

"WHO SHOULD RUN THE UNIVERSITY?"

DEBATE REBUTTAL

by

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Arthur Godfrey told a story recently which bears on my position at the moment. A barfly suddenly announced in a loud, thick voice that he held in his hand a list of all those present whom he could lick with one hand tied behind him. A very large, impressive beer-drinker stalked over to the braggart and asked if his name was on the list. The barfly checked his list and said, "Yes, here's your name right here!". <sup>other fellow replied</sup> The ~~response~~ <sup>other fellow replied</sup> was that if the little fellow thought he could beat up <sup>him</sup> ~~the challenger~~, he was mistaken. "Is that so?", said the little one forcefully. "Then I guess I had better remove your name from my list".

In the present confrontation, I am not sure whether I should take Dr. Franklin's name off my list. I supposed I could hold my own in a discussion of the relationships between the various constituencies of the university. In his approach to the topic, he has chosen to argue ideologies and provide recommendations for university organization by referring us to a system of education about which little is generally known. I am not a Marxist scholar and I certainly am not equipped to discuss the plusses and minuses of the Chinese people's universities, but I will offer some observations about those matters where there are points of contact between his paper and mine and the topic assigned.

It is evident that Professor Franklin and I share certain basic views on this topic. We agree that the determination of who should run the university should be made according to a fundamental judgment about the nature of the

society which the university is to serve. Both of us perceive the changes now taking place in the university are influences counter to the kind of society to which I am committed and toward the kind of society to which he is committed. (And I welcome his assistance in drawing this matter to the attention of the public.) Both of us recognize that the increasing role of the federal government in higher education has contributed to the decline of private enterprise capitalism and individual initiative. We both recognize that the modern university is relatively disinterested in its enrolled students. He concludes, as I do, that the university should be at the service of the needs of the people.

I do, however, detect certain points on which there may be some disagreement.

In the first place, I believe man is most creative when he has the freedom to make decisions for himself and to produce in a manner that will benefit himself and his family. It is said that many a young instructor has been spurred on to towering heights of brilliance and early promotion in the hope of being relieved of eight o'clock classes. The opportunity to better one's situation is a powerful stimulus. I also believe man is so constituted that he has the potential for deriving pleasure from being of service to someone else. As living conditions are conducive to the fulfillment of these two human impulses man is able to build a productive society and to earn personal satisfaction and self-esteem.

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The political and economic systems which developed in this country were uniquely supportive of these two human characteristics, serving well and capitalizing upon the pluralistic nature of our population, providing more favorable circumstances <sup>than any other society ever has</sup> for a person to improve his position according to his own talents <sup>and persistence,</sup> ~~than any other society has ever provided~~, also giving rise to an incredibly diverse complex of private service agencies, and nourishing the altruistic impulse <sup>the people,</sup> ~~in this nation~~. Anyone who supposes the popular support of the Marshall Plan was simply a reflection of self-interest doesn't understand America.

It happened that the educational system which evolved in our country was also magnificently able to support and capitalize upon the diversity of our population. Each local school district and each college and university was responsible to its own board of control <sup>and that board</sup> ~~which~~ was free to make decisions according to its evaluation of local needs <sup>and</sup> local circumstances and according to the values and the aspirations of that community. To be sure, the system had certain terrible and cruel failings, but on the national level it has provided the most comprehensive, the most creative and the most flexible total program of education of any <sup>nation</sup> ~~country~~ for which factual information is available.

The success of the system was, in my judgment, in large part the consequence of the autonomy of the schools and the opportunity for each to find its own answers to problems, and the result of the potential for any school to rise by its own efforts to heights of prestige and accomplishment. Does anyone suppose, for instance, that if education were, in the first half of this century, centrally planned and centrally paid for that a Carleton College or a ~~Reed~~ <sup>Reed</sup> College or a Swarthmore College would have emerged from the great number of little known colleges to a position of international eminence, or that the innovations and creative work which earned them such stature would have taken place? I think not. And that is why I presented in my earlier paper an analysis based upon the determination and implementation of individual policy according to the judgments of each institution for itself.

I reject, as less creative and less useful to mankind, any system of centrally determined education, whether the determination is made by an enlightened office of education, the military-industrial establishment or a somehow codified will of the working class.

Next, I would like to suggest that Mr. Franklin and his fellow radicals may underestimate the instincts for self-preservation and the ability of the American people to respond to attack.

Americans are extraordinarily tolerant and patient and slow to react, but there comes a point beyond which they will not sit idly by. I attended a conference last summer in which a number of student officers were discussing student activism. At one point a member of the audience challenged the student from Columbia University and urged him to use the proper designations in referring to what he and the other protesters had done. He said the students had committed a number of crimes, such as Breaking and Entering, Looting, etc. The student replied that in a revolution there are no crimes and that this was revolution. From there on, the audience <sup>paid close</sup> ~~was really listen-~~ <sup>attention and</sup> listened carefully. And I am certain that those present will henceforth take a wholly different view of student activism.

It is naive to suppose that the American public is going to support indefinitely institutions and activities which are patently directed to the destruction of the society which is paying the bills. There is a growing unwillingness on the part of taxpayers, state and national legislators, alumni and the general

populace to permit the universities to be divided and disrupted by coercive minorities. It is to be hoped that order <sup>rational and deliberative techniques can be used to restore</sup> ~~can be re-established~~ and the universities <sup>so that the universities can</sup> ~~can be enabled to~~ spend their time on the proper business of universities <sup>instead of self-defense</sup> ~~by rational and deliberative techniques~~. However, if <sup>rational</sup> ~~such~~ techniques are not effective, other techniques will be employed, albeit reluctantly. The use of force breeds counter-force. The free nations tried too long to arrive at some

rational accord with Hitler, but eventually they turned to force to put a stop to his depredation. Hitler underestimated the nerve and the vitality of free institutions. I believe the radicals who are overtly trying to overthrow our universities make the same miscalculation. The apathy runs deep, but not that deep.

Another observation I would like to make has to do with our differing views of the classes of society. Professor Franklin seems to imply that the laboring man and the have-nots have a monopoly on virtue and those who own some property or occupy positions of influence have a monopoly on vice. This is patently ridiculous. We agree that acquiring property brings a certain kind of power, but we disagree on the consequences of the acquisition. People do desire things and once having them, they wish to protect them. We have built a society which takes these human <sup>attitudes</sup> responses into account and which aspires to make it possible for each person to get a share of the action with the resulting gratifications for himself. To the degree that ~~our assumptions are correct~~ and we can deliver on our aspiration <sup>for</sup> of an open society, Professor Franklin's concept will be thwarted.

Further, I am intrigued by what seems to be an implication of his statement. <sup>I</sup> We make the supposition that education will add to the individual's capacity to achieve power, with or without property. If the achievement of

power is, in his view, undesirable, is it then the purpose of education to

divest the student of his talents and his natural advantages so that he cannot achieve power and will live in virtuous poverty and powerlessness? It may

be possible by government <sup>action</sup> to eliminate ~~or keep redistributing~~ private property,

or keep redistributing it

but I do not believe it is possible to even out human talents and brains and

initiative and persistence. Some people are naturally going to achieve more than others. If achievement is to be feared and suppressed, it poses a rather dismal view of man and his future.

A related point has to do with the selection of trustees and regents. If there is something inherently sinister in the selection of highly successful people to make the ultimate decisions for the university, here again we encounter a paradox. It seems to me that the institution which is established to deal with man's brain and man's performance ought to be guided by people who, by their own record, are strong on brains and strong on performance. I also challenge his assertion that "the trustees and regents so far have been able to make sure that only the culture and ideology of their own class and of previous ruling classes can be propagated in their universities". My authority for this challenge is Professor Franklin's own statement. He says "most faculties are now, as they were in Russia sixty years ago, overwhelmingly liberal". If anyone supposes that trustees and regents across the country are overwhelmingly liberal, he ought to travel a little and meet some.

*attitudes*

The discrepancy between the basic economic and political ~~instincts~~ of the trustees and of the faculty is not, I believe, the manifestation of a failure on the part of trustees to impose their views and to govern universities in a fashion that will make little carbon copies of themselves, but rather a sign of the virtue of trustees generally in recognizing that society changes and education must change with it and that academic freedom is the stuff of creative education. I think the record of university trustees in this country proves the opposite of Dr. Franklin's assertion. And, as will be noted from my earlier comments, this may not be a wholly unmixed blessing.

Our universities, as now constituted, may be slow to change, but they are geared to consider and present new ideas and to assist and participate in changes in society and changes in their own operation. The recent restructuring of the policy boards of a number of major Catholic universities, replacing priests with laymen, is dramatic evidence that our universities are not frozen into the original concept and pattern.

On the other hand, I note Dr. Franklin's allusion to Jerry Farber's satire, "Students as Niggers", which bemoans our system of education wherein many decisions are made for the students and students must docilely accept those decisions. I know all too little about the people's universities of Communist China which are held up to us as models, but I cannot help wondering whether



the students over there are required to accept without challenge the teachings of Chairman Mao. I have the impression that <sup>the Chairman's</sup> his conclusions about man and society are regarded as the ultimate word and are not open to challenge. If such is the case, our system, with all its imperfections, may be better suited to adaptation and change, which both of us champion, than is the Chinese system.

Next, I am intrigued by Professor Franklin's enthusiasm for having the working people determine university decisions and academic content. I am not clear on where he draws the line on who deserves to be called "virtuous working people", and who has passed over the terrible line into oppressive management, but whether foremen are in the one class or the other, I am a little apprehensive about having even the foremen determine which novels are to be studied in a literature class or which text is to be used to teach atomic physics. I should think that even the Communist Chinese would recognize that certain people have the knowledge and the experience to make better decisions in their field of competence than untrained and inexperienced people, however virtuous or oppressed they may be.

This leads me to observe that the question to which we were originally asked to respond continues to require an answer. Whatever view one takes

of social structures and man's destiny, the university in each society is still composed of students, teachers, managers and policy makers. The interaction and the chain of command and the quality of the relationship among these components will inevitably control the volume and the quality of educational output, whatever the proclaimed purpose of the university may be. I have tried to suggest a manner in which these constituencies may most effectively operate together to serve well in our society. Professor Franklin has responded to the question in a different manner. He has, it seems to me, expressed his view that our society is not a good society and that our universities simply reflect and reenforce the undesirable society that we have. Hence he perceives it to be a waste of time to try to reorder the parts of the university, for that would be merely to reshuffle ill-conceived components. Even so, I insist that the initial question will still need answering in the ideal people's university. The relationships must still be sorted out and fitted into some kind of a hierarchy.

To conclude, it seems to me that the decentralized system of education which we have had in this country in the past has many basic virtues which are worth rescuing from the present thrust toward centralism. There is no question but what it is incumbent upon educational institutions to correct the deficiencies of the past, particularly with regard to equalizing opportunities

for all students, but I am confident that it will not be necessary to destroy the system to make those corrections.

To lead the individual universities from the difficulties in which they now find themselves, I suggest again that it must be the president who runs the university, and that he must be a comprehensivist who can effectively serve as theorist, interpreter, implementer and judge of the purposes of the institution. Simply to keep everything flowing smoothly in a university is a difficult task, but that is not sufficient to produce good education.

In any society, the university must have as a major function, the production of graduates competent to live productively in that society. In a free society, the pressures and the options and the challenges to the individual are infinitely greater than they are in a closed society so that when education fails, the failure of the student is the greater. Thus this discussion and all others directed to improving the effectiveness of the university are of the greatest import not just for educators, but for all thoughtful citizens.

I am grateful to the American Enterprise Institute for sponsoring this series and for inviting me to participate, and I am grateful to Professor Franklin for posing such an extraordinary challenge to which to respond.