

Cross' Policies of Appeasement Lead To Anarchic State of Constant Crisis

by Bruce Martin

I would like to make an observation based on certain of President Cross' past actions and on his responses to various questions at the plenary session Tuesday night in Glasgow.

The basic hypothesis of what follows is that in his hesitations with various interest groups since his arrival at Birmingham last fall President Cross has chosen to adopt a policy of appeasement rather than one of meeting directly and comprehensively with problems as they arise.

In response to a question at the plenary as to which individual or group of individuals should, in his opinion, participate in the final decision as to the designation of a separate building as a black cultural center, President Cross outlined his role as the President of the College, the Board of Managers' role as the holder of final decision, and SAAB's role as the source of a possible veto of whatever building might eventually be offered to them. Consistently absent from President Cross' response was any mention of a possible role in the decision-making process of the student body exclusive of SAAB's (a

possible role of the faculty, but I am a student and the faculty will have to speak up for itself or remain silent and unrepresented).

The main variable which seems to separate the student body from President Cross, the Board of Managers, and SAAB is that the student body is the only group of the four which does not play a critical role in President Cross' appeasement-oriented calculations of imminent sources of unsolvable and unappeasable confrontation. The Board of Managers and the President himself are sources of power which cannot be put off or ignored by virtue of their legitimate positions in the executive hierarchy of the College, however ill-defined many of us may feel that hierarchy to be. The members of SAAB play a crucial role in President Cross' appeasement-oriented power calculations by virtue of their demonstrated willingness to be "reasonable" to the point of providing crisis situations in the fulfillment of their interests.

An example of the "total flow" of "reasonableness" which prevents the student body from playing a more recognized and powerful role in

President Cross' conception of the decision-making process at Birmingham is the manner in which students' desires of participating in civil housing, some of them reasons who have not relinquished their legitimate opportunity for such an expression while at Birmingham, seemed "reasonable" if unconditionally to President Cross' second vote of that plan due to vague interventions concerning curriculum and gateway, as one point outside of their desires were discouraged, by means of "reasonable" arguments forwarded by their future students, from proposals involving academic requirements.

PRELUDES

At the time I did not support non-participatory actions, and I do not support them now. However, the contrast between the prompt attention which SAAB is currently receiving in response to the open conflict (desires to provide student crisis situation and the desire, difficult to confront, to maintain and enhance resistance which was characterized earlier by more "reasonable" students in their efforts to secure a formal experiment in civil housing) and which, for that matter, was also maintained by ending and more "reasonable" attempts by SAAB to secure a black cultural center) had to reflect upon the inadequacies of President Cross' chosen style of governance and decision-making.

The main shortcoming which I see in the adoption of a policy of appeasement is that one's own desires must to some extent be sacrificed for the perceived higher goal of the short-term avoidance of open conflict. Appeasement should never be employed in the hope of avoiding conflict over the long run; it is only an advisable tactic in situations where one has reason to believe that some intervening variable will, in the near future, substantially alter the circumstances of potential conflict.

President Cross has, during the past months, had no reason to believe that students would suddenly stop wanting civil housing as the SAAB would suddenly stop wanting him to maintain his efforts to provide a viable black cultural center. Last Tuesday night in Glasgow his statements and responses to questions seemed to me to be hesitant and fearfully delivered. He appeared very much like a practitioner of appeasement policies with which the long run had finally caught up.

I earlier described the quality of reasonableness as a triple flow. I do not think that this had always been the case, for this people learn to express their desires for attention and consideration in whatever way may be most frequently and positively rewarded. When people at Birmingham have been conditioned to express their desires in reasonable and rational terms.

However, it is possible that as a result of President Cross' im-

define enough to encompass an equation of the working world which was the key to excellence. It would seem that if our definition has stagnated to the point of being synonymous with the world, that is, if it defines not its potential self as that which it isn't, then the definition is no longer functional.

This is the role of the five-year proposal. We are proposing a new definition. The working world will, of course, pose administrative problems, but they are only administrative, not for those not holding the reins. It is significant that the CEF in several thrusts in the problems of the working world rather than the definition, for they are synonymous to it. If so they are not. The working world must remain as fluid and open to change as the definition, but it follows the dictates of the definition; it does not set them.

The original five-year proposal has been retained to include the following revised statement by the CEF: "While five-year programs are possible in some and viable arts for students who are taking some instruction to prepare off campus or who wish to pursue study or incremental work without full credit but with institutional and external supervision; but such programs in the arts are generally only an application to and action by the department concerned based on exceptional accomplishment or promise."

CREATIVE GROWTH

The original purpose of the five-year program was to offer many opportunities for creative growth to everyone, particularly those who haven't had those opportunities. Those who may not be quite so good, those who want to explore the possibilities of developing in new ways.

This is an issue with which the role of the four-year community should be concerned. The role that four-year has become an increasingly and well-estimated status becoming stronger and more secure. Unfortunately, all too often the eye is fixed only to the "best" that students under the leading "wordmark from school."

The five-year proposal is a much more serious proposal than the CEF has thus far realized. The question of four-year's existence is at stake. Recently, the CEF revised the five-year proposal in favor of "four-year students."