

in: Otto Butz (Ed.), *To Make a Difference*,
NY 1967 (Harper + Row)

Bob Dylan, Erich Fromm and Beyond: A Look at the New Politics

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THERE is a story told in the civil rights movement about a Negro with one leg who has worked both in the South and in Northern urban areas for some time. One day during a Chicago school demonstration in which boycotting school children joined civil rights workers and parents in blocking a main thoroughfare, an outraged little old lady, who apparently saw him as the most vulnerable link in the chain of bodies, stamped indignantly up to him and shouted, "Young man, just why are you doing this?" (As if he should have been gratefully working in a center for the handicapped at thirty-five cents an hour and praying for restitution of his lost limb.) In response, he whirled about and, pointing the crutch straight at her, replied accusingly, "Because *you* didn't buy enough Easter seals!"

There are times, like this one, when I feel the same sort of frustration this man must have felt in trying to answer, calmly and rationally, the continuing question: Why protest? For before it is possible to go on to the more difficult problems of how to protest effectively, and how to find out where positive alternatives lie, one must begin with the utterly fundamental question: Why? Just what is wrong?

I think there are essentially two main answers to that question. What is most obviously and urgently wrong concerns the large

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minority of Americans that shares neither in the great material benefits of this country nor in the making of its political decisions. For them the question is one of asking in. From the South comes the knock on the door of the voting booth. In the Northern urban centers it is the board of education, the city housing administration and the welfare office that are being asked to respond.

I spent a part of one summer in Washington, D.C., lobbying on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party (EDP). Four native Negro Mississippians sought election to Congressional seats long held by die-hard white segregationists. At every step of the way, from the registrars' offices in their home counties to the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, they had been turned away—in spite of the universal knowledge that their opponents rested on cushions of violence and unconstitutional disenfranchisement. Now they had finally reached Washington with some thirty thousand pages of sworn depositions attesting the terror that had kept Negro Mississippians "apathetic" enough not to be voting. As if that weren't enough, they had ninety thousand "Freedom Ballots" cast in the face of a massive Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Council campaign of intimidation, economic pressure and eviction. Representatives of the FDP had come to ask for the unseating of the white segregationists and for the calling of new elections in which all could participate—hardly a revolutionary goal in terms of the U. S. Constitution and the House Rules, which expressly provide for such a process.

The day we arrived it was about 110 degrees and we sat in St. Cyprian's, a Negro Catholic ghetto church not far from the Capitol, fanning ourselves with mimeographed handouts. Some chronicled the history of the FDP campaign and the voting records of the challenged congressmen, while others cried in outrage at the recent Johnson appointment of James Pleman Coleman, former governor of Mississippi and architect of the "Mississippi Plan" for legal disenfranchisement of Negroes, to the Federal Circuit Court in the South. (Washington, D.C., by the way, is perhaps the supreme ironic commentary on the War on Poverty, for it is one vast Negro ghetto with "pockets of luxury" dotted here and there—the White House, the Capitol, the various memorials, and the endless military cemeteries.) St. Cyprian's recreation room was filled with students, mostly

white, and mostly from New York and the Bay Area, and an atmosphere of noisy apprehension hung in the air that was nearly wet enough to drink. The back of the hall was ringed with Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) staff members up from Mississippi for the Challenge. Their names read like modern-day knights of the Round Table—Ivanhoe Donaldson, Courtland Cox, Ralph Featherstone—and they mostly lounged in knots of two or three, clad in Levis or overalls, discussing whatever gets discussed when guerrilla fighters leave a police state. One of them came forward to announce that Mrs. Victoria Gray, a would-be FDP Congressional candidate, would speak.

From the back of the room rose a tall, handsome Negro woman with skin the color of clear coffee, wearing a crisp white dress. The room fell silent as she began to speak, apologizing for not having a prepared talk. "There is a myth," she began, "that Negroes in Mississippi are apathetic, that they simply don't care about the poverty and indignity of their lives. That myth goes on to say that if Negroes in my state cared to remedy these things, they would have organized to do so long ago. . . ." There wasn't a trace of Southern accent in her voice, which reached the back of the room easily without a microphone. "What that myth ignores," she continued, "is the simple fact that Mississippi is, and has been for ninety years, a police state. I know, because in past years my neighbors and myself were completely unable to meet together and talk about ways of improving conditions without the threat of losing at the least our jobs and at the most our lives. Then, in 1960, came a group called the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a small number of young people, who began to help provide us with the one thing that was absolutely essential and that had formerly been unattainable: the ability to communicate—with each other, and from county to county." From the white students there were cheers and shouts of "Hear, Hear," but the SNCC staff members, who boast only of the victories of "local people," were silent.

"The organization that started when SNCC workers first came into Mississippi," Mrs. Gray went on, "has culminated in the Freedom Democratic party, a statewide organization open to anyone. Unlike the State Democratic party, this organization supports the national

platform of the Democratic party, and in a Freedom election held last November, it polled more votes for Johnson than he received in the "iegitimate" elections at the same time. . . . In Mississippi we say that the Freedom elections are real and the state elections are mock, because they are a mockery. . . ." At this there was applause and laughter.

"But it has only been since we came to Washington," the lady resumed, "that we have begun to realize how much bigger and broader this fight is than we ever thought. It is only since we've met with the pitiful rationalizations and excuses of congressmen and other Northern politicians, only since it's become quite clear that the word has come down from the *top* to defeat the Challenge, that we've finally understood the frightening truth that segregation and discrimination are not Mississippi throwbacks, but American institutions." Mrs. Gray had spent the weekend in jail for sitting-in at the office of the House Clerk who, obviously under orders from the Speaker and ultimately the President, had refused even to print the thirty thousand pages of sworn depositions of testimony taken the previous winter in Mississippi by Northern lawyers. Her voice rose now in a crescendo. "And it has been with the development of the Freedom Democratic party and this Challenge that people from all over the country have had the chance to support a movement which was a significant departure from the former pattern of an immediate crisis, a call for aid, perhaps the sending of some old clothes, canned food and a few dollars, and then going blithely on thinking everything was all right. The FDP and the Challenge mark the beginning for us of the realization that, while all are not guilty, all are responsible . . . and that until this struggle, and others like it, are won, we will not have begun to talk about democracy in this country."

Amid the shower of applause that followed as she sat down, the person I was with scibbled on my notes, "The first woman President of the United States will be black." I could only smile and agree.

I hardly need to record that the Challenge was resoundingly defecated when it finally came to the Floor in early fall. This only meant that those people went back to Mississippi, wiser and more knowledgeable about the opposition, to organize for next time. Of all the people I had a chance to observe at that time, including Senator

Eastland and the Southern-dominated Judiciary Committee, the person who made me sickest at heart was a well-known liberal democratic Congressman from California for whom I admit I had once even walked precincts. Perhaps the high point of our "briefing session" in his office occurred when a girl who'd spent several months with SNCC in Mississippi asked whether or not there would be a significant change in federal enforcement of the new Voting Bill, on which he had been expounding in glorious tones. "You know as well as I do," she said in a friendly way, "that the 1957, 1960 and 1964 Civil Rights Acts simply never beached in Mississippi." Looking dramatically and directly at her, he responded with the incredible question, "Young lady, are you a lawyer?" (The girl looked no more than twenty.) She answered, "No." "Well, then," he replied, "I'd prefer to discuss that with a lawyer."

The prevention of Negro Americans and others from fully participating in the rights and privileges of our country is the most immediate wrong against which protests are currently being directed. But there is also a discontent that is more of a deep, hollow fear, a poverty that cannot be measured in dollars. For what about that larger group of young people who have not been disinherited, those for whom the grateful acceptance of a split-level ranch-style existence is the "logical," the expected step? What about me, for example, and thousands of other students like me? I am twenty-three years old, of what the sociologists would call upper middle-class background; I hold a B.A. degree in political science, love to write, and possess practical skills that would enable me to get a well-paying job in any number of fields. What leads me to spend part of my summer combing the halls of Congress on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, or most of my Christmas vacation picketing on the docks of Oakland to prevent the loading of grapes picked by non-union labor? Why should I care about the first major farm labor strike in California agribusiness since the 1930s? Why all of this when, as my mother yearly points out to me, I could be driving a nice car, making a "respectable" living, and raising a family?

At the center, for me, there is a great restlessness, a great longing to reach beyond the formica and gleaming stainless steel and to be able to touch other human beings. I want to be able to share with



others the awe of a redwood tree and its inviolability in comparison to a highway; I want to do so without being considered a “nut,” and with the satisfaction of feeling that my society also respects those values and will act accordingly. I want to be free from the compulsion to possess things and people, and to know that others are similarly free. I want to be able to love life enough to value it over all else, and to live in a society that shares that value. I want to feel that my own hands shape my life, free from the invisible strings of individual and social repression, and to know that others share that ability. I want to see no want in the midst of plenty. I want to know that our world will not be blown to bits in the name of any abstract principle, or for any other reason, by the hands of man. These things form the innermost core and are the hardest to talk about without sounding maudlin. But I am saying them anyway, because they do lie at the center and they are important to me. In short, I want to live in a society and a world that solves the problems that are tied around our necks like dead weights from the past—the problems of developing a more mature handling of sex, of overcoming poverty, of implementing basic human rights, and of achieving and keeping global peace. I want to live in a world that is able to get on to the questions that really belong to the twentieth century: What is the meaning of work? What is the fullest meaning of being human? What does it mean to love?

Our search for answers to these frontier questions appear to me inextricably bound up with the solutions we find for the most crying practical problems we today confront. For how, without raising the question of our notion of humanity, do I seek to understand a war in which, under the banner of self-determination and democracy, my country invades a foreign land, interferes in a civil war, sets up puppet governments, bombs hospitals, schools and whole villages of people who have never heard of democracy, burns children with jellied gasoline, and refuses to hold promised elections? How shall I comprehend “arming for peace” and living in a balance of terror? How shall I interpret the fact that “successful” executives often end up in the Mayo Clinic having their stomachs removed piece by piece for a nervous ulcer? Now that there is a chicken in almost every pot, and the pot is electric, and there are two or three cars in most garages,

how do I explain or justify the one-fourth of our people who, even according to the most conservative estimates, do not approach sharing these things? How shall I reconcile Thomas Jefferson’s words on revolution with our actions in the Dominican Republic? Can I really tell my children when they ask me about the murders of Viola Liuzzo, Michael Schwerner or Reverend Reeb that the killers never came to justice because under federal law it did not become a violation of a person’s civil rights to murder him until the spring of 1966?

To be honest, I don’t know how many Americans, or how many American students, share my concern with these questions. But there must be a good many. When magazines like *Esquire*, *Atlantic Monthly* and even *Mademoiselle* devote lead articles and whole issues to campus ferment, they must be reacting to something. Whatever position one cares to take on the free speech movement at the University of California in Berkeley, I daresay few people in the country were unaware that things were stirring there in a major way.

I am, however, much more sure of an underlying restlessness and feeling of dissatisfaction. All you really need to do to get a sense of it is to look at the almost incredible nationwide popularity of what jazz critic Ralph J. Gleason has called “one thin phenomenal youth”—Bob Dylan. Gleason claims on the best estimates that Dylan’s royalties for the first six months of 1965 will be “greater than the combined royalties of Rodgers, Hart, Hammerstein, Gershwin and Porter for the same period.”¹ On his tours, nearly all his concerts are sold out in advance, and not just in New York and Berkeley but all across the country. According to Gleason, he has published 225 songs, many of which have subsequently been recorded by other performers and a good number of which have been hits. What, then, is he saying that young people are listening to? Where is he hitting home?

I well remember my own first reaction to a Dylan concert. The auditorium was packed—mostly, it seemed, with young teen-agers. The entire audience, including myself, sat almost absolutely rapt for the whole performance. No screaming, no hysteria. During the intermission many people just wandered alone about the hallways staring

¹ Ralph J. Gleason, “This World” section of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 28, 1965, p. 35.

at the floor, as if what was coming through was so true, or painful, that to stand bantering and smoking over it would weaken or distort it. The next morning I wrote a letter to Gleason in which I said, for want of a better way to put it, "I don't know whether Dylan is the voice of my generation, but I do know that he is my voice."

Of course, Dylan's songs nowadays are all his own, and I think he is a poet even before he is a musician. There has also been a definite shift in style and lyrics, especially in the past several months. At the risk of tearing apart the petals of a flower just to find out what they're made of, I'd like to quote verses from some of the more popular songs, to help give an over-all indication of what Bob Dylan has been saying and of what we are listening to.

From the early "Blowin' in the Wind":

How many times must a man look up before he can see the sky?
 Yes, 'n How many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?
 Yes, 'n How many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people
 have died?
 The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,
 The answer is blowin' in the wind.²

From another fairly early song, "With God on Our Side":

I've learned to hate Russians
 All through my whole life
 If another war starts
 It's them we must fight.
 To hate them and fear them,
 To run and to hide,
 And accept it all bravely
 With God on my side.³

Also from a relatively early song:

Come Senators, Congressmen
 Please heed the call
 Don't stand in the doorway

² "Blowin' in the Wind." Copyright 1962 by M. Witmark & Sons. Used by permission.

³ "With God on Our Side." Copyright 1963 by M. Witmark & Sons. Used by permission.

Don't block up the hall.
 For he who gets hurt
 Will be he who has stalled
 There's a battle
 Outside and it's ragin'
 It'll soon shake your windows
 And rattle your walls
 For the times they are a-changin'!⁴

From his record "Bringing It All Back Home," the song "Mr. Tambourine Man":

Then take me disappearin' through the smoke rings of my mind
 Down the foggy ruins of time far past the frozen leaves
 The haunted, frightened trees out to the windy beach
 Far from the twisted reach of crazy sorrow
 Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand wavin' free
 Silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus sands
 With all memory and fate driven deep beneath the waves
 Let me forget about today until tomorrow.⁵

And finally, what I consider one of the most telling and beautiful stanzas from any of Dylan's songs, the ending of "It's All Right, Ma (I'm Only Bleedin')":

Although the masters make the rules
 Of the wise men and the fools
 I got nothing, Ma,
 To live up to.⁶

There is one more record, "Highway 61 Revisited" in which the beat is very hard and swinging, and in which the imagery of "Gates of Eden" and "Mr. Tambourine Man" is carried even further, often into personal meanings that probably escape the listener. The trend is

⁴ "The Times They Are A-Changin'." Copyright 1963 (Unp) by M. Witmark & Sons in the U.S.A. Copyright 1964 by M. Witmark & Sons under the Universal Copyright Convention. Used by permission.

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⁶ "It's All Right Ma (I'm Only Bleedin')." Copyright 1965 by M. Witmark & Sons. Used by permission.



away from the simple ballad with a clear message. As Dylan said in a San Francisco press conference, he had simply gone as far as he wanted to go with the early-type songs. That doesn't mean they're no longer valid; it's just that he's said those things and now wants to go on to others.

Critics have tried to show anomalous splits in his works, saying that he has three kinds of songs, the social-consciousness songs, the personal-introspective songs, and what they (but not he) call "folk-rock." I just don't think the breakdown is necessary or meaningful, at least if it is intended to imply some sort of inconsistency or dishonesty. For me there is an authentic relationship between Dylan's various songs and moods. It is a relationship that springs from a whole person who is striving to live meaningfully in America in this time—to love in spite of fear and alienation, to condemn the hidden executioners, persuaders and influencers, to prophesy major changes, and to search deeply inside himself for the wellsprings of joy and despair. Judging from the response of young people all over the United States, there must be many who share some of his longing and hope—even though they may not consciously comprehend the full impact of his words. This thin youth with three harmonicas, a guitar and a heart full of poetry has obviously tapped a great common well of discontent, frustration and yearning. Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie tried to get out messages in many ways similar for years, but they never attained Dylan's phenomenal popularity, except among radicals already committed to the ideas.

I am reminded of the magnificent lines in W. H. Auden's poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats":

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its saying where executives
Would never want to tamper; it flows south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.⁷

The Dylan mouth is sometimes a whisper, sometimes a shout, sometimes a thin wail, sometimes a lyric melody that is in each way

⁷ Copyright 1940 by W. H. Auden. Reprinted from *Another Time*, by W. H. Auden, by permission of Random House, Inc.

saying for millions of young people something central to the way they feel, not only with a sense of imagery and turns of phrase they couldn't write but, I submit, in most cases with ideas that have had to be buried stillborn in the unconscious because of the necessity of living and integrating into this society. Somehow, through the magic of an artistic experience, he is breaking through at an emotional level and, in a sense, reaching people from inside themselves.

While Bob Dylan thus appears to me the most gifted representative of youthful discontent with our present way of life, Erich Fromm offers what I believe are some of the most valuable clues to why so many Americans remain as encapsulated in the inconsistencies of our culture as they do. In *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*⁸ Fromm attempts to sum up a lifetime of study inspired primarily by the writings of Marx and Freud. For me this book has gone a long way toward explaining the seeming paradox of how people can listen without really hearing, and feel without acting.

Fromm believes that, taken together, the works of Marx and Freud show us how human ideas and behavior are the products of two simultaneous forces: on the one hand, our deep-rooted, individual psychic needs and, on the other, the universal necessity of society to perpetuate itself. According to Marx, the ideas and behavior patterns that facilitate the economic and power relationships of a period soon assume the proportions of a social conscious, an ideology in terms of which human beings then come to understand and order their lives. Freud, for his part, has contributed the well-known notion of the individual unconscious. He developed this concept from his clinical discoveries that individuals repress their most important formative childhood experiences and that this leads to the result that "most of what is real within ourselves is not conscious, and most of what is conscious is not real."⁹

Fromm has combined Marx's and Freud's central insights and further developed them into the concept of the social unconscious. In effect, he suggests that Marx's social conscious needs to be viewed as having also an unconscious dimension. And he proposes that Freud's

⁸ Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, New York, Giant Cardinal Edition, Pocket Books, 1965.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

phenomenon of the unconscious is an aspect not only of the life of individuals but of society at large. It is because of the workings of this social unconscious that, in Fromm's words, "we repress also the awareness of facts, provided they contradict certain ideas and institutions which we do not want to have threatened."¹⁰ The social unconscious in the case of a society, like the unconscious in the case of an individual, thus consists of what we consider vital to the continuance of our whole mode of living. And it follows that we guard it from threats just as jealously as we guard the deep emotional significance of early relationships with our parents and siblings. Thus, by the use of certain kinds of logic, by the unconscious repression of those facts which "don't fit" with our belief structures, and by the way we use language, it is possible to "filter out" those frightening, disturbing ideas or events which might challenge our values and life patterns. As Fromm puts it, "In order to convince himself that he acts according to his own free will, man invents rationalizations to make it appear as if he does what he does because he has to for moral or rational reasons."¹¹

The clear implication is that when the filters are pervasive or effective enough, simple intellectual knowledge will not work. Like the person who gets drunk and forgets everything beyond the point at which he began to make a fool of himself, we can ignore or become insensitive to whatever does not jibe with our total psychological and social needs. This means, for Fromm, that change cannot come merely through understanding our experiences in theoretical or empirical terms; what is required is some sort of more basic emotional confrontation. Meanwhile, men have created, and lived in accordance with rules and justifications for behavior which Fromm collectively calls "illusions." That realization leads him to what I consider the core of the book: "We are determined by forces outside our conscious selves, and by passions and interests which direct us behind our backs. Inasmuch as this is the case, we are not free. But we can emerge from this bondage and enlarge the realm of freedom by becoming fully aware of reality, and hence, of necessity, by giving up illusions and transforming ourselves from somnambulistic, unfree,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

determined, defensive, passive persons into awakened, aware, active, independent ones."¹²

Such a recognition is very important. For without realizing that built-in, unconscious societal forces can and do deaden sensitivity, it is impossible to understand not only Hitler's Germany, but a nation that can read daily—now even on the front pages of its newspapers—about the tragic and pointless deaths of children and civilians as well as "the enemy" at the hands of our troops, and not begin to question the war in Vietnam. The press has become so outraged at restrictions placed on news coverage that I believe in many cases Americans are getting an accurate picture of the war and its contradictions, as well as of the absurd degree to which news management is being carried. But President Johnson waves a fatherly hand and draws out the tired, trite clichés about democracy and freedom, and the polls show that the vast majority agrees with his conduct of foreign policy in Southeast Asia. He sends out "peace feelers" to Delhi and Toronto but few question why not to Hanoi or National Liberation Front Headquarters in South Vietnam. Few wonder at the contradiction between our talk of "self-determination" and the reports droned out by television commentators showing that American military installations in Vietnam are being designed on a thirty-year timetable. One or two letters to the editor are the response to a photograph on the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* which shows a "Viet Cong" body draped over the hood of a jeep like a deer bagged by happy hunters in the Sierras.

The same is true of other kinds of atrocities to which Americans seem on the whole quite comfortably accommodated. In 1964 in Mississippi, when the FBI and National Guard were combing the Pearl River for the bodies of the three slain civil rights workers, two other bodies were dredged up. At first there was a furor because it was thought those were the corpses of two of the missing three. When it was learned they were not, the whole question was dropped. No one seemed overly concerned. I asked in Washington in the summer of 1965 whose bodies they had been, and was told by SNCC staff people that they were "just a couple of niggers from a nearby Negro college. . . ." No publicity, no questions, no fanfare, from the South

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

or from the North, even though there was front-page coverage across the nation.

I think the easiest way to explain such things is that the defense mechanisms of people's social unconscious are operating to keep their capacities for awareness and sensitivity inhibited. The transformation Fromm talks of, from the condition of forgetfulness and emotional numbness to one of being aware, active and independent is extremely important. For it represents a process essential to overcoming slavery to social and psychological illusions that blind and deafen us. But where I think Fromm falls short is in his failure to explain how such a transformation can be achieved. Let us return for a moment to Bob Dylan. Surely to him we can apply all those criteria of one who is liberated from the prevailing illusions and who can write and sing about them, sometimes tearing away so many layers of himself that he gets into completely personal imagery which can only be enjoyed like some of Dylan Thomas' poetry, as cadence and rhythm and individually forged word usage. Many people listen to him, and for a great many of them his music is emotionally stimulating; yet only a small proportion probably truly change as a result. It seems to me that if all those who bought his records and attended his concerts reacted to the content of his songs, there would surely be many more people in the civil rights and peace movements, or at least more who in other ways were saying "No" to the banal conformity of American society today. It may be that for some, listening to him is a sort of "secret life of Walter Mitty." Or perhaps they are touched only enough to be troubled. But in any case, these reactions are not enough to make for major changes in behavior, even though they do set the stage.

Fromm propounds a basic humanistic credo according to which man holds the power of affirmation or negation, the power to choose individually or in concert, life patterns that will enhance or degrade the quality of human existence. He says that "man's task in life is precisely the paradoxical one of realizing his individuality and transcending it in arriving at the experience of universality . . . and all one can do for another is to show him the alternatives, truthfully and lovingly yet without sentimentality or illusion."¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

I believe that this is true on a person-to-person level. But I also think that Fromm avoided his own dilemma regarding the filters which are so crucial a factor in keeping most people from being able to hear and act on sets of alternatives that transcend their current value orientations. It seems to me romantically to avoid the central and practical problem of how to reach large numbers of people. And if you want to go beyond scattered individual instances of awareness spread ineffectively throughout a population, you simply must be concerned about reaching large numbers of people.

In talking to one of the activities counselors here at San Francisco State College, I learned that in 1966 more freshmen than ever before had asked during the orientation period about extracurricular programs that would deal with the problems of war and peace and civil rights, or that would put them in touch with other students on a large, impersonal-appearing campus. I don't pretend to know all the reasons for this. Perhaps they were only curious. Perhaps they were afraid of being drafted. Perhaps they were reacting to Dylan and others in the field of entertainment. Or it may be that they had just accumulated enough of a burden of loneliness, dissatisfaction and alienation to feel that they had to deal with it somehow. At any rate, they had somehow come to the door that questions the prevalent illusions, and it was likely that a budding awareness would develop, one way or another. It seems to me that it is up to us older students who are interested in breaking down those illusions to help them respond to these needs for answers and for contact with other people. We must face up to these needs in a meaningful way. We must make possible experiences which will combine some sort of person-to-person relationship with understanding of the problems and alternatives that they confront in their own immediate environment, the problems and alternatives of action or submission, of mere rejection or creative challenge. For the fact is that the dilemma of alienation and awareness can be handled in many ways. It can be met by some form of escape—by physically and/or psychologically "unplugging" oneself from the society. One can, for example, take the way of the "beatnik" and settle for only negative values. Or as some friends of mine have done, one can move to an isolated farm where, in effect, a different existence is created and one practically ceases to communicate with



the world at large. Another way the dilemma can be met is by searching deeper and deeper within one's own self and coming up with some kind of personally creative response (such as art or writing) or else indulging in drugs or other experiences that set up a "world within the world"; this in a sense affords a manner of coexistence with society, but no real participation. And the third major alternative is to begin to look at one's environment with a willingness seriously to question it and its precepts, to work to change it, and to seek to break down its illusions and masked injustices—not in terms of any unquestioned ideology or plan, but with a constant readiness to integrate new information and experiences and to try to incorporate them as part of one's own guidelines. This path also means taking responsibility for the bright and damning light such an approach can shed on the system in which we live.

I opt for that third alternative, which I should like to call creative challenge. That does not mean, of course, that I recommend excluding all parts of the others. (I myself, for example, am working in creative writing and also try my hand at various art forms.) It does mean a basic commitment to acting for the implementation of changes we see as necessary, rather than just accepting the fact that the world is full of things we do not like and feeling that there is no point in trying to do anything about it. But if one really wants to be effective, to make significant changes, and not simply to satisfy oneself psychologically, opting for creative challenge means much more than a simple yes-or-no commitment. Above all, it means avoiding the temptation to exchange one set of illusions for another. I believe that ultimately the challenge lies in developing a new style which will transcend the no-content dialogue of two-party politics in the United States as well as the isolation and ineffectiveness of most radical groups, which usually wind up talking to other radical groups or to small bands of their own faithful. Very often, in fact, radical groups actually fear contact that will mean real chances for effecting change. They do so either because the members have become so alienated that they are incapable of talking and relating to outsiders, or because their goals are not real in other than ideological terms and they wouldn't know how to institute them even if they had the opportunity.

One of the most important ways of working for change that avoid these pitfalls is to start within the student's own environment, at the college itself. Indeed, all over the country students are questioning not only restrictions on speech and activity, but content and approach in the classroom and the curriculum. They are beginning to ask how much of what is being taught is truly relevant to their experiences and needs and to the problems they believe need solving. And they are beginning to look for ways in which they themselves can supplement the existing curriculum with courses and programs of their own. These innovations are of an experimental nature, and may or may not one day find their way into the regular academic offerings. They are open to criticism and revision, able to grow with the needs and curiosities of the participants. And they are very much in the spirit of creative challenge. Their purpose is critically to compare what students see around them with the concepts they are taught in the classroom to see where the discrepancies lie, to root out possible academic illusions and expose them to the light of question.

Such things are happening today at San Francisco State College under the auspices of the Associated Students. Student government over the last three or four years has evolved a basic philosophy which recognizes that the college will be the student's community for about four years and which assumes that to the extent he actively questions at every step, avoids being just a passive vessel into which "knowledge" is poured, and seeks interpersonal relationships with teachers and fellow students, he will be contributing both to his own development and the bettering of the school. To that end, we have sought and won seats for students on all major college policy-making boards, including every committee of the Academic Senate. Students are working on the development of a body of curriculum criticism and evaluation that will hopefully make an important contribution to program changes and innovations in shared classroom experiences for faculty and students.

One semester we decided to start open-ended discussion groups with freshmen and sophomores to mull over anything they felt to be of interest, anything that troubled them about their education, their lives, and what it meant to be eighteen and in college in 1965. Out of these groups emerged what we now call "the GEEP," or General

Educational Experimental Program. Nearly twenty of those freshmen and sophomores had not been satisfied with just talking and griping. So they set out to design and organize their own general education program, recruiting professors from the faculty and breaking down artificial departmental barriers marked "specialization."

Associated Students funds are also bringing to the campus visiting professors such as Paul Goodman. His biting criticism of education and the Academy (not to mention society at large) may keynote a spring which has already brought to fruition what we call "the Special Section," or "the Experimental College." This experimental college within the college was in many ways the next logical step beyond mere criticism of the system. For it is an attempt to try our own hand at organizing seminars, classes, and series of talks and lectures for the purpose of supplementing and, we hope, cross-fertilizing, the regular curriculum. In our first semester over twenty courses were offered, most of which had optional academic credit available. The areas of exploration ranged from nonviolence to avant-garde philosophy, from group process and community organization to critical thinking. In fact, I even organized one seminar called "Something Big: Art and the Campus Environment," in which we tried to bring creativity, art and functional design to bear on our own college community. Specifically, by working together we may find ways of imbuing the college's "neo-penal" architecture with somewhat more human proportions.

Well over three hundred students are now involved in "the Special Section," and interest is growing at least as fast as we can meet it. The whole experiment is permeated by a feeling, a mood—ever so difficult to touch or define, but somehow very much in the air. It is a mood of community and affirmation, an unwritten, between-the-lines kind of sense that somehow emerges from chaos. I guess what it says is that we can do it, that we are doing it—exploring what that means as we go, often groping awkwardly, but nonetheless *doing it*. You seldom hear anyone talk in stereotyped ways about "the" Administration (as though it were an iron bastion without people who can listen, understand and be enthused). For the cooperation we've found among administrators and faculty alike has been little short of amazing and certainly wouldn't validate anyone's stereotypes. In fact, many of these people appear to feel they have as big a stake in our growth and success as we do ourselves.

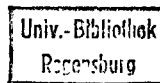
The other major assumption of student government here at San Francisco State is that the college is not an isolated cloister but is unavoidably (and thankfully) a part of the community outside. It affects, and is affected by, the larger community—whether consciously or unconsciously. The college—this one or any other—is a great resource of knowledge and trained people. But college students also have much to learn by mixing experiences in the world outside with academic knowledge gained from their books and classrooms. Many times practical experience gained in community work can have far-reaching results by way of revising theories long cherished but no longer workable. I would cite as an example the contribution to both the community and the college that has been made by San Francisco State's Tutorial Program, an operation involving four hundred student tutors with as many grade-school and high-school tutees from areas of poverty and cultural deprivation. On the one hand, many of the preconceptions with which these students entered such areas as San Francisco's Fillmore and Mission districts have altered drastically. On the other hand, representatives of the Tutorial Program are suggesting sweeping changes in the educational curriculum in areas that bear on their experiences.

It is our ardent hope that the Tutorial Program is just the first in a series of undertakings from which will grow a creative interchange between San Francisco State and the community around it. With this in mind, we have this semester initiated the "Community Involvement Program," which is beginning to involve students in a broad range of community projects, including the development of a model integrated community to the southeast of the College, a Student Union in the city's Haight-Ashbury District, and the provision of pickets and fund-raising in support of striking Delano grape pickers.

I think there is one underlying principle that knits all these activities together. Perhaps creative challenge is a good term, perhaps not; but the crux of it is that students are bringing themselves to bear—and helping to bring others to bear—on their actual, living environment. They are working at the examination and eventual replacement of institutionalized illusions that make us less human, more prone to destructiveness and less creative. In all these ways students are saying no to all forms of passive submissiveness, demanding an active role in the shaping of their destinies, and showing

TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

a willingness to help others do the same. After all, students in Students for a Democratic Society in Newark, New Jersey, with their motto "Let the people decide," and students in Mississippi, developing indigenous community leadership to fight a century-old struggle, are really making the same discovery that we are making on the campus. We have all discovered that apathy is a word behind which the fearful hide. Apathy means not seeing the possibility of effecting change; it means having rejected the easy sham answers and having become cynical about them. But apathy can vanish, to be replaced by commitment, when people learn together the ways they can make a difference.



Format by Mort Perry

Set in 10/12 Linotype Times Roman

Composed, printed and bound by American Book-Stratford Press, Inc.

HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS, INCORPORATED