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We Hold These Truths

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We Hold These Truths

by THORREL FEST, *President*

What appears to be a small minority of private colleges (no DSR schools) have expressed some concern regarding the suitability of the current intercollegiate debate proposition. Some critics of the question feel that to argue for diplomatic recognition of Red China is to approve its conquests, possibly mislead the immature student and provide communists with propaganda material. None of these arguments seems to have sufficient validity to merit the action proposed—change to another proposition. There has been some effort to make a public issue of this matter, and on October 22 your president was asked by one of the wire services to comment. The text of a statement he issued to the United Press follows:

"The current intercollegiate debate proposition, 'Resolved: That the United States should extend diplomatic recognition to the Communist Government of China,' was announced by the national committee representing the Speech Association of America, the four national forensic honor societies, and those unaffiliated colleges desiring to participate in the balloting. In the preferential poll, this topic led all others by a substantial margin. The issue is one of the most troublesome confronting the nation and the world. If we are to reach a peaceful solution to the Asiatic problem, it is of vital importance that all our citizens be fully and objectively informed on this and related matters.

"In a democracy where full, free and objective discussion is possible because there is faith in the judgment of the people, we should be derelict in our responsibility if we did not provide students with the opportunities to discuss all such problems. I have full faith in the ability of college students to evaluate public issues if given the opportunity to test the arguments in the competition of public forums. When we hesitate to discuss freely, we have bowed to the authoritarian philosophy we seek to oppose.

"To study and discuss this problem does not imply that the Communist Government of China is condoned, approved or supported in any of its acts or aspirations. Such discussion does not imply that Red China should be admitted to the U.N. We may seek to understand even a loathsome and regrettable fact. To ignore such problems is to unrealistically ignore the best interests of the U.S.

"At the University of Colorado we propose to debate this problem both on and off the campus. We shall also discuss and debate other problems and issues of local, state and national nature. As national president of the oldest intercollegiate forensic organization, Delta Sigma Rho, I am urging every chapter to recognize its responsibilities, recall the traditions of our society and resist any efforts to censor or in any way restrict the social and political problems students may discuss so long as the activities are carried on in the American tradition of free, open public meetings."

Many of the current critics of our colleges are disciples of force. They support a "get tough" policy in both domestic and foreign affairs. They regiment and manipulate men's minds as well as their bodies.

An effect of their policies is seen in the fearful questioning of the current national intercollegiate debate proposition by a few directors of forensics and college administra-

tors.¹ It is asserted that discussing diplomatic recognition of Red China is tantamount to approving its aggression and may result in "immature and untrained minds" being improperly influenced. A national news service has requested a statement of position and

1. Resolved: That the U.S. should extend diplomatic recognition to the Communist Government of China.

policy. This is but one of the examples of how our areas of discussion may be narrowed from examining possible policies for action to the consideration of how we may follow some readymade plan.

Such emphasis on conformity seems strange in a peaceful democracy whose strength is thought to lie in the intellectual freedom of its citizens. Jefferson's philosophy was based on the belief that an enlightened, alert and articulate people could govern themselves. It is faith in this concept that justifies public education, a free press and the right of assembly. It is concern for the general welfare and the preservation of basic human rights that lead people to seek information, criticize policies and advance proposals. It is these qualities that distinguish free men from vassals.

It is hardly necessary to observe that the training of such responsible citizens is an important obligation of the college. In that training primary importance is placed on the dignity and value of the human personality. All social, political and economic efforts recognize this assumption; it is the central theme of the Declaration of Independence.

Much effort is directed toward understanding and controlling our environment. We are concerned that our students develop sensitivity to and appreciation of the inestimable heritage of the past. We also include training in the principles and techniques of democratic living, including the basic tools of democracy, full, free and fair public discussion. It is here that the discipline of public address can contribute most significantly to the development of a better individual.

Both course work and co-curricular programs must strike deeply into the work of our colleges and the lives of our students. They must challenge the student with new and engaging concepts. In forensics a long list of broad propositions has sharpened the intellects of students on the general and theoretical.

Commendable as have been our discussions of civil rights, congressional investigations and international trade, these same problems should also be related to personal and practical problems like, discrimination on the campus, academic freedom, state trade restrictions, early marriage, intercollegiate athletics, religion in college and a host of community, state and regional problems. There

should be worthy challenges for tough-minded students. Their elders have shattered many a lance on weaker armour.

As he discusses these problems, the student must acquire tools of proven worth. His freedom and flexibility depend on selecting the right principles and then knowing where, when and how to apply them. We are falling short of our responsibility if his training is limited to a few popular or conventional forms of speaking. Neither an unbroken pattern of tournament debating nor a slavish devotion to discussion alone will develop the student's full potential. The program should provide opportunity for speaking that ranges from informal conferences to defense of ideas in public forums. The experiences must evolve from the student's needs.

If training in public address is to be translated into constructive action, the student must see it as part of the vision of a better society. He must believe that by deliberating together men are not only masters of their fate but may achieve great things.

Insensitivity and apathy are the hallmarks of the fatalist and weakling. In a period when economic crises demand bold thinking, when social disintegration is the rule, and when the total bankruptcy of war as a constructive social force is admitted by thoughtful military men, do we not have need to help students use the tools of democracy in the only way that will save it?

The obligations of citizenship bear most heavily on those with opportunity and ability. To what extent do students expect to share responsibility for social progress? Do they regard their forensic skills as personal assets to be used as seems expedient, or do they feel a compulsion to participate in public discussion, challenge the half-truth and denounce the demagogue?

The interpretation of the obligation can hardly rise above the citizen-speaker's standards of value. His ethics cannot be separated from his statements and actions. The irresponsible charges of certain high public officials, the televised tragedy of a recent congressional investigation and the assertions of the recent political campaign give us cause to ponder the depth to which the ethics of speaking may descend.

Rhetoric is no more evil than a thermonuclear reaction, but in irresponsible hands

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his own interest and continue his own study. Hard fact without inspirational lift doesn't go with students today."

An outstanding public speaker himself, Hill is able, while teaching speech, to make reference to pertinent experiences of his own to demonstrate aspects of how specific speech problems may be solved. He sees in speech skills a means to leadership.

In speech situations he is a well-groomed, smoothly tailored, slender, 5 foot 11 inch figure, with greying red hair and large eyes. He stands erect, thumbs often tucked under the lapels of his coat. His voice is baritone in quality.

The speech subjects he favors are related to the follies of war, the necessity for keeping faith with America's future and the youth who must preserve it, the need of every man for a well-rounded education, the history, traditions, and potentialities of the state of Kansas, and community betterment.

In one recent year, Hill found that he had, in addition to his teaching and administrative work, participated as speaker on 135 programs, averaging two a week, divided between fifteen states. He has spoken in 38 states in all.

Hill has been elected to various offices. He is the current president of the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce. He was a charter member of the local Kiwanis Club, once serving as its president. He has also served the latter organization as district governor, and as a member of the International Board of Trustees.

He would much rather talk about his family than himself. In 1928 he married Irma L. Smith, who was in charge of piano work for children at Kansas State, having been a music major at Illinois Wesleyan. In 1933 their son, Howard, Jr., was born. Howard, Junior, is a student at Kansas State and has entered enthusiastically into speech activities. He won the Larry Woods Memorial Speech Contest in a past year, and recently the Capper Oratorical Award.

As Hill stood at the banquet arranged in his honor on the night of April 24, 1954, delivering what might well rank as one of his most moving addresses, it was evident that he felt as warmly toward the assembly that met to honor him as that assembly felt to-

ward him. As he regarded the crowded hall he commented:

"Whatever I may have been or am today, it is, of course, largely because of you."

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both are capable of devastating effects. Thus we must be concerned with the individual as well as with the principles. Help lies not in the direction of despair, condemnation or censorship. It is found instead in training in the full scope of public discussion.

Both the principles and the ethics must be applied in that arena. If training in public address is to make any lasting contribution in building better citizens, we must hope that both private and public deliberations will be raised to higher ethical and intellectual levels by responsible and dedicated leaders.

Some, in their discourse, desire rather commendation of wit, in being able to hold all arguments, than of judgment, in discerning what is true; as if it were a praise to know what might be said, and not what should be thought.

—Bacon, *Essay XXXII*

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