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Some Answers to Campus Dissent*

SPIRO T. AGNEW

Vice-President of the United States of America

I guess you'd like to know how I'm learning my new job. Well, Senator Bennett will tell you that I'm learning how to sleep with my eyes open in the Senate. Also I've found out that the vice-presidency is totally removed from politics. I learned that when I got my salary check last week through the Ford Foundation.

For me the Brigham Young campus offers a refreshing change of pace. Its virtues are readily apparent. Here the scenery is magnificent, the buildings are handsome, and you can still tell the boys from the girls. Now don't misunderstand me, I don't have anything against long hair, but I didn't raise my son to be my daughter.

When you read of campus violence day after day and when you survey a strident student minority, long on locks and lean on faith, there appears reason to despair. More Americans should learn about Brigham Young University. Our nation's largest private school does honor to the public spirit. Much credit belongs to President Wilkinson, to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and to those who come to teach and those who come to learn here.

The founder of this school, Brigham Young, once said: "The first great principle that ought to occupy the attention of mankind, that should be understood by the child and the adult, and which is the mainspring of all action, whether people understand it or not, is the principle of improvement."

Improvement is the purpose of education. It's the work of the school, the college, and the university. Improvement cannot be achieved in a condition of anarchy or uproar. Today, our colleges are under siege.

*A Forum Address at Brigham Young University, May 8, 1969.

What we have witnessed in the past weeks is not mere delinquency nor mere disruption. Both words dismiss too lightly the grave implications of college disorders and the reaction to them that is reverberating across the country.

Not in every case, but in too many cases, we have young adults hell-bent on "nonnegotiable" destruction.

We have college administrators confused and capitulating. We have sophisticated faculties distraught and divided over issues as basic as assault and battery, breaking and entering, theft or vandalism, all of which we understand to be crime.

We have a new breed of self-appointed vigilantes arising—the counter-demonstrators—taking the law into their own hands because weak and equivocating officials fail to call the law enforcement authorities.

We have a vast faceless majority of the American public in quiet fury and with good reason over this situation.

Not one of these elements is constructive—compounded, they create first chaos and then repressive reaction.

The anatomy of violence is unpleasant and difficult to understand. Sometimes we wonder how we reached this route.

I offer you a few answers, and I offer them from this framework—*there is little the federal government can do in this situation*. But if the people who can do something don't start acting, I'm fearful of what forces could fill this vacuum.

I recognize that only a small minority—less than two percent—of America's six, nearly seven million college students participate in disruptive dissent. But the damage they do to the spirit of academic freedom—and, in fact, all freedoms—is vastly greater than their numbers. These students whose recourse to reform is demand rather than debate, lawlessness rather than logic, have the same philosophy as dictators.

Condemning the tactics of violence is not concluding that there is no need for change. But as you all learn from your first course in philosophy, the difference between a free society and a totalitarianism is one—the treatment of ends versus means.

In a totalitarian society, only the ends are important. The means to reach them, whether just or brutal, are irrelevant. In a free society, the means are just as important as the ends.

The law is our means. In America, constitutional government provides for elected officials, elected officials who are

responsible to their electorates, the people who put them in office to change the law. Structured law differentiates human civilization from animal anarchy. Representative democracy permits change and prevents totalitarianism.

Democracy is sustained through one great premise: the concept that civil rights are balanced by civil responsibilities. My right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is secure only so long as I respect your right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I can claim no right as a human being or a citizen that you cannot claim equally under the law. The two-edged sword of rights and responsibilities is the defense of a free society.

When any group asserts rights without commensurate responsibilities, a privileged class emerges creating an atmosphere of abuse, paving the way to the ultimate abuse that is totalitarianism.

Now the time has come for America's colleges under siege to assert themselves. This is not to say we can't improve our colleges. I sincerely believe that every sector of society should question the present fundamentals that shape our systems of education. Certainly if even two percent of our students will resort to violence and a far larger percentage will stand silently by, perhaps even stand sympathetically by, we are failing somewhere along the line.

Compelling questions over the validity of our present system must be asked and answered.

For example, does every high school graduate need or desire to spend four years in college? Should education be a terminal process, or a continuing one? Is it not possible that the most relevant role of the college would be enlarging the availability of enriching adult education?

Among the competing priorities for the public dollar, should the four-year college take precedence over strengthening compensatory education, improving vocational-technical programs, and expanding community colleges to make two years of practical, usable higher education available to all?

I think one of the most neglected fields of education in our time is that of vocational-technical training. And I think we've failed because we've classed this particular type of training at the high school level alone. It seems to me that it should be possible to discern among certain students, that their fortes lie not in formal education of the typical college type, but in voca-

tional-technical training where they will learn a useful skill and be able to make an adequate living.

Discussion should take into account the views of such experts as Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, the renowned psychologist-psychiatrist at the University of Chicago, who in a recent testimony before the House Special Subcommittee on Education stated this:

. . . all too many who now go to college have little interest, ability and use for what constitutes a college education. . . . They would be better off with a high level vocational education which is closely linked to a work program, which gives scope to their needs for physical activity and visible tangible achievement. The complaint of many of these students is that nobody needs them. They feel like parasites of society and hence come to hate a society which they think makes them feel this way.

Certainly, our institutions of higher education must take the initiative in asking the hard questions and in achieving internal reforms.

Many colleges and universities—the ones we do *not* read about—have developed legitimate and immediate methods for students to articulate their grievances.

These schools have done more than simply offer courses on democracy; they have assured their students of “due process” which is an integral part of our democratic system.

A society as sophisticated as ours can establish practical, workable degrees of student participation. We can navigate some middle course without students locking teachers up or administrators locking students out.

Another middle ground which must be found is the place of the college in the community. Higher education can only benefit from a close, introspective look at such policies as “publish or perish”; a voice for faculty below the professorial level; the proper balance in decisions between administrators and academicians.

An insistence on relevancy in curriculum is not an unreasonable request within bounds that are applicable and just. But when students simultaneously demand an increased social conscience on the part of the university, and an end to ROTC programs which some of them desire, there is an absolute lapse of logic.

What is the ROTC if it is not education to serve our country? I want to tell you that I am most disturbed about the lack of freedom on the part of those students who would like to learn the fundamentals of officer training in college, the lack of the ability of those students to have that training because a small dissident minority, who wants training of a specialized sort that it desires, refuses to stand still and let someone else elect what he wants to study.

Not only does that disturb me; I think it disturbs most people across the country. But when you consider that this country's strength in time of trial and turmoil has come from its citizen army, and that the freedoms that we enjoy we enjoy because we understand among our responsibilities as citizens lies the inherent, basic need to defend this country in time of crisis. And that defense comes best from our citizens and not from any elite, professional military organization. Oh, certainly we need the cadres of our military academies, but the balance that has always existed in our large citizen armies comes about because the people who are trained to lead those armies are basically civilians and not soldiers, and they respect and understand the need to get this country back to a peaceful civilian status as quickly as possible. And that's what we are trying to take out of our colleges today, or the defense department will have to respond if there is no way to train officers in the colleges of this country. The defense department will have to create some other professional way to train them, and when that is done the sensitivity of the civilian soldier that I spoke about will be lacking.

Each college must determine its own middle ground somewhere between ivory-tower retreat and settlement-house immersion. In a recent article, journalist William Shannon delineated the role of higher education. And he said this:

It is to transmit knowledge and wisdom and to enhance them by research and study. The university is not a forum for political action. It is not a training ground for revolutionaries. It is not a residential facility for the psychiatrically maladjusted. It is not a theater for acting out racial fears and fantasies.

And I agree with those words. And he went on to say:

The university is a quiet place deliberately insulated from the conflicts and pressures of the larger society around

it. Reason and civility are essential to its very nature because its aim is truth not power. Questioning and criticizing and listening must be done objectively, logically, and above all, lawfully. When administrators and faculties capitulate before storm trooper tactics, they are not only doing a grave disservice to academic freedom but all freedoms.

Finally, not only the institution of education but every institution comprising our society must share in this drive for renewed responsibilities. The family remains the fundamental institution. Parental discipline is the gateway to knowledge. Permissive parents do their children no favors because no self-discipline can come without discipline being there first. And it is a lack of discipline in the family that has led to the abusive conduct of the small minority of students that I talked about earlier.

The family alone can provide the bedrock security of the soul which enables the mature individual to look within rather than from without for moral direction.

Organized religion—regardless of denomination—is an institution possessing a moral-ethical mandate.

The conduct of Brigham Young University offers inspiring evidence of the serenity and strength which stems from strong faith.

The media—our free press—are not exempt from constructive introspection. All too often the media have been too quick to assume that confrontation is a necessary catharsis to a sick society; to report want and destruction in terms of noble causes; to publicize the least responsible leadership in any self-proclaimed crusade.

How many businesses, for example, are out ahead—attacking problems in advance of requests or regulations from government? The industrial community also needs to involve itself more heavily in these problems. It's the failure of the private sector to act which prods the public sector to enter.

Now, if our society is ever going to protect itself from perpetual, violent assaults, every institution must work together. For our society is nothing more than the sum of its institutions.

If the family fails, can we expect the school to succeed? If the school fails, can free enterprise compensate? If the media or the church do not inculcate conscience, should government fill the vacuum? My answer is an emphatic, "No!" Govern-

ment's role is to enlarge opportunity and to protect competing ideologies in the hope that the best will prevail.

When I say that I don't mean to say that government should not be moral, but government's morality should be drawn from the traditional institutions of our society responsible for imparting ethics to the individual.

America is not yet two centuries old. It is hard to believe that we are that young a country. In our evolution we have seen social, economic and political progress without precedent in the history of the world. We have made this progress through freedom, law and order structured by the world's oldest enduring constitution.

We have resisted every assault upon democracy by totalitarian forces from without. And I am confident that our society will defend itself from attempts to impose absolutism or create anarchy from within.

The American system has never been stronger, never been more vital. The American conscience is awake, and the American spirit is very much alive.