

NYU SDS position paper

Disruption and Discipline

though the masters make the rules
for the wise men and the fools
I've got nothing, ma
to live up to...

- Bob Dylan

We are told by the NYU administration that the disruptions last Wednesday of Nguyen Huu Chi and James Reston violated the individual's right of "free speech". We contend that unfortunately no such right exists in America today, and it is only through struggle against the forces that keep America—and Saigon—undemocratic can we win that right and others.

How can we claim that right does not exist? Did not both men come to present their views and were they not prevented? In fact, a right is something much more basic than speaking on a platform. A right is in fact an agreement between an individual and his government. The individual agrees to respect and obey his government as long as it guarantees his right to free speech **and** as long as the government decides its policies on the basis of the opinions of the citizens. There is no sense in having something called a "right" unless the government is responsive to the views expressed through exercise of those "rights": we could all talk ourselves blue in the face but it is fruitless unless it is related to the way the government reacts.

In America, more and more people are aware that in fact the decisions of the government have nothing to do with people expressing views. The only people who are "heard" are those with positions of importance in the corporate, military or educational hierarchies. Everyone has had the experience of getting something done because they "knew somebody"; in fact, on the highest levels of government, the same procedure is used among people who float between the offices of mammoth corporate conglomerates, the multiversities, and governmental agencies. In order to maintain their priveleged position, they deluge the American people through mass media with their rationales and a little dose of conflict—some real, some fabricated—and then have their positions ratified by "democratic" elections where differences rarely go beyond questions of personal integrity and mysteriously disappear right after the election.

But, as the rise of the student movement and the Wallace campaign point out, more and more people are breaking away from that shoddy pretense. Even if they don't understand political theory, people understand in their guts that they don't have any rights, and will have to fight to get them. For rights require the power to do something with them, and people understand that they have no power.

The liberals tell us we are right, but we should be glad we are not prevented from speaking. They argue that we must build our movement without ever violating the pretended rights of anyone.

But what good is the right to speak when it is clear that it only exists because the government has not felt it important to take it away, and what will happen if we continue to back down as the war continues and racists like Wallace gain strength out of people's frustrations? How many people in Germany sat back and waited as Hitler grew in strength until it was too late?

We will not be “good German” on December 4, NYU was host to a man who serves a military junta that guarantees no rights and jails people for advocating peace. Ambassador Chi works for Nguyen Cao Ky, a man who has openly expressed his admiration for Hitler. That government is the agent by which the US is turning Vietnam into a genocidal war in order to suppress a strong popular movement. Are we to sit back and pretend this is an issue of rights we know do not exist?

We say no. Nor can we allow a man who is a major figure in the **New York Times** go unchallenged, for the **Times** has throughout the war legitimized the government through its limited dissent on the war. Even when the stories filed by their own reporters flew in the face of their positions (and much we know has been edited out), the **Times** has refused to take a stance that would endanger the fragile tissue of “consensus” on which the established order has stood for so long.

To state the facts on Vietnam would not only mark the **Times** as politically inept, but would be equivalent under capitalism to suicide. Newspapers in modern America survive—the few that do—through advertising and not through circulation revenue. A paper that steps outside the “mainstream” would be deserted like the proverbial sinking ship by its advertisers, for it would isolate itself from the well-heeled readers that the advertisers pay to reach.

We are tired of waiting for minor editorial concessions from the **New York Times** that admit that perhaps the NLF is not controlled from Hanoi and perhaps the Saigon government is not only dictatorial and corruption-ridden but without popular support except from the landlords, financiers and plantation owners and therefore should not exist. We have to build a movement that through its actions show our convictions and makes it possible to cut through the murk of American politics.

The task at hand is to prevent the administration at NYU from throwing people out of school or into prison for their actions against two men who represent the power that runs our lives. There is an insane logic behind the administration’s acts: John Hatchett was removed by the President for speaking his mind; now students who stop a fascist from speaking must be removed by the President as well. The only thread that ties these two things together, the theme that makes an insane logic consistent, is allegiance to the interests of power. We reject that logic; we reject that power. If the university is to press disciplinary charges, it must do it in open hearings so all of us can decide for ourselves. And we will further demand that neither the courts or disciplinary tribunals will be used to punish people for actions that are justified in a nation moving toward disaster both at home and abroad.

There is an historic scope to the events of our times—the massive black rebellions in the cities, the constant strikes, the gigantic demonstrations against the war, the heroic acts of individuals, the draft resistance, the liberation of Cubans from foreign domination, the cultural revolution of 700 million people, and the heroism of the Vietnamese people. Though these events are separate in time and place, they are part of a general movement against militarism and capitalist control of human material. In special times in history, and because of their special status in society, students become the precursor of social change and liberation.

If the Vietnamese could withstand the force of bombs, if the blacks could withstand the onslaught of modern police, if Cubans could triumph over Imperialism, could we not also, in some way, join the struggle for liberation? We thought we could and we have.

We live in cities where hospitals are overcrowded, lines of pregnant women stand for hours at clinic doors; where masses of people with rotten teeth, faulty eyes, and malnutrition cannot receive medical attention; where the entire saving of a middle-class family is liquidated by a single illness; where thousands of black families rotate day and night for the use of a single room; where blacks, after 300 years of slavery are drafted into a white's war ten thousand miles away; where millions of youths are subjected to involuntary servitude and trained to kill; where police, with total immunity, gas, beat, and kill the very people who try to free themselves; where the courts are loaded with bureaucratic judges who evict tenants, render landlords immune, punish workers for striking to get a decent wage, uphold the legality of any war by any method, and sanction all policies from Imperialism and the Draft; we live in cities where millions of apartments have peeling walls, sagging floors, busted plumbing, heaped-up garbage, subject to roaches and fantastic rents; where dirt and soot are ubiquitous, the cases of cancer, asthma, and emphysema, the bronchial maladies caused by polluted air, almost double every year; in short, we live in a state of chaos, and capitalism is its name.

Under such conditions, the desire to do away with the present forms of social life, to overcome the chaos that already exists in capitalism, is a creative force. Notwithstanding the bloodshed and the sacrifices of thousands of brave Americans, resistance signifies that many Americans are no longer reconciled to Imperialist wars, oppressive ghettos, government corruption, trustee control of entire institutions, a class system of law, and the predatory character of capitalism as a whole.

We believe that it is absurd to talk of neutrality in a period of intense class conflict and struggle, when the nation is beset by wars, resistance and riots.

President Hester has described the people who participated in the action as “revolting”, “wanton”, and “Brutal”. To these men napalm, pellet bombs, and all the others are just taking care of business, the business of death. We have here an example of the corruption of language—language that serves to confuse rather than define. It is not that university officials lie directly (although they often do), their language is so perverted that it does their lying for them. Whereas the humane purpose of language is to relate men to men, to make sciences cognizant of each other, the language of institutions is devised to separate and departmentalize human achievement.

Those who lay responsibility for “anarchy” and “violence” on the movement have entirely missed the point. To purport that the movement wants to wreck the “university” is absurd. Under the Trustees the university has wrecked itself.

Of course, if by “UNiversity” one means war research, military training, elitist channeling, real estate deals, and all the other oppression that Trustees deal in-- then we do intend to destroy that University.

However, if one means by University a body that applies its labor and intelligence to the collective good, which affirms life and liberty, then we do not desire to destroy the University; we intend to build it.

The ruling class disposition to war is so great that professors who use our social resources to work out methods of counter-insurgency are, by some twist of language, considered lawful and constructive; while those who affirm life, and who fight against institutional war-making, are called destructive.

We believe that a University should have nothing to do with human subjugation, except the overthrowing of it. A University’s labor, research, and knowledge should release the creative capacities of our society and advance the liberation of oppressed peoples of the world.

The new left represents people in motion around this kind of understanding of society. It is apparent that those who have the power over our lives have decided that that understanding and the willingness to act on it is dangerous. It is also apparent that this is not limited to NYU, but it is a nationwide phenomena. The repression at San Francisco State, the Oakland 7, Huey Newton, the Spock trial, 10 year prison sentences for dissenting GI’s, the trial of Gus at Columbia—the list is endless—all indicate a growing and systematic repression of movements for social change in America.

The particular situation at NYU is that individuals have been selected for punishment on the basis of past known political position and visibility. It is important the movement move to defend itself as well as moving to defend others in the society that are oppressed and exploited. We demand open hearings so that the university community may see the function of the administrations court and so that we may express our political position. It is important also that we stand fast for reinstatement of suspended students (no more guilty until proven innocent!) and for the dropping of criminal charges against all others.