

1/11/1969

FHL

The actions of SASS of the past week, including their sit-in in the admissions office, have generated much concerned discussion at all levels of the Swarthmore community. The initial problem being discussed was that of admissions policy with regards to Black students, with the position of SASS being that Swarthmore College was singularly insensitive to the need for more Black students here, and the more general problem of Black student life.

The discussion has been conducted in an atmosphere of concern over the general issue of the role of students in decision-making at this institution. No one would deny that this is indeed a major issue, about which there is much concern, dissatisfaction, and confusion. In the past few days we have heard both thoughtful concerned argument as well as impassioned, irrational haranguing. There is another question, however, which is--why has this dissatisfaction come about, generating on the part of some students such deeply felt commitment to the need for radical change?

The answer to this question resides in the essential and crucial issue of institutional change. It is important to review the Swarthmore philosophy of such change. In the past, Swarthmore has adopted two policies with regards to changes in the policies of the institution. To deal with specific problems Swarthmore has adopted the policy of the ad hoc advisory committee, composed of people from the community chosen informally, to decide questions ranging from Collection to statements of admissions policy. To consider general issues of philosophy and the direction in which Swarthmore should develop, the technique has been consensus-building. The decisions which evolve from these two methods start all too often by accepting the status quo, and then proceed to consider incremental changes, rather than starting from the deep questioning of assumptions upon which Swarthmore is based.

The result of this method of undertaking institutional change has been heretofore only potentially dangerous mistrust of the whole decision-making structure of Swarthmore College. A polarization took place, separating those satisfied with the status quo from those who sought radical change, since those seemed to be the only two viable alternatives. The actions of SASS have precipitated the release on the part of many students of their feelings of alienation, powerlessness and frustration; the feeling that somehow the process is not just, that it does not recognize those factions which have a legitimate concern in the results of the decision, as well as generating a new scepticism on the part of the more conservative students that perhaps accepting the status quo was not the wisest position.

What can be done now, in the light of this understanding of the source of the current turmoil? Rather than simply a commitment to change, which is asked for by many students, a commitment should be made now to a philosophy of the method of institutional change, one which more adequately recognizes the needs of the community and is more responsive to them. Such a philosophy would be: That legitimate processes be established, constituted such that it recognizes the right on the part of the groups which will be affected by the decisions to take part in the decision-making process. Thus representatives of faculty, administration and students, chosen by their respective constituencies, would be included in the decision-making body. For example, the committee to establish the admissions policy

1/11/69



of Swarthmore should be composed of representatives of three viewpoints: the faculty, the administration and the students. Since Black students have a unique and important perspective on the general issue, the legitimacy of their right to be heard should be recognized by the inclusion of ~~at~~ at least one Black student on the committee. The essential distinction here does not involve the composition of the committee so much as a view of what the committee is and what it is doing. Rather than an articulation of what the admissions policy is and by those that take part in it, it is a body designed to make decisions with regard to what the admissions policy ought to be, taken by those who will be affected by the decision. Rather than a consensus-building technique, implementing only those policies upon which the community as a whole can agree, the method of such decision-making will take the form of compromise on the part of representatives of the faculty, administration and students, who may often disagree.

The importance of such an understanding of the process of institutional change, is that it provides for the community a decision-making process which can be trusted, which is neither arbitrary nor obscure, and which provides channels for the legitimate expression of various points of view. We recognize and approve of the moves already taken in this direction: for example, composition of SAC in the light of the Ex-SAC Report, which designates the decision-making authority of SAC and that of the students determined by the degree to which the administration, faculty and students are affected by the decisions made. It is upon this basis that future changes at Swarthmore should take place.

#### RESOLUTION - JANUARY 11, 1969

The actions of SASS have dramatized the inadequacies of the decision-making processes at Swarthmore, generating in the minds of many concerned members of the community the need for a probing re-evaluation of the procedures which Swarthmore has utilized for institutional change. The specific suggestions for the structure of future decision-making should be carefully and thoughtfully considered. Rather than a hasty and ill-conceived proposal for the restructuring of such decision-making processes, a commitment needs to be made now, on the part of faculty, students and administration to the general theory of methods of institutional change which would be more responsive to the needs of the community, i.e.:

That legitimate processes be established, constituted such that they recognize the right on the part of the groups which will be affected by a decision, to take part in the decision-making process. Thus, faculty, administration and students, chosen by their respective constituencies, would be included in the decision-making body, to decide policies which would affect those three elements of the college community.

The importance of such an understanding of the process of institutional change is that it provides for the community a decision-making process which can be trusted, which is neither arbitrary nor obscure, and which provides channels for the legitimate expression of the various points of view of those affected by the decision.