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THE DOCTRINE OF  
UNFREEDOM,  
UNIVERSITY REFORM, AND  
CAMPUS POLITICAL  
PARTIES

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## THE DOCTRINE OF UNFREEDOM, UNIVERSITY REFORM, AND CAMPUS POLITICAL PARTIES

--by Donald McKelvey

The time of his life during which the student attends a university or college is a period of uncertainty, change, and attitude- and value-formation. One would hope, then, that the university experience would be liberating and fulfilling for the individual, that here he would find exemplified the very essence of democracy: the concepts of individuality--that individuals are of overriding value and worth--and of individual freedom and power--that individuals can participate directly and significantly in the decisions which shape their lives. And, hopefully, this would mean the beginning of what democracy is a means to--the full development of the individual's capabilities and creativities.

But instead, the student is rarely stimulated by his experience at the university, a fact attested to by the high rate of dropouts. The reasons for attending a university are often perceived by the entering student as the securing of a diploma, the accumulation of skills and knowledge which can be turned into money, and the making of contacts "valuable" during later life--and only rarely does even an occasional professor (and certainly not the university itself as an institution) broaden the student's horizons and help him to redirect himself.

The doctrine of in loco parentis (that the university acts towards the student in place of his parents) only infrequently means direct intervention in student life, since such intervention bares the anti-democratic nature of the university too clearly. More importantly, in loco parentis means a pervasive collection of regulations which the student accepts all too readily and which deaden his sensibilities as a human being and his conception of himself as a truly democratic individual; he goes about his narrow academic business, restricted social life, and meaningless extracurricular activities and manipulations. He is not even told what democracy really means, nor is it discussed, if at all, in any terms relevant to his life. There is no demonstration of real democracy in the university: not in his student government proceedings and elections, or in the functioning of the Administration of the school, or in the control of the university as a whole, or in the machinations of faculty politics. There is no concerted effort made to discover and bring out the best in individuals and to make them aware of others as concrete human beings rather than as psychological data. Is it a wonder that democratic men are not the result of such experiences? Is it a wonder that few university graduates become part of a dynamic community of men controlling their institutional environment? Is it a wonder that adults are "produced" who lack sensitivity toward themselves and their human and natural environment? What else could be expected from a "doctrine of unfreedom"?

It is this poverty of democratic vision and implicit denial of individuality and humanness which we must combat in the university--as throughout the society to which the university is subservient. It must be made clear that any social regulations handed down by the Administration--not only firings of student editors or censorship of their papers--are incompatible with the conception of the Free Man espoused in this society. We must challenge total faculty and administration control of curriculum--just as we must protest any kind of control over speakers from the outside--because we believe students are mature enough to make decisions responsibly on matters which affect them so directly. In short, we must proclaim--and act on--the doctrine that students are a vitally important part of the university community and should therefore have an important part in controlling its decisions.

Much must also be said about the kind and quality of education available at the university. Too often it is fragmented, rarely related to human values and to one's total life, lecture-oriented rather than allowing students an opportunity to present and discuss their own views, concentrated on teaching marketable skills rather than teaching men qua men, concerned solely with students in classrooms. The total educational experience must be an object of university reformers: not only course content but the entire tone of the university--the relationships among the individual members of the community (faculty, administration, students, and staff) and their conceptions of man, the physical plant and its meaning for the human beings it houses, the institutionaliza-

tion and integration of knowledge, and methods of importing knowledge and of learning.

In short, there must be a strong emphasis in the university on the effect on each individual of the entire university community and of the actions of its individual members. Do those actions have the liberating, democratizing effect which has been stressed here? and do the institutional arrangements within the university tend toward the same effect and toward allowing individuals to act in this way?

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All these considerations mean a program of student activism aimed directly at the university, not simply activism in the university. As members of local, national, and international communities, students have become increasingly active in movements relevant to these communities: peace, civil rights, civil liberties, etc. While certainly not deprecating activity directed at these issues and not advocating cessation of such activity, I am suggesting a considerable increase in activity centering around reform of the university. This suggestion is based on the following considerations:

- (1) As has already been indicated, the time during which students attend the university is one of great importance for their futures. This period should be spent in as free and liberating an atmosphere as possible.
- (2) Because we also want the student's life, and those of other members of the university community, to be as full and rewarding as possible in itself (quite apart from considerations in (1) above), we want to change the quality of university life.
- (3) If we accept the inherent importance of the involvement of individuals in political activity, then an overriding strategic consideration is to identify which concerns and activities are most likely to bring a large number of students into significant political activity. Because few students have developed or will develop the social viewpoint and commitment requisite to involvement in such programs as civil rights and peace, and because in general individuals are most concerned with forces which affect them personally and directly in their everyday lives, we would expect that for students university-centered issues would be most relevant and most likely to involve them.

This point is very significant and must be strongly emphasized. It is of great importance--in any movement for social reform--to seek the involvement in the movement of as many as possible of the individuals being affected by the conditions being reformed, partly for tactical effectiveness but most importantly because of the value of such involvement for the individuals concerned: they must not be pawns being manipulated (whether by those who would exploit or those who would help them), but must themselves be the moving and controlling force behind the change which occurs. It is for this reason--because I seek the involvement of all students in their own lives--that I suggest that socially concerned students concentrate on university reform in their programs.

It is undoubtedly correct that many students are not interested in involving themselves in university-centered issues, and this is probably the most serious problem connected with attaining a successful university reform program. But this is scarcely a valid objection to making and remaking every effort to build a movement based on university-centered issues; rather, it is a restatement of the problem: that the university, like the rest of society, is controlled so undemocratically that democratic participation on the part of the governed is difficult to obtain, and furthermore that our training for democracy is so poor that we are not constantly impelled to try to seize control of the institutions which affect us.

(I should like briefly to make a point about involvement in civil rights, peace, and other issues not centered on--though perhaps centered in--the university. Again without deprecating activity on these issues, I wonder if that activity isn't often a form of "running away" from the student's most central--and dangerous--responsibility, namely that to his most immediate community. The argument is often made that students, having fewer commitments and responsibilities and being relatively immune to sanctions, are therefore relatively free to be political dissidents. The one in-

stitution,--aside from the family, and not always that--which can apply strong sanctions against the student, is the university. Thus, it is safer for students to involve themselves politically in issues outside the university than in issues directed at the university. But there are at least two good reasons for opposing this tendency: (1) the university experience is so important for the student; (2) we expect these same individuals, as they continue through life, to challenge institutions which can apply sanctions; they should be doing so now, just as we believe they should now be treated as full citizens. It should also be pointed out that often issues such as civil rights and peace are directly applicable in relations to the university as well as outside it, and a student should be encouraged to make that connection if civil rights, peace, etc., is his main concern, and thus still work directly at the university.)

University reform can be realized only through a mass movement on the part of students at a university and throughout the country. It is not enough for a number of prestigious student leaders to go, hats in hand, to the administration to ask for changes; what is necessary is for a substantial portion of a student body to be willing to take strong action in support of a particular demand. Students must come to feel that the paucity of real education, the rejection of individuality, and the lack of human content in their university lives call for strong and direct action; their willingness to accept the potential sanctions would only serve to emphasize the great gap between the "is" and the "ought".

Perhaps the term "mass movement" seems out of place here; if so, it is because of the lack of education for democracy, the lack of emphasizing what democratic participation means, which pervades our entire educational system, from first grade through graduate school, and throughout life. We must seek ways of making students really care about the fabric of their lives, about something more than their own narrow interests, and then making them act.

Three things are necessary to create this kind of concern:

(1) First is knowledge of all which I have been describing. Some of this knowledge is common to students: they know that social regulations exist, and they feel the restrictiveness personally. They know that there are ridiculous and intellectually restrictive academic requirements. They know that most student governments are farces. And when something spectacular arises--such as the firing of a professor for political views, or the arbitrary suspension of a student leader, or the stopping of publication of the student paper--they know that what has happened was wrong.

There is also inarticulated knowledge--or, rather, feeling--of the more subtly restrictive aspects of in loco parentis. The denial of responsibility for their own affairs, plus pent-up adolescent energy not directed constructively, is much of the cause of the annual spring riots and other seeming irresponsibilities which periodically beset campuses and occasionally make front-page national news. What irony that it is precisely the unwillingness to accord students their rightful responsibility that plays such a large part in causing irresponsible acts, which are used in turn to "prove" inherent irresponsibility! This energy, directed at the doctrine that university students are children rather than adults, can and must be redirected through education by university reformers of students about their fightful role in the university --and by impelling them to action.

And, lastly, this education must be integrative in the sense that it shows the interrelationships among the various aspects of unfreedom and shows also how deeply each of these is tied to the doctrine of unfreedom itself--in loco parentis.

(2) Students must believe that through their actions they can win significant successes in the fight for reform. This is a circular problem, for as long as masses of individuals insist they can do nothing and therefore refuse to organize themselves, they will be unorganized and therefore ineffective. The solution is simply effective organizing, which is an individual problem relating importantly to particular condi-

tions. The main points here are two: (a) it is mandatory that students be organized; (b) certainly the most blatant violations of students' rights can be redressed through student action as, with massive action, can more subtle manifestations of in loco parentis.

It must be recognized that a democratic university cannot be created without a basic change in the attitudes and values of the society which controls the university. But some aspects of the problem can be worked at successfully; and through the process-- both because of victories won and because of the meaningfulness of the process itself --the morale of the students will change and improve, and will lead to greater possibility for victories.

Social change is, after all, a long-term process; and while students may feel that it is too long term for them to concern themselves with during their brief four years' stay, if they understand that the issues being fought here are different only in particulars from the issues being fought elsewhere in the world and that the university is far from unconnected with the rest of society, then they will understand that if they are going to fight for their and others' rights, then they will have to fight in the university as well as after they graduate.

(3) The most important factor in involving students in university reform is the inculcation of the basic principles of democracy emphasized at the beginning of this paper. I will not reiterate them here; suffice to say that students must feel that they have inherent worth as individuals and are rightly a part of a social force which strives to realize just common demands. We must break through the force of societal teachings that this is not a proper conception of man. And we must break through the institutional arrangements, common throughout the society, which thwart whatever democratic tendencies exist because of democratic rhetoric.

This aspect of what in loco parentis means--a continued restriction on the individual's conception of himself and his fellow men--must be constantly stressed, partly because the issue must be constantly articulated as a value issue and partly because students' self-conceptions are the greatest hindrance to an effective program of university reform activism.

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Two clear principles are involved in a discussion of means of bringing about reform of the university. First, it is clear that there must be a high degree of organization of students. Second, questions of strategy and tactics depend to a great extent on the nature of the school, its administration and faculty, its students, the surrounding community, and many other local factors. The necessity for flexibility according to particular conditions should be clear.

I do not mean to deny the last two sentences when I say that for most situations the creation of a campus political party aimed explicitly and primarily at university reform should be the main means for such reform. First, let me consider two other possibilities.

One possibility is the creation of ad hoc committees on particular issues or as crises arise. While it is necessary to focus on single aspects of the total issue and on crises, ad hoc committees do not allow for the overall and integrative approach provided by the existence of one vehicle for the whole problem.

The second possibility is to work through the student government. In a sense, this is what I shall suggest, but only in the sense that the political party should gain enough popular strength to be voted into office and, thereby, to be the real representative of the students' active social concerns. But to work through existing student governments, most of which are not elected or chosen because of mass student support of their policies on these vital issues, would be to make polite requests of the administration. A student government which is the vehicle for a social movement and which makes just demands in the name of that movement, will truly be representing stu-

dents, rather than, as is often the case at present, serving as liaison between students and administration, administrator of social events, and, in general, concerning itself with matters of little importance to students. A student government which represents students will be both a good student government (and this means a S.G. dealing as equals with the administration, though not necessarily one on bad terms with them) and the proper vehicle for social change.

But I am more concerned with the process by which a student government becomes such a force, and that is through the creation of a political party. Before continuing, it should be emphasized that the political party is not mainly concerned with the creation of a working plurality of votes during S.G. elections and, thereby, control of S.G.--though such control can be very helpful in what are its two objectives: the creation of a mass movement for social change in the university and the articulation and bringing to fruition of the movement's demands.

A political party, if explicitly and clearly a vehicle for university reform, would have the primary advantage of both espousing change based on the active support of the masses of students and seeking political power as an important means to that end. This means that, on the one hand, the drive for power based on votes will necessitate the party's pegging its demands to students' levels of consciousness, (in order to not run ahead of the students), and, on the other hand, the drive for radical change will force the party constantly to educate the students so that demands can be pegged higher (in order to assure the raising of the students' levels of consciousness). A political party provides the best way of institutionalizing this tension between political idealism and sophistication, and political opportunism. Furthermore, as a political organization, quite apart from its specific form, the party has the following advantages:

(1) It would deal with the whole range of questions relevant to university reform from extracurricular to social to political to personal. In this way, individual members of the party, though often involved primarily in only one aspect of the party's activities, will come to understand in an integrative fashion how these various aspects interrelate. In fact, through its total program, which would include seminars and other internal educational devices, the party should be able to institutionalize this integration of knowledge.

(2) The party, as it becomes more powerful, can be a strong support for those who have exercised their rights and are under fire for it, as well as an encourager of others to do the same.

(3) The party, again through its overall program, can serve in part as a "counter-university" by performing functions (such as setting up courses) which the university neglects or does poorly.

What, then, would a political party do? First, there is the obvious need to agitate to everyone and in every way possible, through canvassing, programs, letters to the editor of the campus paper (control of which would be most helpful), direct action projects, appearances on campus radio and TV stations, etc.

Second, there is the equally obvious need to exercise precisely the rights which are claimed as inherent to all students. Prerequisite among these rights are civil liberties, especially the rights of assembly, free speech, and access to media. Without these rights, it would be a difficult fight just to "get at" students.

Third, depending on local conditions, work should be done in such areas as social regulations, curriculum, and extracurricular activities.

Fourth, as mentioned above, programs on various issues related to the university and to setting up counter-university classes can serve both internally and externally educative functions. Every effort should be made here to stress the integrative, inter-relating factors.

Fifth, on some campuses--perhaps most--unionization of university employees (both student and non-student) can serve to dramatize and win legitimate demands by the employees, to help students to understand better than workings of the university power

elite, and in general as another nub of organizing for the party.

Sixth, research, where possible closely tied to action, should be carried on exposing the power structure of the university so that the nexuses of power can be directly pointed out and attacked.

Seventh, while control of the campus paper would be helpful, in any case independent papers or journals should be set up and muckraking carried on.

Eighth, as strong and as explicit alliances as possible should be made with faculty members, who are themselves often under various kinds of pressure and sanctions by the administration. Assuming a goal of a "community of scholars", then faculty and students should be clear allies.

Ninth, civil disobedience must be used. The civil rights movement has showed this to be a perfectly legitimate and logical tool in a fight for rights against an institution or system which refuses to allow those rights. Students must be willing to break unjust laws and accept the consequences, but they should also recognize that if enough of them break a particular unjust law, the result will be withdrawal of the law. Sit-ins, student strikes, "lock-ins" (the protesting and testing of restrictive social regulations by locking many male and female students together in an apartment overnight) are a few of the many means of civil disobedience. The method must be used again and again, especially the general and selective strikes, for it represents the student's most effective weapon.

A brief word about the political party's relationship with agents of social change concentrating outside the university. It has already been pointed out that often those concerned with a particular issue such as civil rights or peace can find many university-centered instances of their concern and can, therefore, work at the university.

But there will still be students who want to spend all or part of their time on non-university-centered issues. I would suggest that the political party be a university reform vehicle; and that while it should maintain a close and where possible functional relationship with those working in other areas, it should not itself expend energy and resources directly on such activity. This need not, of course, be a hard and fast rule; but it should always be clear that the overwhelming amount of the political party's efforts are to go toward changing the way the university affects those within it.