

SKANDALON

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EDITORIAL: An Essay on Academic Freedom, University Power, and the Power of the President

Some say academic freedom doesn't exist. Others say it shouldn't. A few so define it as to make it meaningless. And one or two would even say we have never had it on this campus. Nationally, however, the question of academic freedom was last raised at the University of California at Berkeley. We should like to consider the questions raised there in order to determine the rights and responsibilities of students within an academically free university, the position of the President, and the implications of such considerations.

The Berkeley Free Speech Movement began last September but did not gain widespread national recognition or widespread, dedicated support from its own student body until November 28 when the Berkeley administration acted to bring charges against a number of individuals who had taken part in certain protests against the administrative rulings prohibiting the use of university property for the purpose of advocating various social protest activities (except those approved by the administration, such as canvassing against Proposition 2, or taking part in pre-election political activities). The students rightfully pointed out that the action was in direct violation of a rather explicitly stated agreement between the FSM and the university, which had been signed by President Kerr only short weeks earlier.

But the issues at Berkeley go much deeper than the anger certain students felt toward certain administrators. They center over the concept of a university and the concept of freedom within that university. Berkeley acted to suppress "advocacy," and students responded with an unprecedented attack upon the whole institutional structure--against the "multiversity." Specifically, students charged that they had been alienated from the university community. In order to fully understand this term, "alienation," (which has been as widely used on the Berkeley campus as "apathy" on ours) it is first necessary to view the university within the context of academic freedom.

What Is Academic Freedom?

Traditionally, academic freedom has centered around three areas: extending the boundaries of knowledge, re-examining and re-evaluating old concepts in the light of new ones, and the communication of the resultant ideas with other members of the academic community and the community at large. The freedom of individuals to act in these areas must not be abridged. For it is only by the constant challenging of old ideas and concepts that they continue to glow with the light of truth; when the freedom to pursue new ideas and new viewpoints to their logical conclusion is abridged, or when the communication of these ideas is in some way limited, academic freedom becomes a historical figment and the most sparkling truth, whether it be of religion, psychology, or science, becomes no better than the dullest dogma. It should be obvious, then, that academic freedom is not an end in itself, but an indispensable instrument leading to the provocation of thought.

It was in the last area that the students felt their freedom was being abridged: communication. Intellectual activity, and thought itself, they contended, are meaningless if students and faculty are to be prohibited from expressing their convictions to the university community or advocating them without. It is a mistake, they said, to suppose that political issues can be separated from educational ones; a mistake to think intellectual activity can be valid without a corresponding attempt to put beliefs into practice. The attempt of the Berkeley administration to put restraints upon certain kinds of speech, faculty members stated in a brief submitted to the court trying approximately 800 students for sit-in activities at Berkeley, had been an unconstitutional one; and we agree.

The university administration finally backed down to the point where, it said, it would allow all kinds of advocacy except that leading to illegal actions. The reason students found this unacceptable seems to us sound; for nowhere was the administration's position made clear as to what would constitute "illegal" activity. Regarding the advocacy of sit-ins, for example--in recent months, there have been a great many court judgments rendering previous adverse decisions null and void.

Does the university have a right to decide when the courts can't make up their minds? Students claim it is up to the courts to decide whether a speech made on or off campus has led to illegal activity. And it is up to the courts

to specify the proper punishment. (This is a far cry, it should be noted, from South American universities where students demand that they be immune from any kind of criminal prosecution whatsoever while they are on the campus.)

The University as a Factory.

What kind of university, then, are students rebelling against? It is the concept of the multi-versity, a factory administered by men who seek to produce well trained men and women who will serve the needs of a technological society. They are rebelling against the concept of a university which replaces scholarship and learning with research and training. They are rebelling against the fact that there was little communication between the varying elements of the university community. (Most full professors were too busy with research to enter into any kind of meaningful relationship with their students; most students, in fact, had no contact with any professors, except those called "graduate assistants," who, in reality, had little more knowledge than they themselves.) They are rebelling against the fact that they had been alienated from the university, that the university had tried to bar them from the power structure, bar them, in fact, from any effective means by which they could make their feelings known to the administration.

There are important questions raised by Berkeley. Among them, for example, are: what should the policy of the administration be toward those students who do not agree with its policy, either in matters of conscience or because of family traditions? And what modes of action are appropriate to a student body that must cope with an administration that tries to assume the arbitrary powers of in loco parentis?

Power in the University

But these questions cannot be answered without some understanding of the power structure within the university. In our own university, the ultimate power has been vested in the President. Despite the act of legislature, however, the real power lies with the students and faculty. Only they can make a university great. And only they can ultimately destroy it. They can make it great by standing firm on issues of real importance--by defending their right to stand firm because it is their duty to think and their ability to think honestly depends upon academic freedom. Students and faculty can also destroy the university--destroy it by abdicating their responsibilities to those who cannot exercise them effectively or, as some faculty members at Berkeley have threatened to do, by withdrawing from the university.

It is not enough for cute, clever, and cowardly individuals on the intellectual fringe to make ascerbic comments on the inadequacies of our university, as if the university did not affect them. For it does affect them, even if it is only in the fact that it does not give them the education they desire. Faculty members have also been delinquent. They complain about curriculum, cumbersome administrative apparatus, the lack of academic freedom itself. But they complain in lowered tones, as if aware of the fact that an outspoken comment might lead, not to reprisal, but to a demand for action on their part.

It might be said our President has been delinquent; it might be alleged that a man with his authority has some responsibility for the university. This might, perhaps, have some validity. But the President, despite his paper power, cannot make a university. Even in those universities where academic freedom is truly a farce, it is so, not because of some tyrannical administrator, but because the university's faculty and students have consented to it. Perhaps we might wish for more encouragement, both publicly and privately, from our administration. But this, supposedly, is a community of people, seeking the meaning of adult responsibility. And if our President has not acted always in accordance with our wishes, it is because we have not expressed our wishes with sufficient force.

If students and faculty believe academic freedom to be a farce, if the curriculum is not all that they desire, if education courses are not all they should be--then blame must fall equally upon faculty and students. And the blame they must bear is not that of failing to exercise a right; but of having failed to do their duty. Even if academic freedom on this campus were suppressed, it would not excuse us for having failed to resist.

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"MARK TWAIN TONIGHT"

Hal Holbrook's "Mark Twain Tonight" at Siena on March 1 was a highlight of the Albany theatrical season. Holbrook telescoped two periods of Twain's life for his program. An extremely successful author and lecturer, Twain had made a large income. But unwise investments in the Paige typesetter and the bankruptcy of his own publishing company brought him to a financial crisis in 1895, when he was sixty years old. Although he was not legally responsible for the company's debts after it failed, he undertook a world-wide lecture tour in 1895-96 in a successful effort to make large sums of maney fast to pay off his creditors. Then family tragedy struck; his adored wife and one of his cherished daughters died. By 1905, at the age of seventy, he was a lonely and disillusioned old

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REVIEW--MARY POPPINS

It was truly unnecessary to advertise that Mary Poppins came from the Walt Disney assembly line. This film could have graduated only from the same school which produced such "too-too-nice-for-words" features as The Three Lives of Thomasina, Pollyanna, Summer Magic, etc. And, as usual, this "good-for-ages 8-80" sentimentality gets a bit heavy at times.

There are, however, several points on the asset side of the ledger, although this reviewer isn't positive Poppins truly deserved all thirteen Academy Award nominations it received.

One outstanding aspect of the film is the total performance turned in by the supporting players. David Tomlinson (Tom Jones) is magnificent as the too-cold-hearted, villainous father typical of a Disney production. Mr. Tomlinson's handling of the bumbling "bad-guy" (George Banks) is a joy to the eye and (at times) ear.

Glynis Johns, as Winifred Banks, wife of George and mother of the two children (Karen Dotrice and Matthew Garber), who are, with Mary Poppins, the central characters, is almost perfect as the slightly scatter-brained political crusader ("Votes for Women") and part-time homemaker.

Other than the two maids, Hermoine Baddeley (The Unsinkable Molly Brown) and Reta Shaw (The Pajama Game), the remainder of the veteran cast is involved in cameo-like roles. Ed Wynn has a laughing good time as Uncle Albert, a character marked by a moderate touch of insanity. As for Arthur Treacher (P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves) and Reginald Owen (A Christmas Carol), each makes the best of a bad role as Constable Jones and Admiral Boom, respectively. Despite their valiant efforts with all but non-existent material, both characters are (perhaps fortunately) rather easily ignored.

Elsa Lanchester (Witness for the Prosecution), widow of the great Charles Laughton, almost single-handedly manages to save the otherwise chaotic and generally inimpressive first ten minutes of the film as the haughty and quite obnoxious "Katie Nanna," predecessor to Mary Poppins.

Several friends from Hollywood's "Golden Age" appear periodically and add a good deal to the over-all fun. These veterans, too often forgotten by the average moviegoer, include Jane Darwell (remembered for her outstanding portrayal of "Ma" Joad in the 1940 classic, The Grapes of Wrath), who makes what could be her final appearance in films as The Bird Woman. As such, she has a sum total of six words, yet she is involved in one of the more impressive photographic moments in the entire film, as she sits on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral feeding the pigeons; the whole scene is done in a very well handled dream-like sequence, as Mary Poppins serenades the two precocious offspring with "Tuppence a Bag."

Arthur Malet appears as the son of the president of the bank which employs, fires, and re-hires Mr. Barks. Malet is suitably artificial, condescending, and pompous.

The credit for the generally high quality performances goes, to some great extent, to director Robert Stevenson (The Absent-Minded Professor). Mr. Stevenson has been nominated for Best Director of 1964, and rightfully so. The episodes (which indeed they are) follow in succession with as much logic as is necessary in such a fantasy. The scenes are, in most cases, well-handled, though often too long.

Perhaps the biggest asset which the film can claim is the happy (and beneficial) marriage of Stevenson's direction and Edward Coleman's photography. The camera work can best be termed beautiful, particularly in such scenes as the silhouette dance of the chimney sweeps, the London skyline (seen from above), and the dream-like sequence already mentioned.

"Fun from beginning to end" easily describes the rather extended piece of film devoted to the combination of animated and real-life characters. This section is not only fun, but also the technical high point of the film, and could easily be thought of as one of Disney's all-time best cinemoments. Animation Director Hamilton S. Luske deserves ringing applause for his efforts.

Included in this animation-real-life section is a sequence involving four penguin-waiters, with one particular goof-off in the group. This scene is pure fun and enjoyable all the way.

This is followed by a rather over-extended (almost to the point of "Hold! enough!") bit of business involving a carousel and a fox hunt (complete with Irish-brogue fox), and a horse race, which Miss Poppins wins astride her carousel steed.

The screenplay, by Bill Walsh and Don DaGradi (Son of Flubber), is perhaps one cut above the usual Disney script, but only one. The best lines, perhaps paradoxically, are given to the kids, which they toss off with an aplomb which is completely disarming. The dialogue is heavy-handed in spots, such as when Dick Van Dyke admonishes the children to attempt to understand their father. The total script is almost infantile, yet it includes enough solid, intelligent lines as to make the author of the original Poppins stories, P. L. Travers, (almost) regret her delaying from 1939 to 1961 to sell the film rights to the Disney stables--ah--studios.

MARY POPPINS, cont'd.

The music, by Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman (The Parent Trap, Bon Voyage, Summer Magic), seems to be somewhat unevenly divided between fun and "fooeey." First to be mentioned, of course, is the Academy Award nominee, "Chim Chim Cheree," which is definitely the best of the lot. This plus the pleasant (but saccharine) "A Spoonful of Sugar," the clever patter-type numbers (for Mr. Tomlinson), "The Life I Lead" and "A British Bank," not to mention the fine ballads, "Feed the Birds" and "Stay Awake," perhaps make up for the too cute "Super-Cali-Fragil-Istic-Expi-Ali-Do-cious," the rather inane "Let's Go Fly a Kite," and the plainly mindless take-off on politics of the time, "Sister Suffragette."

Two of the brightest lights connected with the film are, of course, Dick Van Dyke, as Bert the Chimney Sweep, and Julie Andrews as the indefatigable and now legendary Miss Poppins. There is, however, one major stain on each performance. With Mr. Van Dyke, the problem is his accent, which can only be labeled atrocious. As for Miss Andrews, she is involved in one scene where she slips momentarily ("Step in Time") into an atmosphere which fairly screams "Eliza Doolittle," smudged appearance and all. That one mistake is easily and gratefully forgotten when placed against the balance of her performance. Win or lose on April 5, Miss Andrews justly deserves her Academy Award nomination for Best Actress.

Mary Poppins is, in a word, a qualified success. Walt Disney should be grateful that none of the characters takes himself too seriously, and no one lets the plot get in the way.

-David Hughes

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MARK TWAIN, cont'd.

man, who filled in his time by giving after-dinner speeches.

What is presented is a seventy-year-old Mark Twain on the lecture tour which took place ten years earlier. We can therefore see the bitter disillusionment with "the damned human race" that marked Twain's final years. Holbrook's make-up and midwestern rasp are wonderful. The elegant old man with the mane of hoary curls and drooping moustache, puffing away at a succession of cigars, and wearing the creamy white suit Twain affected in his later years, is a perfect illusion. And the carefully calculated technique, described in "How to Tell a Story" and "Platform Readings," has been mastered by Holbrook. He used the artful pause--which Twain considered crucial for a successfully told story--with enormous skill, milking every gag for all it was worth.

The program began with Twain as "The Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope," telling a vulgar story of hunting for the W. C.; and, in "His Grandfather's Old Ram," doing a marvellous impersonation of Jim Blaine, the garrulous old storyteller who always talked himself asleep before he get to the point of his tale.

But after the first intermission, the sensitive and perceptive Twain who had thought long and deeply on the relation of ethics to social environment emerges. Although soul-searching is neither easy nor pleasant, Twain never fell into the complacent trap of assuming perfection and pointing out the flaws in the next person. Brought up in a Presbyterian border town which preached the morality and even the divinity of slavery, he had to renounce the mores of his own society in order to affirm human dignity. And his conclusions are shattering in their implications. Holbrook acts out the story of Colonel Sherburn's murder of the drunken braggart Boggs from Huckleberry Finn; then, when a lynch mob gathers, Colonel Sherburn faces down Boggs's would-be avengers with cold contempt: "A man's safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind...I know you clear through. I was born and raised in the South, and I've lived in the North; so I know the average all around. The average man's a coward."

Holbrook presents Twain's scorn for organized religion as a plea for Satan, who has been condemned by mankind without a hearing, a procedure which is "un-English...It is un-American...It is French!" (This sally brought down the house). Satan, after all, deserves some recognition as spiritual leader of four-fifths of the human race. And Twain painted a dark picture of the bloody carnage practiced through the years in the name of religion.

Yet if he were alive today, his barbs would be directed, not against the organized churches, but against the secular nation-state. And I cannot think he would feel there has been any diminution in man's inhumanity to man, as cloaked in hypocrisy as ever. The People's Democracies would have evoked his mordant attention, but our own country would not have emerged unscathed. Regarded as a subversive in his own time, he would now be satirizing our emissaries, armed, not with the Bible but with the dollar, who, instead of converting the benighted heathen, aid underdeveloped countries who respond to American force-feeding by slogans of "Yanqui go home" and burning our libraries.

The program concluded with the famous Golden Arm ghost story. Then, with the weary pathos of a tired old man whose troubled life is drawing to a close and whose feet hurt after an exhausting lecture, Holbrook's Twain left the stage with a ship metaphor--"seventy years out and homeward bound."

-M. E. Grenander

Skandalon is the biweekly journal of Campus Christian Council. Articles, poems, essays, or short stories are welcome, as well as written responses to articles published in Skandalon. Work may be submitted to Guy McBride, Editor, or the Rev. Frank Snow, Campus Minister.