

BENNINGTON COLLEGE
BENNINGTON, VERMONT

This is mimeographed but is not a form letter. It is a report to you and the other Bennington trustees, also a request for counsel and criticism, on the steps taken and plans being made at the College with relation to the national defense program and the European humanitarian emergency.

During the summer I have been attempting to inform myself with regard to the new obligations and opportunities which we face as an educational institution. I was able to trade experiences and analyses with the heads of the seven womens' colleges at an informal meeting in New York, and to make contact with the national educational offices attempting to formulate an educational program with relations to the Advisory Defense Commission. I have been helped by the three members of our social science faculty who this summer are in Washington working in governmental agencies dealing with defense problems.

Although Bennington College is, in form, a private institution, it performs a public task. A primary obligation is, therefore, to be alert to the special educational needs of our government in its developing program, as well as to continuing general needs. As yet there seem to be no well-defined techniques or skills needed in the defense program for which the reservoir of college women will be trained. Plans thus far have been centered on the vocational re-training or training of adults now out of work, and the military training of men. So far as one can forecast there seem to lie ahead needs for more women trained in child care, social work and for special training in health and nutrition. The College already has instruction in these fields and had planned a more adequate personnel for teaching them for next year in the budget adopted in June. There does not, therefore, seem to be any useful revision of our program to meet needs of technical training, as yet defined.

We are contributing in trained personnel to the planning and organization of defense and are ready to consider further requests as constituting a prior claim on our energies. Mr. Jones and Mr. Brockway, of our staff, are both in Washington this summer working in its heat and high pressure on defense organization. Mr. Jones is serving as an economic advisor and coordinator under Mr. Stettinius in the Advisory Defense Commission. Mr. Brockway was called to Washington to work with the Interdepartmental (Cabinet) Committee

dealing with Latin American and European trade policy. Both will return to resume their teaching duties at the opening of College next month. It is worth noting that Mr. McCamy who is on extended leave of absence from the College to serve as Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture has been assigned to deal with the Departments' defense problems and relations to the defense organization. The members of our Science teaching staff have been listed with their research specialties by the National Research Council, and stand ready to engage in any special projects proposed by the Council.

The provision of technical training and personnel for industrial, economic and scientific mobilization does not exhaust the obligations or abiding interests of our colleges and universities. Bennington, along with its sister institutions, exists for the promotion of scholarship and culture. As an institution for the education of women it has also a special obligation to help in the constructive efforts to assist those in suffering and distress. This implies a special relation to the scholars, artists, students, women and children who are the innocent victims of the totalitarian regimes and war in Europe. These are not local or national interests. They are part of the relationship which for centuries has bound together with common, generous purposes, the community of scholars, the seekers after truth--a community which does not recognize boundaries of time or space.

In line with these interests we are attempting, as a small unit working with many others, to help in the care of European children, students, scholars and artists.

Early in the summer a group of us took the initiative in organizing the Bennington County Committee for the care of European children, later the state committee, now affiliated with the United States Committee. Mrs. Leigh is chairman of the special college committee organizing our part of the program and is a member of the County Committee.

After authorization at an informal faculty meeting I have offered the complete facilities of the College (housing, food, supervision and health care) to give temporary care to 150-200 children from England, during our vacation periods; i.e., August 19-September 4 and December 26-February 22. I have also offered the facilities of the College for supervision, food provision and care in any other local buildings, for as many as can be accommodated from September 4 -December 26. Further we have offered to take charge of the reception at port of arrival (Montreal, Boston, New York) and transportation to the College of such children as are assigned to the College for temporary care while they are being placed in the registered homes in this area. To handle the children we are recruiting a group of trained volunteers among our graduates who stand ready to come to Bennington and assist in care of the children in our charge. If we are assigned a number of children for

temporary supervision and care, by the United States Committee, most of the task will be furnished as gifts of services and facilities. The food will be shared by the students by economies in the year's food expense.

We are already providing for the education of several refugee students. In addition we, along with other colleges, stand ready to give assurances that we will give exceptional consideration to these refugee children now of school age, 5-16, if they are obliged to stay in the United States during part or all of their college years.

The faculty has also authorized me to take the \$3000 contained in our annual budget normally used for paying the fees of visiting lecturers, to appoint distinguished refugee scholars and artists as honorary fellows or lecturers for the year. The hope is to provide a stipend of \$1000 each to three such fellows. Mrs. Leigh has already obtained the free use of one Old Bennington house for such a resident fellow. The idea is to get persons of maturity and wisdom such as Sigrid Undset, for whom I am now negotiating, who would live in Bennington, give a lecture once a month at the College and enter into the informal life of the College community as much or little as is compatible with their temperaments and need for their own continuing scholarly or other work. It is a difficult task to get in touch with just the people who could profit by such an arrangement. Alvin Johnson, Director of the University in Exile, who is heading up present attempts to get the distinguished, displaced scholars from Europe, is helping me. If you know of anyone who is coming or is here who would be a good person for us in this capacity won't you let me know? I wish we had \$7000 or \$8000 for this purpose instead of \$3000.

Finally, and much more tentatively, is an obligation we have as an institution devoted to the pursuit of truth and intellectual freedom to serve in our small way as a center of understanding and sanity for our students and in our community. It is clear that the creation of an education in citizenship for the world we live in has only begun. I hope that at a later time I can report activities indicating that our college is using its advantages of independence and flexibility to take a position of leadership in this fundamental line of building a moral defense. But this is a subject for later discussion.

I hope that you approve of the direction we are taking.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Leigh
President

P.S. I am sending under separate cover a printed copy of the commencement talk which I made at Skidmore and Bard Colleges in June, just when France was collapsing and Italy entered the war.