

5/16, 1969

A PARTIAL REJOINDER

It is curious, in view of the fact that the "movement" of last spring and its intended meaning, having been debated and discussed, almost to the point of oblivion, that so much misunderstanding is still in evidence. I would refer you to Sharon Parnes' galley, in which she observes:

"I wonder how many of those who complained during last spring's men in rooms controversy that Bennington was no longer an experimental college, and presented themselves as staunch adherents to the principle of change, are as staunchly committed to that principle in matters of educational policy as they were over the issue of parietals?"

In response, let me observe and offer, as a proponent of last spring's "movement" that:

(1) It is a gross confounding, may, a profanation, to associate the men in rooms issue with the notion of an experimental college. Clearly, the parietals was used politically, that is, as a vehicle for the expression of profound disenchantment and regret with the apparent direction in which Bennington seemed to be moving. There was no causal, necessary or inherent relation between the experimental 'idea' attached to Bennington and the parietals issue. Our concerns were larger in scope and vision.

(2) With regard to the question of adherence to the principle of change, I do not think I am violating the thinking of others involved when I say that we upheld the notion of change---not in itself, but rather as a means to desired ends. I don't believe any of the movement's proponents would have been naive enough to embrace the notion of change qua change.

(3) The critical point of misunderstanding, it seems to me, appears in the last phrase: ... "are as staunchly committed to that principle (change) in matters of educational policy as they were over the issue of parietals?"

It was precisely with regard to change in the interests of educational matters, not men in rooms, that last spring's "movement" was initiated. For example, self-study, was, in part, undeniably a reaction to the substance of last spring's dilemma, a dilemma which neither ended last spring nor did it resolve itself last fall. The momentum and support the "movement" gained bore witness to its central concerns: Each potential signer of the petition was apprised of our larger concerns with educational policy and orientation. Whether the hours issue was the best or potentially most successful vehicle for the expression of those concerns, is not properly at issue here. But the notion that it was men in rooms, rather than educational policies and priorities, is too facile, superficial, and in the last analysis, distorted an appraisal, to let pass by.

Glug, glug, glug... is the noise water makes when it goes down the drain...

Respectfully submitted,

Doreen Seidler