

Quaker Way vs. Confrontation

By HARRY G. TOLAND, of the Editorial Page Staff

One cannot help wonder if the students who seized the dean of admissions' office at Swarthmore College hadn't read John Searle's article in the Dec. 29 New York Times Magazine.

Searle, now a philosophy professor at the University of California in Berkeley, was a faculty leader of the Free Speech Movement there four years ago. He writes that many campus revolts follow a "scenario," usually in three stages.

So far, the Swarthmore drama has followed Stage One quite faithfully:

A small minority adopts an issue, presents it "in the maximally confrontationalist style," violating "as many campus rules of civil laws as you possibly can during the initial presentation of your demands."

Whether Stages Two and Three will be reached remains to be seen, although the effective closing of classes was an ominous step in that direction.

It is doubtful, though, that Swarthmore would ever do a "Columbia" and summon masses of police to rout the protesters. By the weekend not a cop had been called.

This is the politics of confrontation meeting the Quaker method and the scenario clearly is going to read differently. Quakers have been known to confront, but only after reasoning and persuasion have failed.

And this is one reason why so many in the Swarthmore faculty and administration find the sit-in incomprehensible: Real movement has taken place in increasing the pace of enrolling black students and adding black studies to the curriculum, and much more was obviously imminent.

Recruiting Blacks

Swarthmore began actively recruiting black students five years ago. Its success can be measured by the fact that 5% of the students last year were black, despite its high academic standards and the inadequate preparation many predominately black public schools give for college.

But in the past two years, says William Hargadon, admissions dean, the number of colleges actively recruiting qualified black students has increased 200-fold. The black percentage at Swarthmore has dipped a little, to 4.5%, this year in the face of the compe-

tition for a limited supply.

The Swarthmore Afro-American Students' Society, which is running the sit-in, now is asking that "risk" black students be admitted. The many problems this raises for the college and the "risk" students themselves worries the college. But it has pledged it will take on a few who are just below its academic par and try it out.

Otherwise, on virtually all the substantive demands of SASS, the college has indicated at one time or another it is ready to meet them or go a long way toward meeting them.

Black Studies

And on black studies, the movement has been dramatic. In the current academic year, the college is offering 13 courses, one seminar and two courses with seminars on black subjects or black aspects of subjects.

They range from Societies and Cultures of Africa to Politics of Urban Ghetto, one of the instructors of which will be Alvin Echols, of Philadelphia's North City Congress.

"The current crisis," wrote six faculty leaders a week ago, "has not arisen out of faculty indifference to students' needs and interests, or administrative aloofness and refusal to communicate with students or student groups."

The college, in fact, must set some sort of record for consulting with students.

Student Representation

Its one-year review of curriculum, library policy and student life a year ago included substantial student representation on the committees dealing with each of those fields.

Swarthmore believes it is the first college in the country to put students on a president-selection committee—two out of eight on the panel currently looking for a successor for Dr. Courtney Smith.

And on Saturday the faculty and administration agreed to setting up a black student admissions committee which will be half students, including some from SASS.

In the face of this kind of approach and headway, the SASS cries of racism and the peremptory ultimatums on "non-negotiable" demands it has issued have mystified, saddened and angered many who are most sympathetic to their aims.

As Searle puts it:

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"The demonstrators are always puzzled by the hostility they arouse among the liberal intelligentsia outside the university. But what the demonstrators perceive as the highest idealism often looks from the outside like a mixture of vandalism and imbecilic dogmatism."

Headline Grabbing?

The manners and method in this case are so uncalled for, in fact, as to invited suspicion and even cynicism about the goals themselves.

Is this more protest for protest's sake than an effort to get something done? Is SASS grabbing harder for headlines and the 11 o'clock TV news than for the black lot on campus?

Those questions would never have come up without the sit-in. And it is altogether likely that nothing will be accomplished by the big confrontation that couldn't have been done in the quiet Quaker way.