

THE OADFLY

All faculty, spouses, dates,
secret lovers, ex-wives, gurus,
yippies and yaf-ers welcome.

Sponsored by the Manhattan
Community College Chapter
of the United Federation
of College Teachers.

Food, drink (hard and soft),
music, talk (good and bad, no
proselytizing though) and aspirin
when it's all over compliments
UFCT and CARE.

THIS SATURDAY-APRIL 6 AT
MAYER ROSSABI'S, 303 WEST
66 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
(SC4-3138). ASK ATTENDANT
AT DOOR FOR COMMUNITY
ROOM (WHERE PARTY WILL BE
HELD).

SPECIAL MEETING

UFCT-BMCC

Wednesday - April 10

12:30-Room 302a

At the last chapter meeting, it was decided that the faculty should be polled on whether or not it thought that it was advisable to support a national student strike on April 26 against the war in Viet Nam. Results of the poll will be announced at the meeting after which the chapter will decide what its position shall be. All faculty are welcome to participate in our deliberations (short of voting).

The views expressed in the following article are Professor Rossabi's and not necessarily those of the union. The Gadfly in keeping with the democratic procedure of the UFCT invites expression of personal opinion from faculty on issues of concern to the union.

PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

ON A REVOLUTIONARY PURPOSE FOR THE UNION: A REACTION by Mayer Rossabi

Joe Conlin's "On A Revolutionary Purpose for The Union," in last year's Gadfly, was a welcomed article on the role of the union in our educational institutions. However, it remains incomplete, since it only deals with general conditions and concentrates on the activities of one segment of the system. It is the intent of this article to continue the dialogue, add to the analysis by examining the contribution of other segments of the system, and suggest a role for the union in the specific conditions of the institutions' functioning.

Institutional bureaucracy has permitted distortion of purposes and goals; manipulation of people; detachment and alienation from others and one's work, etc. In short, it is corrupt. This festering corruption can only be stopped by revolution, says Conlin. A revolution which will wrest the direction of the college from the administration, since the basis for this condition is "A system which accepts an administration utterly without responsibility to the faculty and devoted primarily to maintaining its existence, its power, its position, its status, and not even secondarily - the interests of faculty and students." But the administration is only one segment of the system, which includes the whole society; more specifically, the faculty, the politicians (elected, appointed, and patronage recipients), the public, and the students: what about their roles?

What of that portion of the faculty that abets and encourages this condition? It corrupts and demeans itself by not fulfilling its responsibility in the educational process. A process which is not restricted to classroom teaching but which includes the concern, provision, and maintenance of a viable democratic academic community of scholars and students. These faculty members have forsaken this responsibility by giving up their individuality (becoming yes men); by being parasites (living off the work of others, in either academic or non-academic matters); by being manipulators (using others, including unions for selfish ends); through ostrich-like behavior (burying themselves in esoteric research); and, self-aggrandizing projects which blur the conditions under which teaching and learning is taking place. These faculty members have a stake in the maintenance of the status-quo; corruption in their institutions exists because they want it to, or allow it to exist. The plot then, if there is one, is not simply of the administration's making but also of the faculty's choosing.

Both the administration (of educational institutions) and the faculty however do not function in isolation. They must contend with the politicians. For it is the bureaucrats and politicians of the society who determine the rules of the game. They interfere dangerously and openly in times of crises. But their presence is even more pervasive through the extremely limiting laws and by-laws they impose on the institutions. Two examples of their role in providing the conditions for the growth of corruption should be mentioned.

The first revolves around the whole process of promotions. Aside from the fact that there are basic inequities in the criteria for promotion, the competition that develops for the severely and arbitrarily limited number of 'Budget Lines' available is in itself corrupting. It sets the stage for invidious inequality between faculty members, departments and divisions.

The second example concerns the appointment, tenure, and power of administrators. The faculty has little constraint over decision making powers of administrators and no power over their appointment or tenure. A position of power, which has little or no restraint to that power, tends to corrupt the individual in that position. Even the most conscientious administrator finds himself trapped by the system. This is not simply a result of "Reactionary" administrators within the educational bureaucracy but is symptomatic of all bureaucracies that permit, defacto or dejure, unlimited tenure and unrestrained power. The horror stories Conlin wrote about are mild compared to occurrences by the most enlightened administrators to the most 'Progressive' or 'Liberal' organizations. Conditions then make it possible for the administrator to use his position for his own benefit (materially or otherwise) and the longer his separation from his original role as an educator, the greater the possibility for his commitment to non-educational endeavors and goals.

Faced with this corrupt system Conlin advocates change - revolutionary change. Revolution has great appeal, it is simple, clear, direct and all-inclusive. As a goal and a theoretical frame-of-reference, I too, would advocate it, but unlike Conlin, I don't see it as a struggle with administration. The struggle should be directed at the social system, its emphasis lies outside the particular institution. The strength found in union is to be used to bring about social justice through its struggle with corruption. Assuming, of course,

that in the struggle the union itself does not succumb to the corruption of its own bureaucracy. To protect against that eventuality, the union must promote an active membership which decides its own fate within the context of social justice. It is only then that the demand for faculty power and 'Bread' and 'Butter' issues can make any sense, otherwise they become cynical adaptations to a corrupt system. In short, the union's goal is the achievement of self-determination, a necessary if not sufficient ingredient of any profession.

Having dealt with the general or conceptual level, the attention is now focused on the specific level; the distinction is imperative if action is to be effective. What then is the role of the union in the reality of the daily affairs of an institution?

One answer is the promotion of practices which help socialize humans within the academic community. As a corollary, the removal of obstacles which interfere with the institution's portion of the socialization process, i.e., the servicing of those humans called students. The union is therefore not simply 'against' conditions but also and primarily 'for' certain conditions. Let us first explore some of the conditions the union should be against.

The revolutionary goals could and should be maintained but revolution is not feasible and even destructive (in the sense of a temper-tantrum). Revolutions prevent us from dealing with human beings, instead we deal with the 'other side', without any possibility of shades in-between. This polarization of the institution detrimentally affects all interaction within it, thereby eliminating the opportunities for developing and attaining the ideal academic community. The union should be against what has been described as rigid compartmentalization, segregation, isolation, etc., as manifested in the following ways:-

1. To deal with administrators within the community, as abstractions, when they are in fact men and woman. To deal indiscriminately with administrators and their behavior is corrupt. It is part of that corruption the union is struggling with in the bureaucracies of our social system - the changing of people into objects. No respect should be tendered to the administrator who manipulates, or who is engrossed in self-aggrandizement through empire building, etc. But teachers are not necessarily devoid of these or other corrupt traits and should be similarly treated. To arbitrarily lump administrators in a mold and to treat them as objects, can easily lend itself to 'administration-baiting.' This tends to interfere with the initial focus of the union. This displacement or diffusion of the focus opens the door for selfish interests and concerns. Corruption whether by the administration, the union, the individual, is still corruption.
2. To treat the institution's administrators as employers, for then they become employers.
3. To treat colleagues in other divisions or departments as 'representations' of said divisions or departments.
4. To place various departments in a hierarchy.
5. To patronize students.
6. To compartementalize knowledge, teaching, and teachers through course packaging.

The union is also against arbitrary decisions from any source.

What should the union be 'for'? The union should be for 'militant alertness' and active participation by the members of the community. The union should:-

1. Assure proper communication (not oppressive memoranda) which will keep the faculty informed of relevant aspects of the college. For example, faculty council minutes and decisions; faculty rights according to the by-laws; policies concerning decision-making responsibilities, etc.
2. Maintain two-way communication with administrators.
3. Stimulate greater involvement in the affairs of the college amongst the faculty. Education does not only consist of the divulging of facts in the isolation of the classroom. Faculty should be encouraged to become advisors to student organizations, and to participate in social and educational student activities. There should also be involvement in committees, whether individuals are elected to the faculty council or not. Faculty members should be concerned with the need for more library space, academic standing, development, etc.

4. Provide the leadership for educational innovation. Inter-relation between the courses taken should be stressed, through core curricula and team teaching. New courses should be offered which will permit greater communication between faculty and students. For example, a student could sign up for a course in 'Contemporary Issues,' attendance being required. Any faculty member who wishes could sign up for participation in such a course and their attendance would also be required. The content of the course would evolve from the questions which either the students or participating faculty members (more than one could be present) would raise and prepare for.
5. Critically evaluate and analyze the effectiveness by which students are served. The Office of Institutional Research could be used to check the relevance of certain course work to the students after graduation, etc.
6. Review the goals and objectives of the institution.
7. Assure the dominance of the faculty in policy and decision making.

All of the above is easier said than done. Once revolution in the specific situation, i.e., the day to day reality, is renounced, and the abstract administrators become clearly defined individuals, the problem of mobilization arises. How can 'militant alertness' and 'active participation' of the membership be maintained? This becomes even more difficult with the elimination of demagoguery, and the ability to 'understand' why an individual administrator act the way he does. The current practice of most unions in the country is for the leaders to manipulate the membership; they prefer a dormant membership, which allows them a free hand, using demagogic propaganda to prime the membership at appropriate times. This should be totally unacceptable to a teachers union (or any other union). The union will have to put a lot of its effort in creative attempts at remotivating the teachers to take an active interest in the total process of education; hopefully this can be accomplished through provision of possible areas of participation. This also applies to member participation in union activities. The autonomy of the individual chapter should be maintained.

In relating all this to B.M.C.C., the 'old timers' will readily admit that progressive democratization of the institution has come about and that we are moving in the right direction. Compared to the past, we can feel the fresh air. To believe that this was solely the result of the union chapter would be a delusion, which some might wallow away in. This is not meant to belittle the activities of the chapter which proved to be extremely important as catalyst.

On the other hand, the belief by some administrators, isolated from the day to day functioning, that B.M.C.C. is the epitome of democracy, is just as delusory, as indicated by 'The Gadfly,' and by the activities of the union's grievance committee.

The Union chapter will of course continue to expose corruption and arbitrary behavior, whether it is manifested by individual administrators and their faculty coteries, by faculty members (union or non-union) or by any other segment of the college. Again, to the old timers 'The Gadfly' does not seem overly aggressive when put in the context of the college's history, but, it has evoked, among a segment of the newer faculty (and some older ones), a negative response because of what they feel is its unnecessarily harsh tones; maybe this feeling should be taken seriously.

The union chapter should also maintain the precedent set by its enlightened and idealistic leadership, of an open door policy and complete freedom of expression and debate within the chapter. The prodding and proselytizing of faculty has continued and the request for active participation by the members still is its primary concern, even though many prefer not to share the burdens and responsibilities, and only expect to be served.

As convinced as I am of the necessity for exposing corruption and arbitrary decision-making, so am I also convinced that the union needs to support any attempts, but most especially attempts by administrators, towards the realization of the democratic academic community of scholars and students. Together we can make sure that the concentration remains on the 'ends' rather than be distracted by the means, to the point that they will become our ends, as exemplified by our bureaucracies.