

GALLEY

As one of the signers of a bill of objections called "scurrilous" by Claude Fredericks, I too had hoped we might turn our attention to the prospectus for the Future of Bennington College without unnecessary distraction; but that is precisely what I believe the statement permits us to do.

The statement, to me, was a timely reminder of all that I had originally felt as an uneasy malaise, and then pushed into the back of my mind, when the Future's Committee and its mission were first revealed in a faculty meeting six months ago. At that time, however, the Committee was only a name with a mandate and a puzzling slate of recruits. It would have been utterly wrong to prejudge the validity of both, or call into public question "the formation, the procedure, the competence, and the good faith" of the Committee, despite Mr. Frederick's rash assertion that such a procedure would have been as allowable then, as he assumes it to be sinister and "scurrilous" now. In my Dictionary, "scurrilous" has two meanings: "grossly and offensively abusive" (in the style of Mr. Frederick's galley) and "given to coarse jocular buffoonlike." I see no trace of either in a statement of grievances painfully drafted by a number of highly responsible veterans of complex college transactions whom I nominated to represent me; and reluctantly signed by others, including myself, after an interval of six months in which nothing -- absolutely nothing at all -- has filtered down from above.

In the interim, I, for one, have been waiting for either consultation or ventilation to set in, as it has in every other major educational shakeup I can remember, from Basic Studies, in the War years of 1942-'43, to the famous, or infamous, Golden Book of the '50's, to the Era of Self-Study in the late '60's. The Future's Prospectus seems to me an event of equal magnitude which has transpired in a manner that I must describe as unrecognizable: a mysterious and inaccessible transaction kept under wraps until the literal last moment. Even Mr. Fredericks seems to think it a canon inviolable to mortal censure till the moment of its public unveiling. It must, I think, be substantively confronted on its own merits, whatever the troubling circumstances, precisely because it is one way of going at things at a time when none of us is likely to be wiser or holier than another; and because, like it or not, it and we are here.

I hope we can proceed now to examine after the fact, what I must assume has been put together in good faith, even if it happens not to embody my good faith. Meanwhile I consider it useful and imperative to write into the records at this time another extenuating point of fact: that though I hoped for better things enroute, the Future's Committee after six months has chosen to confront us with a fait accompli before soliciting our consent and inviting us to envision the future together. If it produces the panacea we are all hoping for, I may yet write this off as an expendable, if expensive, disappointment. But that such a reservation should not be expressed at this time, or that we should at any time avoid what Blake called "the fierce contentions of friendship" in the interests of a supine conformity I can never allow.

BEN BELITT