

# The College Press And Its Freedom

(Editor's Note: The following article, written by John Harrison, appeared in the Daily Iowan. Mr. Harrison, now a Journalism instructor at Pennsylvania State University, was publisher of The Daily Iowan from 1959 to 1961. He formerly was an editorial writer on The Toledo Blade, and was also a Nieman Fellow in 1952.)

By John Harrison

A lot of hogwash has been written about the college press — its place in the educational scheme of things, how much freedom its editors should enjoy, the reasons why it should be free at all.

To invoke the provisions of the First Amendment on behalf of college editors is to miss the point. A newspaper operates on campus at the behest of administrative officials, just as do social clubs and political groups. Its rights and privileges are defined and limited by presidents, boards of regents, trustees and overseers—whichever makes and administers educational policy.

This is true whether the paper is in some degree an adjunct of the university, or operates outside the official family. The most outspoken and untrammelled campus newspapers today have little or no official status. The Harvard Crimson and the Michigan Daily are prime examples. Tradition confers on them an independence that is relatively rare.

Yet nothing prevents President Pusey from closing up the Crimson shop tomorrow. He could do it by any of several acts within his rights as Harvard's president. An unholy howl might go up from many quarters. But no constitutional provision could help the boys in Plympton Street one bit should he decide to take such action.

That he does not do so is rather a mark of Pres-

ident Pusey's intelligence and of his appreciation of the purposes student-edited and written newspapers serve in a complex university than of his acknowledgement that Crimson editors possess any constitutional right to say whatever comes to mind.

College newspapers like the Crimson, like the Michigan Daily, the Cornell Daily Sun, and the Penn State Collegian exist precisely because the tradition of an independent student daily exists on these campuses. They are sustained by administrative respect for these traditions and the educational values they represent.

The reasons why the college press should be free have nothing to do with students' rights. They are at the very heart of the educational process in a free society. These will suggest themselves immediately to the educator who is genuinely concerned that today's college student develop a free society. Its withering away has been widely deplored by critics of today's educational system and the graduates it produces.

Outlets for the expression of opinion by students are always needed. The need is especially great today when mounting enrollments tend to isolate the student, to make him feel he is more a cog in a machine than part of a continuing educational process. Student newspapers provide forums in which all kinds of problems are discussed, and not just by the relative few who serve as editors.

But such a forum functions properly only in an atmosphere where the

free expression of ideas—including ideas that are critical of the status quo, unpopular ideas—is encouraged. Of course it requires forbearance to grant freedom of expression to students hardly dry behind the ears, who may use this privilege to question the motives and abilities of distinguished scholars and educators. Of course many demand patience beyond the ordinary to concede that the student critic—however wrong-headed he may be—should be permitted to express his opinions.

But aren't patience and forbearance in the face of student error and abuse essential qualities of educators? Surely they are if the teacher or administrator accepts as one of the basic tenets of a liberal education that the developing mind must be encouraged to test and stretch itself, to put its convictions and its critical judgments into words—even when they may be wrong.

Unfortunately, other considerations come ahead of education in the minds of some college administrators today. They have come to regard students almost as a nuisance, who get in the way of the perfectly functioning administrative machine. They are not so concerned that students still have an opportunity to whet their critical faculties as that students shall rock the boat at all.

One can almost sympathize with the plaintive declaration of one such administrator, sorely tried by what an outspoken student editor had written:

"Habitually I am called upon to explain why the University's attitude is

thus-and-so, when, as a matter of fact, it is the (student newspaper's) attitude and not the University's which I am called upon to explain. I see no reason why I or anyone should be put to the trouble which this involves. Indeed I see no reason why educational funds . . . would be expended to subsidize a project which adds to our difficulties and troubles."

Poor fellow! His is indeed a thankless job. He must watch out for his university's relations with a board of regents, a legislature, an alumni association, and a whole state's population—none of which is likely to set much store by the ideas "those crazy college kids" are prone to propound. But in his concern with all these, he has lost sight of his first responsibility, which is the education of the young.

And the young are a troublesome, feisty lot. They will explore the critical and altogether disrespectful of their older and so much wiser mentors.

The genuinely wise educator knows this, of course. Not only does he expect that young people will be critical; he encourages them to speak their minds. He recognizes that this is an essential aspect of the educational process. That is why he leaves them free to give tongue to heresy, and yeasty student newspaper is important.

One hopes that students who undertake to edit and publish a newspaper will assume a measure of responsibility commensurate with the freedom granted them. And, with an occasional exception, college editors want noth-

ing so much as to be regarded as reliable and responsible.

Freedom provides a stimulus to responsibility. For once a student knows he will get either credit or blame for the job he does as editor, he begins to be concerned about his own reputation. He seeks advice before he acts, where otherwise he would wait for a higher authority to correct his errors. He begins to learn the essential lesson that freedom never really is earned until the individual proves that he can exercise it responsibly.

In this way, the college press stimulates not just the critical faculty in the student, but also helps develop that more sophisticated faculty—the responsible exercise of freedom—which can be cultivated in no other way. The notion that responsibility can be injected intravenously and that, enough of it having been administered, freedom can subsequently be substituted in the syringe, is itself irresponsible and destructive. It is a favorite refuge of authoritarians.

Thus, the case for freedom of the college press, which is strong and persuasive, too often is put in its weakest terms. It has nothing to do with the protections the Constitution affords the press. What is at stake is protecting society whose members are free to examine and criticize all institutions.

These freedoms will survive only so long as we make it a stated policy of our educational system to stimulate the critical faculty, not suppress it because it sometimes may cause embarrassment.

**LITTLE MAN ON CAMPUS**

—THE MINUTE I LEAVE MY LAB—WHY, I HAD NO IDEA HE WAS SERIOUS ABOUT DRINKING THAT SILLY CONCOCTION!

## Nine Nominated to Biz. Council

The Business Administration Executive Council will be elected during the Student Council elections, Monday. The Council consists of two members elected from each class.

- Those nominated for the Council are:
- Jim Mesonbrink . . . Soph.
  - Margaret Anderson . . . Jr.
  - John Felton . . . . . Jr.
  - Penney Purcell . . . . . Jr.
  - Randall Sittler . . . . . Jr.
  - Mike Miner . . . . . Sr.
  - Stanley Navrude . . . . . Sr.
  - Don Slaby . . . . . Sr.
  - Linda Watson . . . . . Sr.
- One of the junior and senior members must be a girl.
- During the school year the Bus Ad Exec Council's major activity is the sponsorship of the Bus Ad Career Days.

**VOTE**

**STUDENT COUNCIL**

RE-ELECT

**BILL GUNLICKS**

SCBC Backed      BUS. ADM. COLLEGE      IFC Backed