comfort in the presence of a majority of his betters, I can only say my search has been fruitless. Orthodoxy among monetary economists exists like beauty - only in the eye of the beholder. Or a more apt analogy might be a paraphrase of the description of the oboe, and say that monetary policy, at least right now, is an ill wind no one blows good.

My remarks are directed instead to the broader American dissatisfaction that has found its sharpest expression on the U.S. campus. And make no mistake, the campus disorders do not exist in vacuo. They are symptomatic of a general unhappiness with the way things are -- an unhappiness that is pervasive in America today. The issues generally are reflective of national concerns -- Viet Nam, race, the quality of life style. Even the issue of governance of the American university, it might be argued, is a sublimation of the distress of many of the electorate with the traditional political structure of the United States. To use another analogy, the student rebellion could be likened to an aneurism in a hypertensive body politic. Like all aneurisms, the blowout is occurring at a point where the system is weakest, for the student newly arrived in the system has not yet developed the inhibitory

mechanisms that contain the identical pressures in the older members of society.

I realize I am dissenting from an orthodoxy right away in this statement, for the conventional wisdom of recent months says that the dissenting student is a mutation or a sport (and I'm using "sport" in its classic sense, believe me) who is totally new in our society. According to this wisdom, they can be clearly distinguished from all the rest of American society in their idealism and concern for their fellow man in a dehumanized, mechanistic and materialistic world. In special ways, so goes this orthodoxy, they are a total departure not only from the traditions of the United States, but have no counterparts in contemporary American society in their philosophic interests.

This dialectic is satisfying to liberals and conservatives alike, even though their reasons are quite different. For those liberals whose guilt feelings are insatiable, there is a whole new spectrum of social shortcomings. For those conservatives who require a periodic renewal of their sense of outrage, a fresh and apparently inexhaustible supply of heretics has been provided.

But this doesn't make it so. The causes of student dissent are not unique phenomena of the student population. They do not uniquely possess these concerns. The fact that they are an easily identifiable group within the society does produce an understandable confusion between them as instruments of expression of the concerns of society at large on the one hand, and as sources of special problems attributable to their group identity on the other. By this kind of chemistry, Viet Nam, racism, political change, the pressure of an urbanized

congested world, become a simple issue of law and order on the campus. And this is an issue everyone understands and can articulate. In the process, attitudes shift, and the consideration of greater good of our society falls through the cracks.

It is precisely because the student dissenter is a member of a special - and easily identifiable - class he bears a special responsibility for the way he expresses his dissent. And when in the expression of that dissent he crosses the thin line between the rational act of a concerned and civilized man, and the unthinking and violent act of primordial man, he betrays all students everywhere. Not only students, but their allies who share their concerns, their aspirations for a better day for human society. The tragedy of campus violence is really the human tragedy, for there are so few who would turn to violence as an early resort if not one of first instance. Yet the majority of students will yield to the appeals to group identity and either refuse to propose alternatives for leadership or consider them if proposed. Violence is a weapon to be used sparingly, if any human society in the democratic western tradition is to be possible at all. Violence becomes contagious. The cynical reference, "One colonel out, one colonel in," describes those unstable societies where political, social and economic changes are ushered in by regular and repeated violence.

The role of the innocent has never been an easy one, and the casualty lists of the last eighteen months are certainly testament to the numbers of innocents who have been slain in this wave of unrest on the campus.

High on the list is the educational institution itself. It has been many, many months since I read any kind word at all about universities. It is not only unfashionable, but in many circles dangerous to speak about any of the accomplishments of the American system of higher education. And, of course, this same structure applies to any of its structural elements -- students, faculty, administration, and trustees. Euphemistically referred to as the university community, they resemble more often unwilling and hostile passengers who by accident and not design have found themselves in a common vehicle they all want to drive, with no agreement at all on the destination. Quite obviously, no student dissenter is going to step forward to defend it, regardless of the benefits he may be deriving from it. Burning down the gymnasium may not stop Viet Nam, but it is a legitimate substitute for the Pentagon. Smashing several million dollars of computers at a university installation may not clear up pollution of the environment or change the life style of society - but after all, they are machines, and they're handy. Deriding the faculty and the administration may not alter the relationships of Congress, the electorate, and the executive branch of the government, but it's the next best thing. The irrationality of the dialectic I posed earlier has surely been accentuated by the student response.

Now, this is not to say the university as a political institution does not require continual reassessment and continual change. But what I am saying is that this is a separate kind of an inquiry altogether. Students have much to answer for -- not only those who have been in the activist minority (with whom I can identify), or the violence oriented activist minority (with whom I cannot), but the great mass who, like their counterparts off campus, have been

inert except when provoked into response by derivative issues like the use of police - which I submit are irrelevant to the broader societal issues that started the ruckus in the first place. Student riots are mob responses -- they're unthinking and amoral. The fact they occur on university campuses with sensitive, educated people, including faculty members on occasion, as constituents makes them no different than any other mob response. It is a mob, and one of a kind with Brown Shirts, Black Shirts, and Hitler Jugend.

Not only is the delicate fabric of the university torn in the process -- a fabric that has to hold the university in its proper place in society -- but the legitimate broader social causes suffer -- causes that are shared by many outside the university, and whose efforts to assist with the change are made more difficult, if not sometimes impossible.

In many board rooms of national corporations, professional corporate managers and directors are voicing broad social concerns. I know that that statement will produce as much disbelief as a kind word for a university, but it is so. It is more than a voiced concern; human and financial resources of many major companies are being committed to social reformation. It is not uniform, but neither is the degree of student concern uniform among all students. There are a significant number of corporate leaders, though, who are dissenting from orthodoxy. These are the members of this new generation of corporate management, generally publicly held corporations, who view their employers as legal, political and economic units of a broadly conceived national society. You may remember Engine Charlie's statement a few years back, which was popularly and inaccurately quoted as "What's good for General Motors has to be good for the country." This generation I'm talking about is more likely to turn it around.

No, the dissenting college student is not alone, nor is he unique on the American scene -- but he may soon be. Unless the student can in some way be brought to realize this, and in some way brought into a coalition with those "outside" who are marching to the same music, this will be a game nobody is going to win.

And how is this going to be done? The issue that is being joined now is the wrong issue. Whether the campus subordinates itself to the orthodoxy of law and order is not the right fight. Unfortunately, it is the fight that is being fought.

I was impressed when I visited with some students at Harvard a few weeks ago. The issues that brought about the sit-in had almost become unimportant. The issue that aroused the students -- this inert middle group -- was bringing in the police. The merits of the initial cause were not being debated.

I do not share the apocalyptic view that the issue is the survival of man. Man is just ornery enough - to use a good old Montana expression - to keep an impudent thumb cocked to his nose against a hostile physical universe. I would have said "world", but I suspect that's old fashioned, too. Man will survive somewhere - for he's developing the potential of physical survival somewhere in the universe. The concern shared by the dissenters on and off the campus ought to be the survival of our society. Here -- and now. That this will require change -- a change in the rate of change -- is obvious. And I say rate of change advisedly, because there is change. I used to say "in my short lifetime" I'd seen a great many things happen. I can no longer, unfortunately, refer to my lifetime in those terms. But there have been a great many changes. Our

society has been receptive. It hasn't been as responsive as fast, however, as the changes in our physical environment. And by "physical" I mean the kinds of machines, the kinds of physical patterns of life today.

And so the rate has to change. It is here I can become pessimistic on dark winter days in Minnesota. If Konrad Lorenz is right -- and he's piling up a very impressive body of evidence for his contention that the possibilities of human social behavior are finite because the limitations are genetically carried -- we do have problems. Problems posed by changes in time frames. Institutions, too, have their built-in limiters carried forward in articles, by-laws, the attitudes toward it of people inside and outside of the institution, and maybe most of all their growing size and complexity. So at the same time society is demanding almost immediate responses across a whole broad range of changes, most of the odds are working against the capability of man and his institution to provide them.

While this does not mean that social behavior cannot be modified, it does connote limitations. And if this is so, then common sense, if not an awareness of historical perspective, must force us to seek new ways, new channels, for the voicing - and the containment of dissent. The escalation from the broad humanist concerns that in their depth and degree are new in our society, whether voiced in the broader community or on the university campus by the dissenter, to violence in the depressingly familiar pattern of human reaction to stress, should be proof enough to get on with the job.

And how is this going to be done? I think the other members of the university community can play more effective roles. I will voice one of my

prejudices: on many campuses these have not behaved very well. For example, the only faculty generally to come forward are those who want to man the barricades with the students. The great mass of faculty seem to have been content to pursue their disciplines and assume that society will continue to provide the same kind of a setting they have always known in which they can carry on their pursuits. Well, that isn't going to happen; if the university communities are destroyed or materially changed by an increasingly hostile public, faculty and administrators will suffer most of all. The student is there as an undergraduate, certainly only four years; the faculty and the administrators make their lives on the campus, and they must become concerned.

Faculty, administrators, and trustees must provide the bridge between the thoughtful dissenters on campus and their off-campus counterparts.

May I repeat - the efforts of major corporate business in many communities -- not all, but certainly in many communities -- have really been very good. In this community, for example, the willingness of exceedingly busy corporate presidents to devote time and money to public concerns is incredible. It hasn't been well publicized. It would be self-serving if it were. But it's a fact.

These people, however, cannot talk to students without an intermediary, simply because they are posed as the enemy. There's kind of a Beaufort scale the student uses in classing his enemies. The faculty is on that list, but lower than the administration; and far, far lower than anybody who comes from a corporate enterprise. At the end is the banker, who is the ultimate villain. Obviously bridges have to be created. Ways have to be found to unite those

who want to bring about change within the framework of western thought. That it will be painful and bruising at times is certain. It may be the effort can also be stimulating and rewarding beyond measure.

An aneurism, you know, need not be fatal, but it is symptomatic of a perilous condition. And I submit to you that unless this kind of an effort goes forward on the campuses, which are simply the measurement of this degree of tension in our society; unless a way can be found to bring about a coalition of concerned people on and off the campus, the patient may die from the aneurism.