

THE VOICE OF YOUTH

*the demands of today on
education and training*

A major concern confronting America today is the current and apparent continuing strife erupting throughout our institutions of higher learning. The discord experienced on campuses has produced results such as: disruption of classes, "liberation" of buildings, protest marches, destruction of property, "kidnapping" of administrators, cessation of the institution as a functioning body, police and National Guardsmen on campus, bodily harm, death, and a Presidential Commission to investigate the dissonance. As a member of the campus culture, I hope to share with you some personal reactions.

A basic trend has been developing in American education during the past ten years, and is now sharing the power which once belonged only to the traditional authorities of the Universities. This phenomenon is student voice demanding an active role in determining how they will learn, and more significantly, what will be taught.

I feel I have experienced both the "traditional" learning environment of straight academics, and the more recent trend. During my undergraduate study, I obtained from my Jesuit college what most educators would term a good, academic background. I enjoyed studying philosophy, sociology, psychology, etc. The institution was more than willing to attend to my needs. My *modus operandi* was to gain the background necessary for entry into graduate school, and thereafter a profession. My vision began to alter once I arrived at graduate school. I found myself on a campus where students protested not only academic but non-academic issues also.

NEW LEARNING APPROACH

This was a new experience for me; my previous role was one of complete passivity with everything but study. As the months passed, I began to realize that there were aspects of life other than the academic. I began to have a new sensation, I wasn't only a think machine, but moreover, a human being who had many needs, wants and responsibilities denied by myself and the university. I began to change my approach to learn-

ing from the traditional mode to a people-oriented system.

As I perceive it, this emphasis on people and the problems inherent in communicating and living with one another constitute the "new learning." The younger society is moving from a strictly cerebral environment to one that is both intellectual and person-centered. Many students realize there is a new game or culture developing but lack the rules which would facilitate the game movements.

The success of the "free universities" and experimental colleges represents an alignment of education with the new learning. They represent a reaction against the neutrality and boredom of our educational institutions. The emphasis is on creativity and self-determination. This individualism is represented by allowing students to pursue their own interests rather than being confined by conventional curriculum. The student can truly become all that he can be, in a potentially unlimited sense, rather than all that he can be as allowed by a system that has at its nucleus the principle of conformity.

Students enter college with the hope that it will provide a new, bright and exhilarating experience. Many are constantly becoming alienated with the realization that it is none of these things, but rather an advanced form of high school. Colleges have been slow adapting to the needs and desires of the youth culture.

CONFLICT IN ONE SCHOOL

This past year I was employed as Director of Guidance at a private secondary school. What I experienced there I feel is typical of the demands that will be made on institutions in the coming years. I found the school to be practically non-porous in being freely open to either internal or external change. The curriculum was almost identical to that of my high school education, and as one faculty member stated, it was exactly the same curriculum he had studied in the 1950's. The goal of the school appeared to be one of quality education as

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measured by College Board scores, I.Q. results, and above-average success on a myriad of other tests. Last year was the first time this type of education was challenged at the school. Students and a few faculty worked to establish such programs as teach-ins on Vietnam, a drug awareness program, workshops on ecology and most significant was three days of "free form education."

The three days entailed courses outside the regular academic subjects. Courses depicted such topics as ecology, black power, racism, Vietnam, sensitivity workshops, economics, aviation, photography, etc. Students and teachers were allowed to attend and teach the classes they desired. The majority of students and faculty felt the program was a huge success, and had hoped to incorporate this experience into the existing system of education. At present this hope has yet to be realized. What is important here is that students are saying they want a major change in what is being taught. They recognize there is more to life than academics. There is something much more important and worth learning than four years of compulsory Latin or math, and it possibly may be learning to be happy with oneself, and to interact and experience others in a meaningful and satisfying way. It is also learning to become involved in the problems that beset our society today, rather than studying those of past cultures.

I found this philosophy on academics to be fairly representative of the seniors I interviewed. They in turn felt this was depictive of their peer group in other public and private schools. There appears to be a growing dissatisfaction with the three R's., history, science, etc. What students seem to be thirsting for is a better sense of today's world as viewed from different styles of life and work besides their own milieu.

UNREST AND THE WORKING WORLD

The unrest that college campuses are experiencing can soon be expected to occur in the working world, and essential-

ly for the very same reasons. Business, government and industry have focused their attention mainly on production output rather than becoming responsive directly to people needs. The youth in our educational institutions will soon be moving into institutions that are woefully lacking the tools to satisfy them. The youth will be saying it is no longer enough to produce goods and capital gains; you must also become involved in issues that speak directly to us.

A most disconcerting experience for me was my job this past year. I found the educational requirements necessary for obtaining the position far exceeded the intelligence or creativity necessary for adequate performance. There was a vast distance between the hopes and expectations I had and what existed. What I found was boredom and mundane work rather than an exciting and challenging encounter. This feeling seems to be typical of my peer group (teachers and government employees). The institutions are non-responsive to their idealism and feelings. I detect from myself and others a sense of dissatisfaction with one's work. The working situation is not meeting our needs, is not offering outlets where idealism can become reality. I am hopeful this situation will change with the transfusion of new blood into the system. Youth possesses the power to effect change in the institutions much the same as workers harnessed power to unionize industry, to make industry responsive to their needs and wants. One can only hope that the change will be brought about by less violence and destruction than was viewed in the 1930's and 40's.

EDUCATION AND ASTD

The Urban Coalition Slogan: If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem

The universities must take an active part in eliminating the major causes of unrest that engulf our country today. They can no longer afford the luxury of seeking only truth and knowledge, but must add the variables of action and representation to their professed goals. The institution must not only speak out against

war, racism, poverty and the continued destruction of our environment, but take direct action against those responsible for the continuing pathology. Up until now, I liken the universities to the "silent majority" who witness a crime but do nothing to intervene. They realize there are crimes being committed but prefer to rationalize them away by saying, "this does not involve us," "we are not the proper force to deal with these circumstances," "the university cannot commit its name," etc. I feel the university has the power to confront and change the explosive issues of the day which threaten, in various degrees, to destroy us all. The universities possess the power and must assume their responsibility for eliminating or at least curbing the human debilitating forces in our society. This action may entail the confronting of established institutions such as the automobile and chemical industries, certain types of governmental and scientific research, etc. As I perceive it, this confrontation is absolutely necessary if we have any hope of surviving into the next century. Should the universities not choose to accept their responsibility they will play the role of a drowning man who because of middle class politeness chooses not to shout rather than be rescued. In this case, the university and possibly many others will "drown" from its reluctance to extend itself in the form of direct action.

To bring the issues expressly to ASTD, the organization can no longer morally afford only to train top-level management in techniques that facilitate transactions of business and increase revenue. ASTD is in an optimal position to effect a meaningful and valid change in many of America's corporations. They have a responsibility to rectify not only the internal problems of business, but societal complications as well. Should this not materialize, the organization may join the universities in the drowning man analogy. What is needed today is direct action in changing the human condition. I only hope we all acknowledge our share of the burden.