

## THE ANATOMY OF STUDENT DISSENT

By

President Charles W. Laffin, Jr.

With the aid of several interested faculty and staff members who have been discussing student demonstrations on College and University campuses, the President presents some reflections as exercised in social analysis.

To those who have made some study of the anatomical characteristics of student dissent and demonstrations for change, the following factors seem to emerge:

1. An issue of considerable emotional appeal must be defined as a basic platform for dissent by demonstration.

Examples of this emotionalism may be found in the areas of race, religion, generation gap, peace in Vietnam; factors in the demonstrations now going on from Brandeis University to Berkley from Duke to Chicago.

2. Preferably, the issue raised by students should have some relevance to campus life but it may be beyond the control of local establishment to control or change.

Illustrations of causes beyond local control, such as "stopping a war", immediate action in a change of student and faculty or curriculum mix, reduction of cost of education, tuition, etc., removal of rules or regulations imposed by higher than local authority are planks in dissent at institutions across the country.

3. Visibility to the cause and demonstration of dissent must be achieved through the recourse to mass media, visual, audio and written, appealing to T.V., radio and newspaper audiences.

An apparent strategy is the alerting of news media even prior to informing authority against whom dissent is to be pressed. Invitations are extended to media known to be sympathetic and public press as well. Illustration of this was seen in demonstrations at San Francisco where relative quiet was observed between picketers and police until a television station wagon came along. This seemed to be a signal for picketers to charge the line of helmeted police. A fellow president has related experience that his office was not invaded until mass media representatives arrived on the scene.

4. There may be outside influence to give form, direction, vigor and perimeters of the dissent.

Influence or direction can often be traced to student groups with a national base: for example, the S.D.S., John Birch, the New Left, militant race, religious, nationality or political groups across the spectrum from moderate to extremists. There is evidence that behind the militant dissent lies a supporting strength derived from a wider base of support, frequently on national (and possibly international) level.

5. Once the course of action has been entered upon, the determined demonstrators' action must be taken even if justified intervention and attempts at reasonable solution are offered.

If the dissent program is leaked purposely or otherwise there is no turning back, no "chickening out" in front of news media. The newsmen have been invited in to see a demonstration and the demonstration

seemingly must be held at any cost.

This is perhaps one of the most frustrating characteristics of student dissent. Once the purpose and form of demonstration has been made known or has been decided upon, apparently the application of reasonable attempts at other solutions are virtually impossible as alternate paths of action. Seemingly, the fear of appearing "weak" before T.V. cameras, news reporters, radio casters, looms greater than the college or university authority's limited resources to review and penalty by due process.

Trial by news media is one of the least justified procedures in resolving any issue. There is almost never a viable rebuttal to accusations or misrepresentations resulting from conclusions drawn by reading or observing the mass media's versions.

At San Francisco State, the demonstration cycle has resulted in continual brawling with helmeted police. At Berkley, it resulted in burning a costly assembly hall. At Columbia, it was Mark Rudd's "troops" occupying the administration building, library and other key structures on the university campus. At San Mateo, San Francisco Junior College, it was blowing up the Dean of Student's home.

Across the land, the violent hand of "visible demonstration of dissent" follows a similar anatomical pattern, either completely or in much of the skeletal figure outlined here. None of it is in the manner of a democratic society's belief in bringing about social, educational, economic or governmental change through the rule of reason, the voice of the electorate, and a government by man and laws.