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Controversial Speakers Still Present Problems To Colleges

by Walter Grant
College Press Service

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (CPS)--- When the University of Alabama held its annual Emphasis program several weeks ago, one of the principal speakers was to have been Yale University Chaplain William Sloane Coffin.

However, Coffin--one of five men indicted by a Federal grand jury for counseling young people to violate the Selective Service Act--did not appear here. At the advice of the university administration, his invitation was rescinded by the Emphasis committee about four weeks before the program.

University President Frank A. Rose did not demand that the committee, which included both students and faculty members, rescind Coffin's invitation. He merely explained that having a "controversial" speaker on campus would strain the already poor relations between the university and the state legislature.

The committee was able to understand the possible repercussions Rose had in mind. Only last year, several state legislators called for Rose's resignation after articles by black power advocate Stokely Carmichael and Communist Bettina Aptheker appeared in an Emphasis publication. A speaker ban law was introduced in the legislature, and liberals in the state had a tough time keeping it from being adopted. Many observers were afraid the bill would have a better chance this year, especially if Coffin appeared on campus.

The Emphasis program is over now, and most people have forgotten about the Coffin incident. But as long as conservatives control the state government and the university's purse strings, similar incidents are bound to occur time and time again.

The Alabama case is typical of the way administrators of public colleges and universities in many states, particularly in the South, keep controversial speakers and organizations off their campuses. The administrators simply explain why it is best for their institutions not to upset the status quo.

Dr. Ted Klitzke, chairman of

the art department here and a member of the Emphasis committee, thinks the technique used by Dr. Rose is used successfully by most college administrators in the South. "In Southern relationships," he explains, "there is a kind of demand for loyalty that exists between an administrator and those under him. Administrators want this relationship, and they act personally hurt if someone is not loyal to them. It's a case of people being faithful to a master."

Dr. Klitzke says committees on campus often compromise what they think is right when President Rose "plays up this idea of loyalty and faithfulness. President Rose wants us to look up at him as the Big Daddy. I have taught in other parts of the country and have not found this type of relationship."

Southern administrators have been able to get away with their pleas for loyalty because most of the students and faculty members on their campuses are from the South. "Most of these people are simply unfamiliar with any tradition of dissent," Dr. Klitzke says. "They were brought up this way both in their homes and in their schools, and they are taught not to rock the boat."

Although many college administrators in the South take advantage of this aspect of the Southern tradition, there are also other, less subtle ways of keeping controversial speakers off campuses.

In Mississippi, for example, the board of trustees requires that all speakers invited to the campus of any state-supported institution "must first be investigated and approved by the head of the institution involved and when invited the names of such speakers must be filed with the Executive Secretary of the Board of Trustees." A board of trustees resolution says speakers should not be approved "who will do violence to the academic atmosphere of the institutions," or who advocate "the philosophy of overthrow of the government of the United States." The resolution also outlaws speakers "in disrepute in the area from whence they come."

Officials at the University of Mississippi attempted to use the board policy last year to keep Aaron Henry, state president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, from speaking on campus. Student and faculty groups filed a suit against the policy in Federal District Court, and a temporary restraining order was issued enjoining officials from interfering with Henry's appearance at Ole Miss.

The courts, however, have not ruled on the constitutionality of the speaker policy, but most observers are NOT optimistic that it will be declared unconstitutional. In the meantime, the restraining order issued for Henry's speech has been responsible for relaxing the effect of the speaker ban.

Many Mississippi students, nevertheless, say they don't even bother to invite some speakers to campus because there is too much red tape, and they know the speakers would be rejected by their administrations. Therefore, Mississippi State University President William Giles can

say proudly that he hasn't turned down a speaker this year.

In Louisiana, the state legislature passed a bill last year which prohibits the use of state funds by any institution of higher learning to promote, sponsor, authorize, or otherwise benefit any communistic or atheistic organization, program, speaker or function.

Louisiana Gov. John J. McKeithen, however, insists the bill is not a speaker ban. He says the law does no more than prohibit the expenditure of state funds to support communistic or atheistic activities, and does not "in the least infringe upon the right of our academic communities to freely discuss and debate any subject including atheism and communism."

In Kentucky, several state legislators threatened to enact a speaker ban law after hearing that Communist Herbert Aptheker had been invited to speak on the University of Kentucky campus. A speaker ban bill was not introduced into the legislature this year, but Gov. Louie Nunn, a conservative, says "no legislation is needed. All we need is a board of trustees (at state colleges) that are willing to say who will speak and who won't." The governor, by law, is chairman of the UK board.

At Florida State University in Tallahassee, a student-faculty committee reviews all speaker requests. "I don't know of any specific speaker who has been flatly refused," says Dean of Men H. F. Reinhard. He admits, however, that the mere presence of the committee tends to discourage some students from submitting the names of controversial speakers.

These are just a few of the ways, some subtle, some not, that college administrators keep controversial personalities off their campuses. And although there are few written speaker ban laws on the books, their political counterparts are in forceful evidence on many campuses.

The major problem is that many state legislators and taxpayers, particularly in conservative Southern states, refuse to accept the notion that a university must be a center for "free inquiry." Southern administrators are noted for their paternalistic attitudes. In the area of campus speakers, Southern paternalism decides which views college students should be exposed to.

Some college and university administrators, like Alabama's Dr. Rose, do not always personally agree that certain speakers should be kept off the campus. But they are forced to encourage an atmosphere of non-controversy in order to avoid confrontations with the powerful conservative elements in their states.

The attitude of many Southerners was reflected recently by Tom Ethridge, the conservative columnist for THE CLARION LEDGER in Jackson, Miss. He wrote, "With due respect for zeal and 'academic freedom,' it would seem that students automatically agree to accept the authority of a college administrator when they enroll. If and as that authority becomes unacceptable, students should leave--and good riddance."

Eye View Guru.

ogi--spiritual adviser to the architect of Transcendental Spiritual Regeneration Movement--cross-legged among cushions--a Himalayan retreat where ng and exist on boiled rice and there, and Mia, and a score ebrated believers from around ut, Post writer Lewis Lapham vers in the U. S., then went to aharishi, A CURTIS MAGAZINE
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