Editorial

STUDENT GOVERNMENT, THE INSTITUTE, AND 45 CENTS

Shotgun weddings are inherently unpleasant affairs, and when the parties involved are the Institute Committee and the Faculty Committee on Disciplines, the results are doubly unpleasant. The fact that some six hundred students have not paid the 45 cents at the Institute Committee office under threat of a five dollar fine by the Administration’s Committee on Disciplines is merely a public indication of just who is holding the shotgun in this little affair.

The whole thing began before Field Day 1952 when some $18,000 was to be turned over to the dormitories and to one of the main buildings by students whose identities have never been discovered. On December 4, 1962, Mr. Robert M. Kimball, Director of Business Administration, pointed out in a letter to Frederick G. Fauzett, Associate Dean of Students, that the Institute has no provision in its budget to cover damage done by the students. He said, “My purpose in writing this is to find out which approach you would prefer to take in clearing this account.” The approach taken by Mr. Fauzett was to turn the matter over to Institute Committee, which then decided on the 45 cent assessment.

All of this was very straightforward and certainly the right thing to do, since it is evident, even without reference to the fine print in the catalogue, that the students are responsible both morally and financially for their actions. Institute Committee obviously undertook the assessment to demonstrate to everyone that student government could effectively discipline the students, or putting it in a nice way, that the students are capable, at least financially, of running themselves. At the point, one might properly ask the questions, “Why did the Committee authorize an assessment on twenty-five hundred people when it certainly must have been evident that a large number would not pay? Since Institute Committee itself has no direct power to force payment of the fee, what was to be done about the delinquents—those that refused to pay?” The answer to this last question is clear—absolutely nothing. The net result is all too plain. Student government has merely fulfilled an obligation to the Institute at the expense of its greater obligation to the student body. It has collected money from those who were willing to pay, and then told the Dean’s office to collect from the rest. It started on a job it knew it could never finish. In short, Committee, ostensibly representing the M.T. undergraduate student body, has in this instance been reduced to a collection agency for the administration, and a pretty poor one at that. Furthermore, much damage has been done to the prestige of student government in the eyes of its fellow students. By running to the Committee on Disciplines, Institute Committee has demonstrated that student government is not yet independent, not yet ready to stand on its own two feet, and certainly is not “your student government,” whose actions “is considered by the Committee on Discipline to be your own act and decision and therefore binding upon you.”

This is what should have been done. Student government should, after having passed the motion to assess the undergraduate body 45 cents, and after having collected from those who were initially willing to pay, have sent a second letter to the delinquents, saying in essence (in addition to an explanation of the reasons for the fine) the following: “Those of you who still have not paid the fine have already paid the fine. It is evident that in fairness to them everyone must contribute his share. Thus we have arranged with the registrar to withhold the term marks of those who have not yet paid. Furthermore, a fine of two dollars will be levied on all those who have not paid by March 19. This letter would originate from the Committee office and would be signed by the President of the Undergraduate Association, and not by the Chairman of the Faculty Committee on Discipline. The authorizing for the above fine, the withholding of marks could easily be arranged by private communication between Institute Committee and the proper authorities.

The essential point is this. One having decided to assume financial responsibility for the damages, Institute Committee should have carried their decision, namely the 45 cent assessment, through to some definite conclusion, getting the cooperation of the Institute or other individual groups if necessary. The fact that one cannot help getting as a result of this fiasco is that student government is thereby forced into a front organization for popularizing the Administration’s policies, and decisions. Let us hope that the new Institute Committee has enough gumption and initiative to take back what should never have been given up.

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