

Committee on General Meetings, October 25, 1940

The Committee on General Meetings met with Mr. Troy's Committee on Plans for Second Semester on Friday, October 25th, at one o'clock in the North dining room.

Present: Miss Shelly, chairman; Mr. Leigh, Mr. Brockway, Mr. Belitt, Miss Patterson, Mr. Troy, Katrina Voorhees, Miss Bowie, secretary.

Absent: Mr. Fergusson.

Mr. Brockway reported that the Social Studies division was very favorable to the idea of having Dr. Polanyi in residence at the College during the second semester, as an honorary fellow to give a course or seminar for students and faculty members. Such a course would probably deal with the religious basis for, or the moral philosophy underlying, Dr. Polanyi's political and economic views. Other faculty members attending the seminar would be expected to do some work for it, not merely to listen.

The main business before the meeting was the presentation of a report from Mr. Troy's committee. The plan outlined has been worked out by Mr. Troy and Miss Patterson as Mr. Fergusson has been ill for most of the time of the committee's deliberations.

The plan submitted was as follows:

To have a series of eight or ten lectures covering a philosophical and historical resume of the movements and thought that lie behind the present world situation. Such a series has never been presented at Bennington College, and the existing crisis brings to the fore the debates and conflicts of the European tradition and culture.

The form of the series was tentatively outlined as:

- 1) an introductory lecture giving a characterization of the present situation, a charting of the "isms" and the ideas involved;
- 2) a discussion of the basic historical background;
- 3) a discussion of the Renaissance philosophy and thought;
- 4) a discussion of Greek philosophy and thought;
- 5) a presentation of the orthodox Catholic point of view;
- 6) a return to the immediate background in the 19th century; and
- 7) a summarizing lecture, bringing the material up to date.

The focus throughout the series would be on Humanism; a definite attempt would be made to define the term and to examine historically the Human as a value, since an implied belief in it has been at the bottom of the whole Democratic tradition.

Mr. Troy said that such a series would be quite abstract, but the Committee agreed that this need not constitute a danger. The obvious difficulty of maintaining the thread of continuity through eight weeks of varying audiences might be overcome, Mr. Leigh suggested, by having summaries of each lecture available, as has been done for Dr. Polanyi's lectures.

The series would probably run for eight weeks, Thursday evenings, from the second week in March through the first week in May. It was agreed that no other series or seminar outside the curriculum should be contemplated. Any remaining Thursday evenings could be filled with student music, workshops, etc. It was suggested, and agreed to be a good plan, that each Thursday lecture be followed the next Monday afternoon by a discussion period. After discussion it was agreed that in addition to the present faculty committee of Mr. Troy, Miss Patterson and Mr. Fergusson which would be responsible for the set-up and organization of the lectures, there should be a student committee of three members to organize the Monday discussion groups. Efforts would be made to tie in the lecture material with the work done by class groups, as, for example, in art, literature, and philosophy.

In order to have this plan effective, well attended and not in competition with other activities, it was agreed that a definite block of time should be laid out with other competing events cut to a minimum. So far as possible, students and faculty should understand that attendance at the lectures would be expected since material in them would frequently be brought back into class-room discussion. The cooperation of faculty members was felt to be particularly essential, in the discussion groups as well as in the lectures.

So far as the actual personnel of the lecturers is concerned, it was agreed that it would be much more satisfactory to have faculty members and resident honorary lecturers rather than outside speakers brought in for a single lecture in the series. While it was agreed that the educational nature of the series made it of prime importance to have excellent speakers whether European scholars or not, the Committee also agreed that if it were possible, we should try to combine the original aims of having a series of this kind and of assisting needy scholars. Mr. Leigh said that if Mr. Troy's committee could suggest the type of scholar they thought desirable, such as, for example, a specialist on the Renaissance and one on Greek philosophy, he (Mr. Leigh) would get in touch with Alvin Johnson, Frank Kingdon, and the American Friends Service Committee, and see whether any such scholars are or will be available by the end of February. If Mr. Troy and Mr. Fergusson should each be responsible for one lecture, and Mr. Brockway for a third, that would leave only five for outside lecturers to handle. In the matter of enlisting faculty cooperation in the series, Mr. Troy stressed the necessity of having the series arranged so that the faculty would not be obliged to prepare long written lectures.

It was agreed that Mr. Troy's committee should further discuss and organize plans for the series, and that the matter should be laid before the whole faculty body not later than December 1st. It should also be presented to the students, possibly in Community meeting, by Katrina Voorhees.

Any visiting scholars invited for next semester, it was agreed, should be asked either with a view to contributing directly to the series, or else with no lecture or teaching obligations which could in any way compete with the series,

as, for example, an artist or musician. Not only would any other lectures act as competition, but there would be no time for them in the calendar. The proposed seminar by Dr. Polanyi would fall within the class schedule.

After discussion of the latter question, it was moved and seconded that Dr. Polanyi should be invited to remain in residence at the College for the second semester, to conduct a course or seminar under the Social Studies division, at a salary of \$500 to be paid from the General Meetings budget. The motion was carried unanimously.

This leaves \$1000 for the series and for any other visiting scholars. It was agreed that the final selection can be left until the plans for the series take more definite shape. Mr. Troy raised the point that contributors to the series would probably fall under a Social Studies heading, as have two of the first semester scholars, and he wondered if other divisions would object. Miss Shelly said that probably European scholars in these subjects would be able and apt to deal also with art and science of the times under discussion, and Mr. Leigh pointed out that the General Meetings Committee was not committed to represent all divisions equally. It was also agreed that the series, as now proposed, would cut across divisional lines and represent a wide range of interests, relating them to the central theme.

Mr. Troy suggested that if possible a European scholar representing the Latin tradition should be secured as the two this semester have been Central Europeans, and the tendency generally has been to emphasize the Central European and Germanic traditions to the exclusion of the Latin. The Committee agreed that this was desirable, and also that it was probable that such a scholar would fit very well into the needs of the series.

Discussion in the meeting emphasized several points very strongly:

- 1) the need for careful organization of the series, both before it begins and during its run;
- 2) the need for faculty and student interest and cooperation during the series.
- 3) the need for careful planning of time and other events in the calendar, so that the series may be a continuing source of stimulation and interest to students and faculty alike, neither excluding nor competing with events of other kinds and appeals.

The rest of the meeting was devoted to General Meetings business, from which Mr. Troy and Miss Patterson were absent.

Mr. Leigh reported that Mr. Jones would not speak in the Political Series, but would speak on December 9th as the third lecturer in the Defense Series--title to be announced later.

The Health Committee had asked for a meeting next Thursday afternoon at which Mr. Allan Richardson would present a plan for Student Reimbursement (a health insurance measure) under the auspices of the Health Committee. Since the plan requires over 50% student cooperation to be effective, and since next week is already very full of meetings, it was agreed to advise the Health Committee against holding such a general student meeting at this time. Two alternative dates are available, Monday, November 25th and Thursday, December 12th.

Mr. Leigh presented a letter from Miss Mary N. Winslow, United States Representative on the Inter-American Commission of Women, in regard to a proposed visit to Bennington of one or more Argentine representatives. It was agreed that the ladies should not be asked to speak, since the calendar is full, but that one or more should be invited to visit the College. Mr. Leigh and Mr. Brookway will be in charge of the visit.

Miss Shelly reported a conversation with Mr. Kouwenhoven in which he said that he and other members of the Community were still not clear as to the Committee's policy on European refugee scholars. Miss Shelly had explained the matter to him, and Mr. Leigh agreed to talk further with Mr. Kouwenhoven. It was felt that any added explanations to the Community could be given when the plans for the second semester are announced.

The last business before the meeting was the question of the A.S.U.'s desire to have a meeting on Monday before Election Day at which local representatives of the Republican, Democratic and Communist parties should speak. Discussion centered around two points; 1) should the General Meetings Committee sanction this particular meeting?; 2) what meetings of the A.S.U. must be cleared through the General Meetings Committee before they are scheduled?

On the first point, the majority of the Committee felt that the idea of having a partisan rally under A.S.U. auspices was an excellent one, but that a) the speakers suggested were of doubtful qualification; b) the Socialist party should be represented as well as the Communist; c) an attempt should be made either to get good outside speakers, for whom the Committee could pay travel expenses, or to secure student partisan speakers. Such a meeting, it was agreed, would be well worth while, but the Committee finally agreed that as proposed by the A.S.U. with the local speakers, the meeting should not be sanctioned. If the A.S.U. insisted on inviting the local candidates, it would have to be a closed meeting of A.S.U. members only, not reserved on the College calendar.

Discussion on the second point finally reached these conclusions: that a closed meeting of the A.S.U., not open to any non-members, could be called by the A.S.U. without sanction of the General Meetings Committee, though it must, as other meetings, be scheduled through Miss Bowie; that any other meetings of the

A.S.U., open to the College Community by direct or indirect invitation, must be cleared through the General Meetings Committee.

The Committee agreed to refer the matter of the pre-Election Day meeting back to the A.S.U. Further proposals from them along the lines suggested, or others, will be considered by the Committee, but the particular meeting proposed was vetoed.

The meeting adjourned at 3.30 o'clock.

Respectfully submitted,

Elisabeth H. Bowie
Secretary