Utah Conf on Higher Ed
Snow College
Thursday, Sept 13, 1973

FACULTY POWERS, FREEDOMS, AND CONSTRAINTS IN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

It may be a sign of the times that a recent selection in one of the book clubs was titled 365 Ways to Cook Hamburger. I am not referring to our menu, only thankfully reflecting that there are not, so far as I know, 365 ways to govern a college or a university. Our task at this conference, and certainly my task in choosing a subject, is somewhat simpler than our wives' when they have to decide what to have for dinner. Your task at this moment is to endure one of society's more refined cruelties, the after-dinner talk: you must now pump blood to higher altitudes of thought and attention than feels comfortable. Both of us would prefer to relax in the satisfactions of a full day as well as a full meal and reflect, in a more leisurely fashion, on the important things to be discussed at this conference. It would be enough to ruminate, in both senses of that word.

We might, to begin, ruminate on the origins of three words often found in our discussions: I am struck by how the words college, university, and governance all derive from ancient roots having to do with working together in a common pursuit. The Latin collega (our English colleague) was a

partner in office; collegium meant a partnership, an associated group, and we know such associations as the college of cardinals, the college of heralds, the electoral college. (Here tonight, around these tables, with our common purpose, we form a college, a college of educators.)

The two words college and university have become interchangeable in this country even though their respective missions are dissimilar in important ways and their essential character distinctive one from the other. Their common origin and most basic purposes, however, arise out of a need to know and a passion to learn; and my remarks this evening will, therefore, apply equally to each.

The word university, as everyone knows, is from Latin unum, "one," and versus, "turn," so that the Latin universum gives us universe, "turning as one." University, in English, is applied to the whole group associated in the task of higher learning: universitas magistrorum et scholarium, "the whole body of masters and students"--an all-embracing phrase that should have rung out its reminder again and again in the troubled sixties.

With reference to the word governance, I may have to twist and turn a little, but without, I think, losing the point: govern comes, of course, from the Latin gubernare, "to steer," which in turn comes from the Greek kybernan, also "to steer," preserved in the allusion to the helmsman on every Phi Beta Kappa key in the motto philosophia bio kybernetes--"love of wisdom the helmsman of life." Steering, except for "steering

committees," may not sound like a group activity, until we reflect on all that is involved in getting and keeping a ship under sail.

Thus college, university, and governance are venerable words, in good fellowship with each other. The inherently cooperative meanings of these three words still persist, as still longer they should, despite the widespread feeling that today's campuses are collections, as one observer puts it, of "dissimilar persons engaged in unrelated tasks," tasks as diverse as pondering the human condition in Philosophy and devising pollution controls in Engineering. Today's leviathan, the multiversity, as Clark Kerr has called it, is a far cry from "college" conceived as the log James Garfield sat on, at one end, with Mark Hopkins at the other. The log has become an elaborate structure of almost bewildering complexity in which ends and means no longer seem so simply and beautifully related. Today Garfield and Hopkins, student and teacher, would feel themselves, like their modern counterparts at registration time, somewhat folded, spindled, and mutilated.

And yet, despite the visible complexity, the constants and even the variables in the governance of higher education are few. The constants are: 1) the need to learn--the students to be taught and the faculty to teach them while continuing to learn themselves; 2) the learning environment--the obligation of the administration and governing boards to oversee and provide; and 3) the society itself whose creation these centers of learning are and on whose goodwill and continuing

support higher learning has always depended for the wherewithall to survive.

The variables are 1) the differing structures which states and institutions devise to bring these bodies into harmonious and productive relationship and 2) the degree of emphasis each of these bodies puts upon its prerogatives and obligations, particularly in times of stress.

Problems of governance in higher education can too easily be dramatized as differences, even conflicts, between higher boards and institutional administrations, or between the administrations and their faculties or any other combination of these as may befit the issues. These differences and conflicts sometimes are inherent in certain flaws or ambiguities in the fundamental law under which they operate, but more often they originate in the very nature of the new tasks which society has assigned higher education and for which new forms, new procedures, new alignments, and new lines of authority are to be hammered out.

Colleges and universities have always been more like living organisms than mechanical or legal structures, and governance is an institution's metabolism. Governance is the sum of those processes of discussion and decision-making by which change, whether gradual or dramatic, takes place and which maintain the institution and serves the society which nurtures it in healthy symbiosis.

Unlike living cells, however, institutions do not function unconsciously. Occasionally the components ask--as in the famous quarrel of the body parts--which is most improtant, who runs the show, and by what authority? The faculty have certainly expressed themselves on this score in connection with which it is well to recall the powers and freedoms they have traditionally enjoyed, (and sometimes won at just sacrifices,) and at the constraints and responsibilities that go along with them.

Today centripetal forces on campus seem to be gathering power in the hands of the administration while at the same time centrifugal forces off campus are in turn dispersing that power among those agencies--government, industry, and the foundations--which fund higher education and press to prescribe its tasks. This both compounds the problems of governance, and afflicts the administration with feelings of impotence.

Faculty unions, as opposed to professional associations, are such a centrifugal force, and represent a further dispersion of administrative power with implciations for the traditional role of faculty governance that are as significant as the sources of funding. Frustrations in education are no one's monopoly these days--not the students', nor the faculty's, nor the administration's, nor the trustees. There is no villain--only society's pressing need to keep up with the accelerated changes that mark modern life.

Society, I believe, still values the traditional college product--the liberally educated and cultivated individual. In the same person, however, it also wants the engineer, doctor, teacher, lawyer, architect, psychologist and corporate executive. Society, in short, has given higher education a dual role: one general, liberal, traditional; the other specific, professional, highly contemporary. In this duality we may find the key to the forms of governance we have to live with, modify, or invent if higher education is to carry out its greatly enlarged and complicated mission.

Complex as our mission is, there is a common center in all that we are asked to do. We teach! We stimulate students to learn. And we ourselves continue to learn through research, through the literature, through association with colleagues, and, yes, through our work with students. A university's primary and enduring purpose is to teach ~~and to encourage research that adds new subjects to be taught and gives vitality to old ones.~~

The fact that we are fundamentally teaching institutions puts the authority of the faculty at the heart of academic governance. This authority is rooted in knowledge and an understanding of the processes through which truth may be made known--the mastery of a subject--~~and society finds that knowledge valuable enough that, under the sheltering wing of academic freedom,~~ faculties are granted intellectual independence so that ideas whether new or familiar will see the light of day, be subject

to critical analysis and examination and stand or fall in that most exacting of markets--the market place of ideas. This intellectual independence is a faculty member's most precious possession, but it brings with it certain restraints and reciprocal obligations, and I now wish to make an important distinction between the rights and responsibilities of the faculty as members of a profession and their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

As teachers, the faculty enjoy the special sanctuary of academic freedom; as citizens they enjoy the civil guarantees of free speech which are intended to protect everyone in our society equally; but as teachers we bind ourselves in the classroom and out, by the decorum of our profession, by its code of ethics and conduct, by its tradition and essential character. Precisely because we are members of an honored profession, we have the special obligation in our professional work and public utterances 1) to be accurate, 2) to exercise appropriate restraint, 3) to show respect for the opinion of others, and 4) to make every effort to indicate that we are not institutional spokesmen unless one of the burdens we carry compels us to be such. In other words, Professors as professional persons under professional standards--not under the law--are specifically denied the full range of utterances perfectly permissible for the citizenry at large. The faculty, in short, are held to professional standards of accuracy, respect, and restraint, not by the civil authority but rather by the profession itself,

even though such conduct and utterances may be constitutionally protected. This may seem a hard line on a subtle distinction but only by such constraints, only by the exercise of self-restraint will academic freedom itself be left free.

The authority of knowledge is higher education's bedrock; all else is superstructure. It is primary and original, where other kinds of authority affecting education are secondary and instrumental. This does not diminish the power of secondary forms, such as civil, institutional and bureaucratic authority. They can be instruments of a profession's life or death. I want only to point out the basic nature of the authority faculty members enjoy. Yes, knowledge is power. Ask the young, who know what it is like to be "in" on something: they talk like initiates about rock, about sports, about film stars and the new model cars. I envy their authority! To know is to be initiated into a mystery and to feel an exquisite sense of kinship with what is. Knowledge exists and, like beauty, is almost its own excuse for being.

Knowledge is one kind of authority. The faculty wield another and related kind which I would call personal authority--a power and influence measured by performance. The authority of the charismatic teacher who can impart his knowledge as one live coal imparts its glow to another is far reaching and long lasting. Remember the effectiveness of the teach-ins of the Sixties? Such personal powers can be abused, of course, creating demagoguery in the classroom, or cloaking opinions on matters outside one's competence with an equal show of authority.

There are Pied Pipers of learning as well as pedants, those on the one hand who lead by glittering means to fuzzy ends, and those on the other by dull means to dead ends. These are caricatures. These are marginal. These are uncharacteristic--clear exceptions to a noble profession peopled by honorable men and women dedicated to enriching the lives of the young with learning, understanding and compassion as they are committed to the pursuit of truth freely sought. In the best tradition, renowned scholars and gifted teachers attract students and give tone to an institution as they have always done. The responsible exercise of this authority is a worthy legacy from the medieval universities, as at Bologna, where the students engaged the professors for their eminence and popularity, and as at Paris, where, in the reverse, the masters formed into faculties and drew the ablest young scholars in Christendom to that great archetypal university. These, by the way, provided two models of governance which persist today: the Bologna model in Latin American countries, student dominated, the Paris model, by way of Great Britain, in our own, master dominated, with the important modification that the state has made education its business, from kindergarten through graduate school. The United States has separated church and state, but joined state and school, till death do them part.

Besides enjoying primary and personal authority, which I have already described, the faculty play obvious and important roles in the formal bureaucratic structure of the system. A

great many decisions, at crucial points throughout the system, have traditionally been in their hands. For example, within their disciplines faculty design the curriculum, arrange the resources to support it, fix the standardswhich control it, recruit, retain, or terminate those who teach it, evaluate the students who take it, accredit the certificates, diplomas, and degrees they earn. In departmental, college, and university-wide councils and committees, they determine the tone and character of the institution and the quality of its life. The key figures in the administration itself are usually faculty, deputized for a limited period to carry out these responsibilities. More than most institutions, a college or a university is indeed the lengthened shadow of its men and women who teach.

What really shakes the fortress of faculty authority over a given discipline and thereby over university standards and objectives is the Trojan Horse, as some would call it, of outside funding. Beware, they say, of Greeks who come bearing gifts, whether public Greeks or private Greeks! But even though administrators are aware that whoever pays the piper tends to call the tune, they are most often willing to take the risk, for they also know that higher education in this country could hardly survive a day without these benefactors. The faculty response is to ask for faculty review of the budget, to insist that no request for special services which cannot be related to higher education's primary purpose of teaching and teaching-related research be honored--no matter how tempting the contract or the bequest. The rub is that contract funding

of any kind, as opposed to general appropriations, calls on the contracting party to "deliver" specified "products," and calls for a kind of academic management and fiscal accountability in some ways irksome and even alien to college and university life. It usually means a bureaucratizing of what was loosely humane in order to meet quotas, deadlines, percentages, and extraneous standards. It also usually means a loosening of institutional loyalties. Professors in research appointments who are bound to their federal grants like an astronaut to his life-support system, must be ready or may be forced to move with the money. Nor are the humanities immune: the humanists too have discovered the heady pleasures of flirting with endowments, building enclaves within departments and kicking themselves loose from concerns of local governance in their supposed independence.

What all this means for the governance of higher education is, of course, the business of this conference to discuss. Colleges and universities continue to bring together the best minds of our time to help and, in vastly more subtle and sohpisticated ways, to provide a house of the spirit for the society that supports them. Higher education in Utah, seen as a single system, feels the pull of all its component parts. Governance in the system can succeed only through concert and concensus, with students, faculty, local administrations, the boards and legislature--like weights in a scale--moving now up, now down. The role of the faculty, I am confident, given its inalienable freedoms and self-imposed constraints, will be a stabilizing one.

It is an exhilarating and at the same time sobering thought that knowledge is our business, students and ideas our life. I am proud to be joined with this "college of educators" here tonight, in the firm determination to enhance the quality of our efforts through the full exercise of our trust and of the heavy responsibilities we share.