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Cry Alarm!

In the Harvard University commencement address of 1957, Erwin Panofsky spoke "in defense of the Ivory Tower." He traced back to the "Song of Songs" the origin of that currently quaint-sounding simile, justified the scholar's normal aloofness from the turmoil of current events, yet concluded that times arise when he must cry alarm over what he sees from his ivory watchtower.

The past few weeks have been such a time, and have heard such a cry. Faculty members and college presidents have joined students in telling President Nixon, congressmen, and other government officials of their desperate dismay over the invasion of Cambodia, the shooting of students in Ohio and Mississippi, the failure of national leadership, and the disruption of national priorities. The cry of alarm is spreading. Congressmen and Cabinet officers are being implored by friends, acquaintances, their staff members, and their own sons and daughters to restore harmony at home and to withdraw us from a faraway war. So many resolutions have been adopted that a new one is no longer newsworthy. *The New Yorker* has charged the President with overt and unconstitutional usurpation of power. In all of this, the nation's intellectual community has found unity that, for the time being, has overridden its own internal differences.

What will follow this climax of concern? How can the effort to prevent national disintegration be sustained? In the speech the Illinois Constitutional Convention did not permit John Gardner to deliver, he asked the moderates to consider more closely their own responsibility for our national dissension, and for its repair. He accused moderates of "a secret complicity in the activities of the extremists," and then went on to say, "The moderate conservative does not explicitly approve of police brutality, but something in him is not displeased when the billy club comes down on the head of a long-haired student. The liberal does not endorse violence by the extreme left; but he may take extreme pleasure in such action when it discomfits those in authority." The restoration of unity requires the withdrawal of even tacit approval of extremists of either fringe; the repudiation of wanton destruction by students and of shooting by police; the protection of individual rights against invasion by either group; and the eradication of the social ills that have given rise to so much dissension.

These are the objectives. As for the means, thousands of students who came to Washington to plead and protest went home to work within the political system. The academic community can have greater political clout than it realizes. Over 3 million students are of voting age. Many must send absentee ballots home because they cannot vote in their college communities, but this limitation may be removed, as law students at the University of Michigan have demonstrated. In addition to students, there are 800,000 professional staff members, plus their wives, husbands, and nonprofessional campus associates, some of whom can be influenced by faculty and student supporters of favored candidates. All told, the potential academic vote exceeds 5 million, and those voters can influence others. There are ideological differences within the 5 million, and on some issues the academic majority will disagree with the general majority. Nevertheless, in some of the approximately 1000 small cities in which higher education is the principal business, the academic vote can be controlling. In national elections this year and in 1972 it can be powerful. All over the country, students are setting to work to make it so. Voting with ballots, instead of with brickbats and bullets, brings hope. If this effort can be sustained, we may be able to reverse the national disintegration that has called forth so many shouts of alarm.

—DAEL WOLFLE