

PRINCIPLES OF PROTEST

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During the confusions of the recent protesting years on our campuses, I have been trying, as have many others, to set down some guidelines for myself; I should like to share these resulting "principles of protest" with my students. None of these is original with me, but the result of my reflection and editing.

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM: At the very heart of every college in the United States is the practice of freedom of thought. Every student, professor and administrator has the right to hold any position on any issue. (He even has the right to speak against academic freedom!) Therefore, the extreme right and the extreme left, along with in-between positions, have a right to be heard within the classroom, in bullsessions, in print, and in forums.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTRACT: In virtually every sphere of living, whether it be marriage, business, or college, agreements are made so that the intentions of those involved can be carried out. Members of the college staff are contracted to teach, to administer, and to carry through with the innumerable tasks that enable instruction to take place. When a student registers at a college, he is actually contracting the often burdensome responsibilities of studying within the curricula and regulations published in advance by the college; the student is an apprentice, under contract, but with full academic freedom.

Should a faculty member wish, for what he considers urgent reasons, to be released from his agreement for a day or an extended period, he has the freedom, and rightly so, to either resign or seek a leave of absence usually without pay.

Likewise, whenever a student member of the college wishes for what he considers urgent reasons, to be released from his contract (registration), he has the freedom, and rightly so, to either withdraw or seek a leave of absence. The first option is "without pay," that is, without

academic credit and with likely loss of tuition. The second option, where possible, might not involve loss of credit, but is subject to the judgment of the college administration and the instructor(s) involved.

It is absolutely essential, however, to honor the contract of those members of the college (administrators, professors and students) who wish to meet the terms of the agreements. Instruction must be carried on for those who wish to complete their tasks. I believe that in all but the gravest crises this contract is not subject to anyone's vote, that the contracts of even the few who might cooos to continue must be honored. (It is obvious that all are free to involve themselves in non-academic matters, in addition to fulfilling their academic obligations.)

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF CHANGE: Whether it be in matters of curriculum or politics, change is inevitable. Few would argue in behalf of "change for the sake of change." However, in

matters of curriculum, politics, or anything else, "change" versus "upheaval" requires at least two "subprinciples," those of objectives and strategy.

Is it unreasonable to assume that when one wants a change, he has a particular purpose or set of objectives in mind? Persons who seek political change hopefully have clarified their goals not only for themselves, but for all to be affected by their implementation. It is necessary for change to take place to develop clear-cut objectives.

For the change(s) to mature for the objectives to be realized, one must convince, intellectually and emotionally, the persons to be affected. One must "convert" people, at least the clear majority, to a point of view. This involves preaching and teaching, in the best sense of those words.

As is known well, people do not learn by having any point of view merely shouted at them or shoved down their throats. Real change, real learning takes place only when one has been able to understand the point of view and make up his own mind and heart as to his own acceptance (or

rejection) of it. Thus, to implement objectives one must seek to have persons learn; strategies must be developed for convincing and altering. Also, one must accept at least temporary defeat when the majority rejects a viewpoint.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF SELECTION:

There are innumerable changes needed in our culture. Should one be emphasized one week and forgotten the next? Should one person's or group's concern dominate the other for a day or a year? It would be my hope that the various social institutions, including the colleges, could each develop a list of priorities to which they would give attention, not for a short time, but for an ongoing, daily effort, seeking changes toward clarified objectives for each of the chosen priorities.

CONCLUSION

There have been those who argue for "strikes" as a "symbolic gesture" or their concerns; such disruptive gestures will usually violate the principles of academic freedom and contract. They will probably violate the principles of change and selection as well.

Those advocating the violation of these principles might suffer from the dictatorial phenomenon of "instant gratification" - in plain language. "I want what I want, regardless of others, NOW!" (Perhaps too many persons have been raised by their families in the style of "instant gratification"). This concept clearly violates the principles proposed here.

It is interesting to note that those advocating strikes have often not considered seriously the principle of contract. Often such professors and students have sought protection of the "Establishment" (the college) as they "strike" by demanding the expansion of the present contract. For example, pass-fail and other options. In other words, "While I strike, I don't want to suffer any adverse consequences!"

A much forgotten meaning of "protest" might be helpful as we face the planning for the school year. "Protest" in one of its most classical senses means "to affirm," "to be a witness," "to assert." Notice that these definitions are positive ones, not negative. I submit that a real protest is indeed positive, not negative; I submit that the "Principles of Protest" summarized here permit each of us to witness to our just concerns and to carry them through much more effectively than has been done in the recent past.