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23 April, 1970

CROSS CURRENT

Egalitarian Concepts

As a means of modernizing the armed services, making them more efficient and less bureaucratic at the same time, it has been proposed that the present system of ranks and privileges be abolished. In place of this, an 'egalitarian' type of service would be instituted in which all members would be equal and no one could hold the power over another that an officer now holds over his men.

This proposal would appear to be constructive at first, but actually is lacking in a number of basic areas. In the long run, it is eventually self-defeating.

In the first place, it would not only be inefficient, but would result in chaos. The armed forces of this country constitute a huge enterprise employing millions of men at varied and complex tasks, spread out all over the world. The geographical distances involved alone would necessitate some sort of central command, which would co-ordinate the operations by delegating specific projects or authority to different groups. From this process some sort of rank system would necessarily develop. To expect that such a large, spread-out organization could function properly if it was not closely controlled is not simply idealistic, it is absurd. In any type of emergency or, especially, in any battle situation an egalitarian set-up would go beyond being useless, to the point of being criminal. Here we are dealing with tactical situations in which there are lives at stake. Without some uniform system of command which could be relied upon to function under stress

(Editor note- Mr. Ball submitted his essay simultaneously with that of Mr. Dougherty. That I have printed both reflects my concern over the problem)

conditions, many senseless injuries and deaths would occur.

Secondarily, such a system would most probably have an adverse effect upon morale. While it might be true in some cases that the men resent the 'power structure', the system does have benefits for them. Promotion in rank and increase in administrative responsibility is a very practical reward for doing a good job. The absolute equality of the proposed system could be seen as a deterrent to individual achievement. It is improbable that anyone likes to work at something without receiving some sort of recognition for the effort. With the egalitarian system, there would not only be no substantial way to reward a man, but there would be a large possibility that the labor spent would be useless in relation to its making any real 'difference' beyond his own, personal level.

The general outlook seems to be that the armed forces (and almost any other type of organization) can not hope to function effectively under the egalitarian system. Again, the idea may be discussed forever, but its application here would be a minor disaster. In order for any organization of this type to perform all the various activities, widely separated in time and space, necessary for its existence, and to still make a general forward movement, a system of ranks must be evolved. In most cases, this does not hurt the members, but helps greatly in the completion of their tasks. Those who voice the fear that the 'tight-fisted military bureaucracy' may be, in reality, out of the President's control must seriously consider how much control he could ever have under an egalitarian system.

----Robert Bai

Gone Are The Days!

Remember the stirring sight of the massed battalion of midshipmen arrayed on the Field of Fitton? Well, the flying banners, flailing swords, and exasperated officers have all gone the way of the battleship and the nickel candy bar. The Midshipmen are now engaged in hopefully more relevant activities for the nascent sailor. Like target practice at the Navy-Marine Reserve Center, sailing on Lake Quinsigamond, Swimming at Assumption Prep, and sports and physical training up on Top. And the uniform of the day for drill? Egalitarian sweatsuit. (Is nothing sacred?) Cant tell the neo-fascists without a program!

On Anti-Rationality

Our previous editorial referred to a growing sentiment of anti-rationality within the student community. Some further elaboration is in order, as it is germane to the problems that all societal institutions are having with the student. In fact, we feel, it is the crux of these problems. While student political (I use that word in only the broadest sense) action remained confined to the campus, the question remained quite academic. The military became concerned when ROTC became involved in the student power matrix. But only quite recently has the society as a whole been challenged. In Santa Barbara and Cambridge, students have taken to the streets with destruction as their appeal to the repression at Chicago and Berkeley. A riot is always an infallible sign of some societal inconsistency, but the fascinating thing about the recent disturbances has been the spirit in which they were undertaken. These are not the orgies of hatred and despair that wracked the black ghettos in summers past. The prevailing spirit at Santa Barbara was one of an engaging romanticism. Students cheered as the banks burned. Why?

Another example closer to home. Last week a capacity crowd at the Fieldhouse not only cheered, but seemed to feel in intense rapport with an entertaining nihilist. While Mr. Hoffmann's observations on the sickness of this society were quite perceptive, it seemed the loudest applause followed his exhortations that the students take to the streets. Again, engagingly romantic. Again, why?

The answers are difficult, and deeply psychological. In a rather generalized nutshell (for doing which we deserve summary damnation) students combine maximized intellect with a minimized responsibility. In return for some dozen hours a week of classwork, students are maintained for four to eight years in a leisurely holding pattern between youth and adulthood. And more often than not, they have only a vague idea of what they would like to do in life. Apparently this artificial existence is enjoyable, for there is a marked tendency to dismiss such things as adulthood, job, mortgage, as the useless paraphernalia of this poorly oriented society. In effect, are they not dismissing the word responsibility? We have become a generation of Easy Riders, proud and jealous of our right to be absolutely free, and quite correctly paranoid about society's concern (which often unfortunately takes the form of repression) for this obsession of ours. We can discern no other reason why vocation-

oriented majors such as math or physics (or ROTC) count few revolutionaries among their ranks, and why most revolutionaries eventually return to society as they age. In short, people who have a vocational idea generally do not resent a vocation-oriented society as much as those who do not. This resentment gives the student a strong sense of identity with his fellows, and further leads to a romantic ritualization - the Counter Culture. More basically, it leads to anti-rationality. Rationality became old when the old told us to act rationally, particularly with respect to righting the ills that our youthful idealism abhorred. Emotionalism becomes the new outlook. Dialogue is replaced by non-negotiable demands. Patience is replaced by confrontation politics. And certainly not without good reasons. The nadir is reached, however, when an Abbie Hoffman dismisses the lessons of history as Bull ___ and submits Robert Stoddard's credit card as a means of post-revolutionary economic survival. It becomes disturbing when to be a Street Fighting Man is to be in; when the idealists are no longer builders but wreckers.

To all those who are now again calling us Defenders of The Faith, we beg you to reread this in the same spirit with which it is being written. A criticism of youth is not to be found here; merely an observation. And perhaps a final suggestion. Rationality and Cynicism need not be as synonymous as Mr. Abbie Hoffman thinks.

Cross Current thanks Dean Harrington for his compliments and his encouragement.

Cross Current begs students to write us, if only to call us the nasty things we probably are. Or write us an article - pro or contra anything - and we will try to print it in our last issue.

Cross Current is published by Midshipmen of the Holy Cross ROTC Unit, Worcester, Mass. Views expressed are individual opinions, not necessarily those of the Navy Department or the ROTC Unit.

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Interested in the subject of this Editorial? Read Roszak - The Making of a Counter-Culture.