

"Antioch, A Liberal College" Algo D. Henderson (November 1946)

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Antioch, A Liberal College

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Antioch, A Liberal College'by Algo D. Henderson, President

This statement was originally made extemporaneously during a discussion by the Antioch Board of Trustees and the Antioch Administrative Council in November, 1946. It is reprinted here from the December issue of the Antioch Alumni Bulletin.

The people of this country seem to be turning away from their daring temper and progressive attitudes of the depression and war years. The conservative in all things appeals to them now as safe, sane, and restful.

The program of Antioch College, however, is both liberal by tradition and by intent. Because of this, I should like to be certain that you understand the program fully and my position toward it. For in spite of public pressures, I do not consider it advisable for the College to back away from a liberal position on the question of educating young people about the crucial issues of these times.

Liberalism Distinguished

At the outset, I want to distinguish between Liberalism and Communism. The Liberal and the Communist, as the latter has exposed his tactics in the United States, are diametrically opposed in methods. The Liberal wants an examination of ideas; the Communist has predetermined ideas. The Liberal wants to consider facts as a basis for action; the Communist has predetermined orders. The Liberal, believing in freedom of speech, desires everyone to be heard; the Communist monopolizes time, prolongs contention, and seizes power when others

are bored or tired from the conflict. The Liberal desires action on the basis of a democratic majority in group opinion; the Communist desires his end regardless of the means or its effect on others. This distinction is important, for there is some public confusion about it. Some of the more reactionary have thought that

Democrats are Communists who shave.

It is the Liberal in history who usually initiated the programs that won the confidence of the masses of the people. Note TR's trust busting, or Wilson's New Freedom. The Liberal took the lead in initiating programs for conservation of natural resources, for reforming our currency practices and establishing the Federal Reserve System, for regional planning in economically retarded areas (as in the TVA), in securing for labor the right to collective bargaining (which is right in principle, but not yet perfect in practice), and in appealing for world organization as the only means of preventing atomic war.

It is the Liberal who stands the best chance of defeating Communism in the West, for he offers a program of hope to the masses, one which obtains greater security and opportunity for them without also enslaving them. Take support away from the Liberal, and we in the West will get Communism, or its reactionary twin, Fascism. This is the issue in Europe right now.

The Antioch Tradition

When I talk about Liberalism at Antioch, I want to emphasize that this is the tradition at Antioch.

And when I use the term "Liberal" I want it to be clear that I do not identify it with some political point of view of the moment. Horace Mann, Antioch's first president, was a great liberal in religion, in his support of civil liberties, in educational method. One of you, now a trustee but formerly a professor here [William Leiserson], kept the College in hot water with some of its financial prospects. You advocated collective bargaining and unemployment compensation for labor when those issues were highly controversial. Another of you, now a trustee, left the presidency of the College to head that so-called 'socialistic experiment, the TVA [Arthur Morgan]. A nearby manufacturer wrote me then that

if Horace Mann knew what was going on at Antioch today, he would turn over in his grave.

The passage of time, short as it has been, has given the public better perspective about these particular issues. The College lost friends and money through these actions, but it also gained new friends and new support. And because you helped human beings advance a notch or two toward a better life on earth, the College was fulfilling its fundamental purposes and receiving its reward.

Faculty Activity

In describing our program I should first like to speak of our faculty because they make the program. I should like you to know that I consider our faculty, as faculties go, an outstanding one. They have their shortcomings, and they have great strengths. They are intelligent and they are well-trained. They are able teachers and counselors. Because of the substantial research program at Antioch, our faculty is research-minded. They are scholars, as evidenced by the 18 books and the 315 monographs and papers produced during the five year period

covered by my recent President's Report.

Their writings make known to the public their views in their respective fields, which include the whole range of arts and sciences. A reason why we have supported the Antioch Review, a liberal journal in the field of social sciences, is to have our faculty in this area closely in touch with the best writing being done for publication today, and to subject their own writing to public criticism. This process tempers judgments and corrects any tendencies to make statements that cannot be supported or documented.

Another point about faculty policy: We encourage our faculty to be active in their respective fields. A professor of accounting does some auditing for industrial firms; a professor of geology does research on quartz crystals for the U.S. Army; a professor of government is the local Democratic Party central committeeman; and a professor of sociology recently helped instruct in a training program in race relations for the police of the City of Dayton. Nor do we restrict the activities of the faculty outside of their fields. For example, a professor of languages has brought criticism on the College because he is active in editorial and organizational work with the C.I.O., yet I think he has a right to do this.

We ask these men to be aware that while they are working as individuals, or performing their duties as citizens, their actions are credited to the College. We recognize that these actions will sometimes embarrass the College in its public relations. But we believe that there are values that more than offset these difficulties: especially, that the teachers get a more dynamic quality than they otherwise would have.

And this brings me to another point of faculty policy. At Antioch we try to pick men who have opinions, and we encourage them to express their opinions. Of course we want opinion that is based upon learning, including the learning from experience. We want faculty who will give the reasons for their convictions; we want faculty who will change their minds when new evidence tells them they have been wrong (for example, we have one man [Professor of Political Economy Lewis Corey] who a number of years ago was a Communist, but who changed his mind as the Russian Revolution evolved into a totalitarian state); and we want faculty who will present views other than their own, and who will grade examinations on the basis of merit and not of viewpoint.

This matter of academic freedom is important if a college wants to have life and vigor. At Antioch we do not want milk-toast professors, nor policies which produce timidity in professors. Considering the experience of our students under the work-study plan, we must have faculty who, in addition to being historians and philosophers, know the world and feel themselves to be an active part of it. Having confidence in the integrity and scholarship of our faculty, I would rather risk a little indoctrination now and then than to have inanity in teaching.

Balancing the Faculty

Now a word about balancing viewpoints within the faculty, a subject frequently agitated by alumni. My observation is that within college faculties the technical men tend toward the conservative side in political and social views (although usually very liberal in their own fields),

and the men in humanities and the social sciences tend to be Liberals. This provides a kind of balance in social viewpoint, but of course it is not the subject at issue because the scientist is chiefly concerned with science and the humanities with the more controversial subjects.

When an alumnus says that a faculty is out of balance, he means that the social sciences faculty is left of center. He means that he wants to see each advocate of economic planning or devotee of the labor movement balanced by an enthusiast for free competition and unrestricted enterprise. Antioch has a measure of this kind of balance. Its professors of business administration are both advocates of the free enterprise system. Its professors of labor relations are both advocates of organized labor unions. Its professors of economics present their subject, as I think they should, from a long-run social point of view. They seem agreed that more economic planning would improve our economy, but one of them wrote for the Fall Number of the Antioch Review a searching criticism of the

matured

economy idea so prevalent during the New Deal. The professors of government believe firmly in democratic government; one of them thinks that the responsibilities of government can be extended yet subjected to democratic control, while another is strongly opposed to concentration of economic power in the government.

Men of Balance

But the idea of balancing

left

with

right,

in my judgment is not sound education because you get extremes of conviction rather than true liberal insight. What is needed is the best educated and best experienced men that can be employed, assuming their personal integrity is unquestioned. Such men will not believe that the world is finished, or that we know all there is to know in any field. They will all be men who will put to proof traditional methods and established ideas. If they are worth their salt, they will, by the very definition of the term, be Liberals. And they will be inspiring teachers or dull ones depending upon whether they stimulate their students to ask questions or confine their lectures to patting the status quo on the back.

The balance should come another way. It should lie within each teacher. The advocate of private enterprise should be the first to question the perfection of the system. The enthusiast for labor should be the first to point out the abuses in organized labor. The advocate of government as an agency of social advancement should be the very one to analyze the dangers in uncontrolled power in government. The intelligent student in these fields can see that these weaknesses and abuses, unless corrected, will destroy the end results he is seeking. To the extent that there is lack of balance of this sort, it is due to human failing.

Disturbing People

The net effect of the teaching of a good social sciences faculty will be an optimistic view of the

possibilities in social change. Not change for the sake of change, but change to improve the human lot. There is no way that I know for a society to avoid having persisting social maladjustments. There are ways in which particular maladjustments can be alleviated. In a democracy, this effort should be a continuous one. And ordinarily the social scientist will be found working on the side of the underdog to improve his lot. That is really his obligation, assuming that he believes in the worth and dignity of the human individual. I think it is part of the function of an institution of higher learning to stimulate the society of which it is a part to strive constantly toward better ways of living. Note that change always disturbs someone, and thus arouses opposition! In a way, the choices before a social scientist are either to be innocuous or to disturb some people.

Controversial Subjects

I should like now to make some analysis of our educational program, especially as it involves the study of controversial subjects. Please bear in mind that our program includes the whole of the arts and sciences, and the program of practical experience as well as the study of books. The study of controversial problems is only a small segment of the whole, but it is a live one and very important.

I do not know of any more important job for the institutions of higher learning to be doing just now than to be making some attempt to solve the crucial problems of today. Take the subject of race relations, for instance. The presence of this inequality in the United States is what enables [then Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav] Molotov to chide [then Secretary of State Jimmy] Byrnes about South Carolina when Byrnes asks for equality of treatment for minorities in the Balkans. The Negro with his frustrations and his growing hatred of the white man is fertile ground in which the Communist can plant his seeds of dissension. Also, if we are to interest a thousand-million people in the world in the democratic way of life we must persuade Britain, the Netherlands, and France, to join us in scrapping the idea of the White Man's Burden as applied to the Far East. We must push ahead. We in America cannot stand still, or move at a snail's pace against this evil.

An illustration of how we at Antioch approach these difficult problems was brought before you in this meeting. A faculty member and four students described in detail the work we are doing in race relations, and the students told you what they are getting out of it. I shall recapitulate their story briefly.

Race: The Facts and the Techniques

The spark plug of this program is a Community Government Committee, called the Race Relations Committee. It includes faculty and student membership, mostly persons who are deeply interested in the problem.

The committee has publicized the history of the coming of freed slaves to this community, of the efforts made by community leaders to help them establish homes here, of the clause in the original charter of the College prohibiting discrimination on grounds of race, creed, sex, or color, of the abolition many years ago of the segregated school system in the village.

Courses in anthropology, history, literature, and so forth, have been revised to give information and unbiased information about Negroes and Negro culture. Special reading programs have been developed for students.

Interesting co-operative jobs have been secured for students in communities or organizations which are working constructively in race relations. Students have written reports and theses on this work for analysis with the faculty.

Working on a carefully prepared, nonviolent plan, with copies of the State Law in their hands, students eliminated the color line at the local theatre, thus probably avoiding the kinds of riots that occurred in many other cities of the Middle West, and securing a permanent correction of the situation without any resulting loss to the theater owner.

An Institute on the Techniques of Good Race Relations was held last spring, with discussion by experts on police protection, housing, employment, and other subjects.

The College gives equal opportunity to Negro employees and currently employs a Negro professor in music [Walter Anderson], and a Negro supervisor of waiters in the tearoom [Kenneth Hamilton]. The presence on our faculty of one professor of sociology who has had long experience in working with Negroes [CD Stevens], and a second one who is a native of India (and recently visited there) [MN Chatterjee], is also significant for its bearing on the teaching program.

You will observe that we do not leave this subject entirely to the discrete courses in the various fields. We have revamped those courses to some extent because most textbooks ignore the Negro in American life. Beyond the individual courses we have job experiences, job studies, institutes with experts, special reading programs, and opportunities for community action such as in reducing situations that breed racial prejudice and in raising funds for Negro scholarships (there are 14 Negroes in the student body). From this program we may graduate a few persons who will make a career in this special field. Our main interest, however, is in getting all of our students to have a realistic understanding of the problems of minorities in present day society, and to have some knowledge of how to deal with them wherever they may find them.

Tempering Through Experience

In thinking about the Antioch program we must bear in mind that the idea of using practical experience as an aid to learning is basic to it. Students are placed on practical jobs in order to learn at first hand about the things they are studying in the books. This contact with real life also develops personalities and tempers character.

The idea of using experience in the education of young people is just as important in nonvocational fields as in the vocational. We think it is important for our students to have practical experience in race relations, in politics, in labor unions, in liberal organizations (and conservative ones, too), and in community living. Some of these experiences, both conservative and liberal in character, are found on the co-op jobs, many kinds are secured through Community Government, some through individual participation in national organizations.

For example, a veteran last spring ran for the Democratic nomination for Congress. He lost, but he and his student manager learned a lot. The campus, watching with both amusement and concern, also learned a little about politics. This fall some of the veterans and a faculty member organized a chapter of PAC, and got some of the students to ring doorbells in Dayton to get out the vote. In doing so, they not only learn how to organize to try to carry an election, but in working in an organization like PAC they learn something of Communist tactics, through the attempts of the Communists to infiltrate, and how to deal with them. It seems to me that learning how to deal with Communists comes largely through dealing with them, and the opportunity for students to do this lies in liberal organizations, which the Communists are trying to capture. In saying this, I am not advocating bringing any Communist-controlled organization onto the campus in order to deal with it first hand!

Unions and Students

Students are not restricted in labor union activities where they feel it important to belong to the union. In some jobs they have to belong. A few of our jobs are with unions, as in the main research offices of both CIO and AFL (we have a similar job with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce). You will recall the thorough study made by one student of

Hollywood

Uniontown

which she reported to you a year ago. This girl had become very objective about unions after seeing them function from the inside, noting their maze of jurisdictional disputes, getting the employer and community viewpoints. Many students, of course, go through a phase of learning when they think that a labor union can do no wrong. The Antioch work and study program is constantly at work in tempering and refining all unsubstantiated beliefs.

Incidentally, I have thought that Antioch has a genuine opportunity for the training of labor leaders. Labor is suspicious of the colleges because of their dependence upon wealthy people, and because the college training tends to wean the students away from working with their hands and from the rough and tumble of union politics. Labor leaders with whom I have talked think the Antioch program makes sense, because the students continue to work in factories, in unions, and so forth. One big problem confronting organized labor is that they are too dependent upon leaders who have had little education. Many of these leaders have come to the top through political and elbowing tactics. But labor is reaching a point where these tactics cannot always secure for it a larger share of the economic pie, because their demands become uneconomic for the industry. This means that the unions must develop research organizations, and they are gradually doing so. Leaders are needed who can utilize research as a means of increasing industrial production and thereby create more income to be shared by capital, labor, and management. The Antioch program, obviously, offers an ideal situation for the training of some such leaders and for demonstrating how this job can be done.

The Bearing on Public Relations

We think we have a sound program in education which prepares young people for all kinds of

callings in life. Any college does this, although we think the work-study plan has particular advantages in the maturing of students and in giving them insight into the problems with which they deal.

As one relatively small part of that program, we think we are doing a significant job in educating our students to meet a few of the more crucial problems in society today: race relations, labor-management conflicts, conservation of natural resources (where we use the Glen as a laboratory), international relations, and so forth. We think that practical experience in relation to these problems is also important.

These interests and these activities for the sake of educational experience for the most part go unnoticed by the public; but with any reasonable precaution short of suppression there are occasional incidents which cause discussion about the College. The best vents in a chemical laboratory will not remove all of the odors, yet experimentation in chemistry needs to go ahead. So does action in the social sciences. Usually the controversial wins some people and estranges others. It also makes it possible for politicians and agitators who are hell-bent to preserve the status quo to make an issue of the College, thus dividing the opinions of people. The fact that Antioch thus gets a "pinkish" reputation among conservative people is in my judgment no sufficient reason to cause us to confine our treatment of controversial issues to the ivory-tower approach (which doesn't save the colleges from being "pink" either). It does, however, make it important that we get the public to understand our program.

As my President's Report will show factually, we have been getting a steady increase in applications from prospective students, we have excellent job relationships with more than 400 of America's best employers, and we are among the more successful of the colleges of our size in securing financial support. These facts suggest generally healthy public relations.

My thesis, then, is that Antioch College has a vigorous and significant program. It is broadly conceived, covering the whole of the arts -and the sciences, and the accumulated wisdom of men as well as practical and tempering experience in the world today. Traditionally the program is liberal rather than conservative in character, and as long as you continue me in the presidency of the College it will continue to be that. For I have confidence in the soundness of our method in education, and in our faculty as educators. Furthermore, I feel strongly that a college has a responsibility to assume some leadership in helping make this a better world in which to live.

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