

is its effect upon our teachers?" If we can get them rightly placed in relation to their work, nothing in the world can prevail against them.

## 3

## The American College and American Freedom

*After the closing of the Experimental College in 1932 its alumni, men who had been students or advisers on the college, held regular reunions—in Chicago in 1942, Annapolis in 1957, and Madison in 1962 and 1977.*

*These reunions were academic conclaves. They arose out of the desire of the alumni to think through again the meaning of the experiment and the questions it had raised in their lives. At their reunions the alumni held discussions in the Socratic mode that they had learned at the college. Meiklejohn used these occasions to learn from his former students. He presented his current ideas and challenged his audience to light into him, to reveal his flaws, and to raise questions he had neglected.*

*He gave the following address at the reunion on May 10, 1957, at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland. The occasion marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Experimental College and the 85th anniversary of Meiklejohn's birth. The speech is a culmination of Meiklejohn's thought, the single document that best presents all his themes. It draws upon the twenty-five years he had spent after the closing of the Experimental College thinking about self-government, freedom of speech, and the First Amendment.*

*The speech was printed in the Congressional Record, 85th Congress, 1st Session, vol. 103, part 7 (June 7-20, 1957), pp. 8751-8755.*

President Weigle, Dean Klein, the faculty and other members of the St. John's community, we of the Experimental College come here, in response to your very kind invitation, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the birth of our own college. May I express to you our deep appreciation of an act of courtesy which is, I think, unique in the academic life of the United States. There are, as you know, many differences in the method and the content of teaching of our two institutions. And yet, your invitation and our acceptance of it indicate, I am sure, a fundamental kinship, an identity of purpose, between us. Through many happy and exciting days and weeks and months on this campus I have recognized the depth and the warmth of that kinship, and have delighted in it. Coming here, we of the Experimental College find ourselves at home. . . .

The Committee in charge of our celebration has requested, or directed, me to present my topic by posing a question or questions and offering an answer or answers in such a way that throughout all our meetings there may run a continuous effort of reflection and discussion concerning men and their minds, and especially concerning the freedom of American minds. The plan seems to be that, so far as we are capable of it, our reunion shall take on that mingling of gaiety and seriousness, of belief and bewilderment, which the symposium of Plato long ago established as the model of revelry and conversation which are proper to reasonable beings.

As I say that, I am wondering if you recall as vividly as I do that morning meeting of the college at which George Russell, whom his readers knew as "AE," spoke to us about the symposium, telling us that whatever he had won of human wisdom had its source in the sayings of the wise Diotima as she was quoted by Socrates in that beautiful and powerful platonic discussion of the nature of human love.

At this point, too, before the argument begins, I must pay my respects to my two very good friends, Alan Barth and Harold Taylor, who have been summoned by the committee to give my argument a going over when I have got it stated. They are dangerous fellows both. It may be that when they have had their say there will be nothing left of my suggestions for you to talk about.

Shall we, however, summon our courage to try what the committee tells us to do? Shall we go Socratic to the limit for a day or two? If we do follow that program, then our celebration must find its fun in gay and fearless questioning of whatever we are, whatever we think, and whatever we care for. We must subject to critical assessment the truth or falsity of what we believe, must ponder ruefully over much that we have done and plan to do in a confusing and self-defeating contemporary world. The committee is, I am sure, right in thinking that these are the activities which our college would wish us to carry on and to enjoy in celebration of its birth. Can we enjoy them? If not, it is, I fear, all too clear that however much we celebrate, we are not celebrating a college.

Since we have been separated from one another for many years and have traveled many different paths, it will be wise, I think to make a slow beginning of our symposium. Let me then, in reminiscent mood, seek to reopen the lines of communication by referring to two features of the past which we have in common.

### *The Experimental College*

First, then, I remind you that at the reunion of 1942, when we celebrated the college on the tenth anniversary of its ending, nine wise young members of the alumni group were called upon to answer on paper and by voice the question, "How do I fit in?" These men had worked in many occupations since leaving Madison and each of them spoke of his special work with deep concern. They were a lawyer, a doctor, an administrator of the Tennessee Valley Authority, an organizer for a labor union, a sculptor, a university teacher of history, a machinist, an employment supervisor, a writer of plays.

And yet, to my keen delight, they were also speaking as members of a college whose general interest, while referring to all their occupations, was wider and deeper than any one of them, than all of them together. As I listened to their words, I knew the recorded fact that Henry Adams had died thirty years before those papers were read and that Plato's writing had come to an end twenty-four centuries earlier than that. But still, on that happy morning I heard both Adams and Plato speaking. They were there in the words and phrases through which nine stories were told, in the questions and answers by which ten years of busy living in the United States were critically examined

and interpreted. That was true, I am sure, in 1942. We had tried to make it true from 1927 to 1932.

I now suggest that it is still true in 1957. Since we are a college, Plato and Adams are here, waiting and eager to talk with any one, with any group, which seeks to find its way toward educated living. But so, too, are many others. John Dewey, whose gospel we often challenged, and who challenged ours, and Thorstein Veblen, Aristophanes, and Lincoln Steffens, Thucydides and Frederick Turner, the builders of the Parthenon, the builders of American railroads, Solon, and Thomas Jefferson—these and a host of other friends and teachers are always present where a genuine college is. They are now ready to talk with us here just as, three decades ago, they stirred and puzzled us and tried to make us think, in Adams Hall.

The road toward understanding of men and their world is often hard to travel; just now it is even hard to find; but it is not, for one who looks around him as he goes, a lonely road. To go to college, if one really goes to a college, is to be initiated into a fellowship of learning. It is that permanent fellowship which our impermanent little college now celebrates as, in these meetings, it celebrates itself.

And, second, it will perhaps stir old memories, and so reestablish old relations of controversial give and take, if we look once more at the curriculum, the course of study, which our college required of all its members. There were no separate subjects, so-called, in that curriculum. We made no carefully devised incursions into such special fields of investigation as economics or art, physics or logic, and the like.

We were seeking to learn, not how new knowledge may be won, but how knowledge already available to us may be so interpreted and reinterpreted as to be of use in the planning of human welfare.

To that end, we studied not subjects but civilizations—civilizations taken each in its entirety—and only civilizations. In the freshman year, advisers and pupils alike were thrown into the attempt to become acquainted with the city-state of Athens, in the age of Pericles and the decades which followed. After the fashion of critical observers just come to town, interested in the manner of life, the successes and failures, the joys and sorrows, the merits and defects, of a human enterprise, we read and considered together the records which that most self-expressive of civilizations has left of its daily experiences, its great achievements, its tragic blunders. So far as we could do it we

shared in those experiences, those achievements and blunders, as if they were our own. And the study culminated in the endeavor to see and feel the city as Plato saw and felt it, to join with him, as pupils and critics, in the reflecting upon and planning of his Republic.

The second task was assigned to our pupils at the end of the freshman year. It was to be worked at during the summer vacation and continued, as a separate project, during the first half of the sophomore year. We called it a regional study of some American community which each of you chose as having special interest for him. Dealing with vastly different intellectual and cultural material, you were commissioned to write a critical examination of a nearby human enterprise just as you had tried to interpret that Grecian city, distant from us in time and space and circumstance, which still gives guidance and insight and warning to the Western World.

And, finally, as your third task, the main business of the sophomore year, you were asked, with the help of your advisers, to derive, from the records of the creative activities of the United States of America, the beginning of an understanding of this Nation of ours, what it cares for, what it does and fails to do, what it thinks about and fails to think about. As youthful Americans, you were to share, with mind and feeling and will, in the making and sustaining and transforming of the community of which you are members. And here again your success in the venture was assessed by your ability to read a book. You were asked to write a review of the account which Henry Adams gave of his own education. It seemed to the advisers that, insofar as you could see and interpret what Adams was saying about the United States and his attempt to understand it, could critically give assent or dissent to his assessment of our national career (our national destiny), you would have made a beginning in that process of education which the college wished you to suffer and enjoy.

Now, it is easy to see what was, and what was not, what is, and what is not, the purpose which animated that curriculum. When we asked you to size up, as a going, or not-going concern, some American village or city or district, when we cultivated and tested your ability and your eagerness to share with Plato and Adams the intellectual criticism and the emotional solicitude with which they planned for their respective communities, we were trying to initiate you into an art, the most difficult as well as the most important, the most practical as well as the most intellectual, activity in which the human mind can

engage. It is the art of intelligent practical judgment, of understanding your life and that of the community of which you are a member, of so understanding them that you can share with your fellows in the making of those decisions which determine individual and social welfare. As I say this, I must remind you that the college which we celebrate made no provision for the teaching of the techniques of scholarly investigation, gave no training in the methods by which new knowledge is won. Other institutions should do that work. But we, as a college, had neither time nor interest for it. In our final report to the faculty of the University of Wisconsin, we said:

"To put the matter very bluntly, the college is as much and as little interested in the training of scholars as it is in the making of bankers, legislators, grocers, or the followers of any other specialized occupation or profession."

We imposed upon you and upon ourselves a required curriculum, with no elective, because we were convinced that standing apart from all special interest, from all specialized studies, there is a common interest, a common unspecialized form of study, which surpasses all of them in urgency and difficulty and significance. It is the need of understanding what we know. And that requires of us that we learn to use our minds in a way which, in content, in method, in presupposition, and in result, is radically different from any of the kinds of thinking by which scholarly research is done. To develop the power and zest for engaging in that creative inquiry is, in our opinion, the only legitimate purpose of an American college. . . .

I have talked long—I fear too long—and, perhaps, too sentimentally about what an American college is and, hence, what it ought to be. We must now discuss as briefly as we can, what American freedom is, and hence, ought to be. When that has been done we may be ready to try to determine the relation of each of these to the other.

#### *Freedom and Liberty*

. . . . I venture as a generalization which will run through the arguments which are to follow in this paper, the assertion that when we Americans talk about our Nation as free, we do not know very well what we are talking about, in fact we prefer, on the whole, not to know what we are talking about. In explanation and, I hope in

support, of that accusation, I begin by offering two less general remarks.

First, throughout our history, but especially in recent decades, our Nation has had unequalled opportunities for the creation of external wealth and power. With a new world open before us for our conquest, we have seized upon those opportunities by the methods of what we call private or competitive business enterprise. The success of these methods has been so quick and so great that it has become a source of amazement, of envy, and of terror to the rest of the world. But the strains and stresses of that success, the preoccupation with material achievement, have been so intense that we have more and more substituted for the ideal of inner dignity and self-respect which lies at the heart of our institutions, the pseudo-ideal of competitive efficiencies, of victory over others. Our prevailing maxim for young people, as well as old, is not now "Be good" or "Do good," but rather "Make good." Under the guidance of that maxim we have become eager and aggressive in defense of our individual competitive rights. But our only effective common purpose is that of forever raising higher and higher what we call the standard of living. And the illusions, the meaninglessness inherent in that purpose have penetrated into every corner of our common life. That is the basic reason why the schools and colleges which are, presumably, commissioned to study and teach the ways of freedom are so weak, so confused, so ineffectual. My first remark is, then, that insofar as a society is dominated by the attitudes of competitive business enterprise, freedom, in its proper American meaning, cannot be known and, hence, cannot be taught.

And, second, this substitution of a false ideal for a true one has built up among us a national defect of disposition or of character which hinders all our attempts to educate ourselves. That defect is a strong defensive antipathy against self-criticism, an insistence upon intellectual conformity, an irrational fear lest by the use of our minds, we might discover that we are not, in fact, what we intend or profess to be. I am not here suggesting that we fear intellectual activity as such. We have, of course, no terror of the brilliant investigations which make possible the curing of our diseases, no dread of the scientific research or the technological inventing which enables us to create external wealth and power with enormous efficiency. But the men whom we fear because of their thinking are the critics, men who would question the value or wisdom of these intellectual

achievements, who would block progress by standing, like Socrates, in the middle of the busy thoroughfare, asking themselves and others whose ears they can catch, where the road leads. Such men are, as of old, corrupters of our youth and deniers of our gods. They do not follow loyally and contentedly what we call the American way of life. They are dreamers, do-gooders, eggheads, to be ignored or laughed at; or, if that does not suffice, punished and suppressed. And this craving for intellectual conformity, this timidity of mind, more than any other single factor, has brought it about that our teachers labor in vain as they seek to educate the people of a Nation which fears and despises the very essence of what education is.

What, then, is American freedom? May I say to you, my fellow ex-collegers, that ever since you and I parted company twenty-five years ago, the major part of my time and energy has been given to the attempt to answer that question. In reporting to you now "How I fitted in," I shall not give you an organized lecture on my findings. I shall follow the usual procedure of the college by telling you of a series of questions and assertions which still puzzle me. I do so in the hope that we may discuss them together.

First, I mention a point on which there is, I think, some progress to report to you. Following a suggestion given to me forty years ago by Walton Hamilton, and worked out with my colleagues in the San Francisco School of Social Studies, I seem to have discovered that, as we study American freedom, the best reading material available for the purpose is found in the Federal Constitution and in the judicial opinions by which it has been interpreted. That material is filled with controversy and with significance for the understanding of our national life. I deeply regret that when we puzzled out a sophomore course of study in the Experimental College we had not realized how it might be used. If any one of you or any number of you should someday share in starting another experimental college, or in making more experimental one which is now conventionalized, I hope you will consider the suggestion I am now making.

My second topic is, in form, semantic. It has to do with the defining of the difference between the two terms "freedom" and "liberty," as they are used in the Bill of Rights. These two terms serve as instruments for defining the relations between individual Americans and the governing agencies which they have collectively established. And the Constitution has great value for our discussion



*Alexander and Helen Meiklejohn at the reunion of the Experimental College held in Annapolis, Maryland, May 10-12, 1957. Standing with them are some of the men who served as faculty of the college: Delos S. Otis in the first row; Paul M. Herzog, John W. Powell, and Malcolm Sharp in the second row; H. H. Giles, Paul Raushenbush, and Ralph Crowley in the third row.*

because, in its own reference, it sharply separates these two words which are commonly regarded as interchangeable. The first amendment speaks of freedom—freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition. And its tremendous assertion is that Congress and, by implication, all other governing agencies, are denied any authority whatever to abridge those freedoms. The fifth amendment, on the other hand, speaks of liberty. And liberty, it appears, is within the scope of governmental restraint. The Declaration of Independence, it is true, had made the flaming pronouncement that all men are "endowed by their creator with unalienable rights" and that "among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But the Constitution, in flat contradiction of the earlier document, soberly provides that, by action of the Government, all three of these rights, as we call

them, may be taken from us, may be alienated. That may not be done "except by due process of law." And yet the fact remains that, when public needs seem to justify such action, and when it is done fairly and with proper procedure, men may be ordered to go into battle to destroy other men's lives, to lose their own; their business activities may be confined within this or that set of limits; they may be required to pay into the public treasury such unequal shares of their yearly income as the Government decides that it needs to take. But those men are still, in the meaning of the Bill of Rights, free men, whose liberties are properly abridged.

The third intellectual venture in which I invite you to join is that of defining the revolutionary conception of freedom which dominates the Constitution and which finds its most explicit indication, if not expression, in the first amendment. Why did our forefathers adopt the dictum, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances"? And why do we, when our minds are clear, hold fast to the same intention?

At this point in the argument, I am sorely tempted to draw you into discussion of the paradoxes and controversies into which, during the last fifteen or twenty years, I have been plunged by proposing an answer to that question. I would much like to have your help in holding my ground or your consolation if I am forced to give it up. But the lack of time forbids me to yield to that temptation. I can only try very briefly to tell you what, as I see it, is the idea for which the American Revolution was and is being fought and won.

The constitutional principle which, for purposes of warfare and rebellion had been effectively, though inaccurately, proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence was that of political self-government. For centuries our forefathers had suffered, and had seen other common men suffer, from the tyranny of being governed by others. Priests, kings, barons, nonrepresentative parliaments had, by superior force, imposed an arbitrary control upon them. But now the time and the opportunity had come to establish a political order in which the people governed would also be the governors. The rulers and the ruled would be the same persons. No man would be required to obey a law in the

making of which he had not had an equal share with his fellow citizens.

Against this background, the first amendment finds its significance in the fact that the terms "religion," "speech," "press," "assembly," and "petition" refer to those activities of judgment-making in which the process of governing consists. And it is obvious that unless the judgment-making of the people is, individual by individual, completely independent, unless it can be kept safe from any external interference, the program of popular self-government becomes futile and a sham. Now it was at this point that the makers of the Constitution envisaged the danger that representative officials and agencies chosen by the people might, under the new regime, attempt, as tyrants had done before, to govern the sovereign people without their consent by exercising powers which had not been delegated to them. And it is to prevent that catastrophe that the first amendment makes its ringing declaration, setting an absolute limit to the power of the legislative body and, by implication, to the powers of all other representative agencies. The need for that provision and for its unqualified enforcement, was never more clearly revealed than during the war-tormented years through which we have passed since 1919. Just as the tyrants of old had always justified their acts of suppression by the plea that religion, speech, press, assembly, or petition, in this case or that, threatened danger to the general welfare or to the national security, so our officials and our courts of these current days have invaded our freedom, appealing to the same justification. But the first amendment will have none of it. Speaking for a society whose members have decided to be free, it denies and outlaws that plea of danger. If the amendment does not mean that, it does not mean anything. Whatever political freedom turns out to be, we Americans have decided to have it and to take it straight.

Fourth, I have just spoken with much enthusiasm concerning the first amendment. And yet, for the purposes of the teacher, for dealing with the questions with which we are here concerned, it is a strangely unsatisfying statement. It takes under its protection five different human activities, but gives no unifying principle which could bind them together into a common significance. But, even worse than that, its provisions are merely negative. It seeks to prevent something from being done rather than to get something done. It protects our freedoms, but gives no assurance that, in actual practice, we Americans

have and use any freedoms which are worth protecting. The difficulty just suggested does not, I presume, trouble those who, under the spell of the Declaration of Independence, think of freedom as a gift with which all men are endowed from birth. But to those of us who have spent our lives, as teachers, in the desperate attempt to find some way by which Americans, including ourselves, can become free, that belief seems meaningless and negligible. Freedom is not a gift. It is an achievement. It can be won only by hard work and good fortune—the good fortune including normally much help from others.

Now, if these things are true it follows that our attempt to understand the Constitution must go beyond politics, must attempt to find elsewhere the goal toward which the education of our self-governing people is, or should be, directed. And here, the teacher, more directly than any other member of our community, must be able to serve as our guide, the interpreter of ourselves. The persons who are commissioned to lead our people, young and old, into the ways of freedom, must understand what freedom is. What, then, have they to tell us about it?

### *The College and Society*

Before trying to answer that question, we must carefully note the fact that education, good or bad, is won from the personal and social influences of a surrounding community, as well as from the teaching given in schools and colleges. Which of these is more important, it would be hard to tell. But, in any case, they must be considered separately.

As a starting point for some brief remarks about schooling, I offer you a provocative statement concerning British teaching which I picked up when in Oxford three years ago. It was written by a master of Eton College in the days, three-quarters of a century ago, when Britannia still ruled the waves, and the upper class boys and young men who went to Eton and like public schools were being educated to rule Britannia. As a teacher in the service of that aristocratic governing group, William Johnson Cory wrote as follows:

"At school you are not engaged so much in acquiring knowledge as in making mental efforts under criticism. A certain amount of knowledge you can indeed with average faculties acquire so as to retain, nor need you regret the hours you spent on much that is

forgotten, for the shadow of lost knowledge at least protects you from many illusions. But you go to a great school not so much for knowledge as for arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment's notice a new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person's thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent or dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the art of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, for discrimination, for mental courage and mental soberness."

That description of what should go on in the minds of persons who are being prepared to govern a community seems to me unusually significant and suggestive. What I have to say here about the teaching of freedom in our American schools and colleges may be said in a few brief comments on Mr. Cory's words.

Since we are, as a nation, committed to self-government rather than to an aristocratic tyranny, it is evident that, as contrasted with the special privileges of Mr. Cory's upper class group, all our citizens must, so far as possible, be equally educated. And that being true, it follows that our task of educating our rulers is immeasurably more difficult than that which confronted the public schools of England, seventy-five years ago. It implies, for example, that, for a long time, we as well as the Britain of today must accept a lowering of the standards of teaching achievement set by an aristocracy.

Further, in spite of the quantitative difference just suggested, Mr. Cory's words go straight and piercingly to the heart of our American teaching enterprise. Every phrase which he utters about the "arts and habits" of "making mental efforts under criticism" should startle us into awareness of the failure of our schools and colleges to provide the preparation needed for the "judgment-making" which free men must be able to do.

But a strange and striking feature of Mr. Cory's account of the purpose of teaching is that he does not mention the curriculum, the content of study, with which a school or college should deal. And the explanation of that fact is, I think, that, in the Eton which he knew, the choice of subject matter on which pupils should practice their arts and habits was made, not by the school, but by the compact social group to which, both by external and inner commitment, teachers, pupils, and school, all alike, belonged. In fairness, I must add that, in

the life and manners of that group, as in its schools, there were great possibilities of smugness, of cruelty, of stupid and insensitive conformity. And yet it had a purpose and could teach it. I doubt that, in the making of the modern world, the public schools of Britain have been surpassed with respect to their success in teaching the arts and habits needed by those who govern.

It should also be said again that in sharp contrast with Mr. Cory's Eton, our American schools and colleges do not find in our society any such intellectual and cultural purposiveness as that which he could count on to give content and direction to his work. As a new and highly conglomerate people, still in the early stages of its making into a Nation, we have, it is true, a code of behavior which we call a way of life. But . . . that way of life is sadly unaware and afraid of its own meaning and intention. There is throughout our society, I am sure, a generous passion for freedom. But that passion, marching blindly on under the banner of liberty, drives us toward enslavement of our fellows and of ourselves, toward tyranny and, hence, away from freedom. Our national education is, as yet, in its crude and unformed beginnings. We fail to educate our children chiefly because we have not had time or integrity or courage to educate ourselves.

The fifth step in our argument should by logical sequence deal with the influence upon education exerted by nongovernmental attitudes and agencies. I can, however, take time merely to mention two or three of these. Supporting our teaching is the intense but often misguided American belief in the usefulness of scholastic learning. But on the other side, our attempt at understanding is blocked and misdirected by a wide array of privately managed activities which are clearly hostile to education in self-government. One of these forces against which the colleges especially need to be protected at the present moment is the insatiable greed of the corporations and other business agencies for an output of technologically trained scientists as well as of potential business executives. At a time when our private colleges are suffering from financial stringency, that greed threatens their teaching with a fundamental distortion. And, further, correlative with this threat to the colleges is the dreadful effect upon public attitude and opinion which comes from the mass-communication industries, as they are conducted by business enterprise. In my opinion, those agencies, and especially radio and television, are, day by day, year by year, doing more damage to the minds of our people than the

schools and colleges are doing good. They have made dominant again in our society the mental trickiness, which, long ago, Plato saw corrupting the mind and spirit of Athens—the trickeries which can prove (that is, make plausible) any belief, whether true or false, can, at a price, make the worse appear the better cause. Because of them, our national intelligence is, I believe, steadily losing ground. Madison Avenue is more powerful and more dangerous than the hydrogen bomb. What shall we do about it in defense of our freedom?

And now, in conclusion, I must summarize my argument by telling of the mortal combat which, during the sixty years of my teaching, has been waged in the American college. If I had the art for doing it, the story might be told in the form of a medieval mystery in which God and the devil contend for possession of the souls of men. The devil, one of whose favorite devices is that of raising for men the standard of living, thereby succeeds in lowering the standard of human intelligence. Since the battle, as we see it, takes place within colleges, it is fought in the field of the mind. Two sets, two kinds of intellectual activities are at war with one another. In spite of their hostility they are strangely akin in origin and in character. After all, the devil is, as you know, an angel. But he is a fallen angel, a rebel. He must, therefore, be subdued, brought back to fellowship and sanity. Can it be done? How can it be done?

The two contestants, as seen within the college, are the passion for knowledge and the passion for understanding. In one camp are the intellectual strivings by which men seek to add new knowledge to the vast stock of it which, in various departments, we already possess. In the other camp are the intellectual strivings to so interpret and reinterpret what we now know that it will play its proper part as the servant of an understanding which plans for human welfare. The question at issue is not "Shall knowledge be destroyed?" It is, rather, "For what ends shall knowledge be used, and by what kind of thinking shall the using be done?"

As I phrase that question my mind goes back to the days when, in 1897, my teaching began. Through the strange, mechanical, and, shall I say, devilish, device of an elective system, the old classical curriculum had been giving way before the inroads of a new scholarship. And I can still feel the thrill of excitement and hope, mitigated by a confused anxiety, with which we younger teachers welcomed the broadening and deepening, which the new forms of investigation promised to

bring to our learning and teaching. We began to speak proudly and confidently of our newly devised university college which, through the addition of specialized graduate teaching, would fuse together the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of understanding on a higher level of intellectual enterprise. But today, so far as I can see, that hope is dead. The two elements did not fuse. Scholarship has not informed and inspired the search for understanding. On the contrary, stimulated and made powerful by its strong appeal to the externalized and competitive impulses of American life, it has specialized in disconnectedness, in lack of meaning. It has thus obscured the older purposes of the college and driven them from the field. The curriculum has now become merely a vast collection of mutually unintelligible subjects. The members of the faculty have, professionally, little if any intellectual acquaintance with one another. And pupils are encouraged to pursue each his own separate studies, without regard for or interest in what, in other classrooms, his friends may be doing. The combining of the university and the college into a university college has torn into fragments the community of learning which the older college intended to be.

How shall the damage be repaired? How shall the college become again a place of understanding? First of all, it must be separated from the university, must become a distinct and independent institution, aware of its own purpose, which is radically different from that of the university, and resolute in the pursuit of that purpose. And, further, the college must be small enough and coherent enough to be in a vital and dominating sense, a community which will bind together all its teachers and all its pupils in the carrying on of their common enterprise.

I have said that the pursuit of knowledge has heretofore invited disaster by tearing apart what we know about men and their world into relatively meaningless fragments. As against that procedure what we now need is that in pursuit of understanding there be cultivated and practiced an equally severe and rigorous intellectual discipline which will endeavor to put the minds of men together again into a pattern as meaningful as the facts allow. That pattern will not be created by mere good will. The needed unity can be won, only as the total body of human knowledge and purpose is brought within the scope of an organizing group intelligence. The brilliant achievements of scholarly investigation must be matched, they must be surpassed, by the

concerted efforts of intellectual interpreters. The college must think its way through knowledge toward wisdom.

I need hardly add that if this transformation of the college is to be attempted, the demands made upon the teacher whether he works in Ghana or Russia or England or Israel and so on, will be radically changed and magnified. His work will be both more important and more difficult than that of the investigator. He will no longer be merely an instructor in English composition or banking or chemical engineering or foreign language. He will be, in the measure of his ability, one of the world's thinkers, just as all free citizens should be, grappling with the world's problems, carrying assurance to his pupils and to the surrounding community that it is a free man's business to do what he can with his mind in relation to these problems. He must think and teach in the interest of freedom for all men.

The situation which now faces the teacher and all of us is one of tragic severity.

It is possible, as we all know, that this blundering untutored race of men, through the sudden access of brutalizing power which knowledge brings, will soon destroy itself. But there is also hope that for the first time since man began his education among the carnivores, we may by patience and intelligent use of knowledge construct a world that sensitive and timid natures could regard without a shudder. . . .

## Critique of Protestant-Capitalist Society

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Alexander Meiklejohn challenged the basic aspects of U.S. society—its materialism, individualism, and pragmatism. In *Education Between Two Worlds*, published in 1942 when he was seventy years old, Meiklejohn used the phrase "Protestant-capitalist" society to indicate the individualism that he saw underlying both the Protestant and the capitalist traditions. Protestants believed that individuals could work out their salvation alone. Capitalists believed that the common interest could best be served by individuals pursuing their own interests. But Meiklejohn did not believe this. The common problem of creating a self-governing society that worked for everyone could not be solved by individuals pursuing their separate ends.

For him, capitalism was too competitive. It accepted as necessary that each person should be at every other person's throat. That belief had no appeal to a man whose serene parents had managed to weld eight sons into a harmonious, cooperative group. Meiklejohn had spent the first eight years of his life in Rochdale, England, where textile workers were creating a cooperative economic scheme that would eliminate the horrors of working class life under a capitalist arrangement. Though Meiklejohn seldom spoke in public about this experience, when he did he stressed its importance in shaping his adult outlook (selection 6).

When Meiklejohn began to teach at Brown, alternatives to capitalism were being widely discussed in the United States. Immigrants from Europe, fleeing wretched conditions there, were bringing ideas for other ways to organize society and economic life—socialism, anarchism, syndicalism. In the 1890s the Socialist Labor Party blossomed in New York. In 1901 the Socialist Party organized in Indianapolis. The Industrial Workers of the World organized in 1905 and held their dramatic strikes of western miners, loggers, and textile workers.

In the years just prior to World War I socialism was a growing movement capable of winning elections. The socialist Victor Berger was elected to Congress by Milwaukee in 1910. In the elections of 1911 socialist mayors were elected in thirty-three cities, including Milwaukee. In 1912 Eugene Debs ran for president on the Socialist Party ticket; he received 900,000 votes, six percent of the total vote, the largest percentage ever received by the Socialist Party in a national election. Socialists promoted their ideas on college campuses through the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, a group formed in 1905 by Upton Sinclair, Jack London, and others. From 1913 to 1919 it published *The Intercollegiate Socialist*. During World War I it was practically snuffed out; it re-organized in 1921 as the League for Industrial Democracy in order to expand its influence beyond college men and women.

At Brown Meiklejohn did not take a public stand on social and economic issues. But at Amherst he took his stand, publicly stating his belief that social and economic arrangements in the United States were not what they ought to be and that liberally educated people should be considering alternative ones. In 1918 Meiklejohn raised questions about the economic order in his speech commemorating the 250th anniversary of Pawtucket, Rhode Island (selection 4). He encouraged students to consider these questions by instituting a freshman course in "Social and Economic Institutions," by organizing students to give classes to workers, and by inviting speakers who challenged the prevailing order, notably the great English socialist R. H. Tawney.

Not being an economist, Meiklejohn did not try to specify how business should be owned and operated, but as a teacher he asked the questions and presented the alternatives. As an administrator, he made activities more cooperative and decision-making more inclusive. Especially he wanted students to run their extracurricular lives. Even his struggle for a common curriculum may be seen as implementing his belief that studies should be cooperative rather than wholly individualistic.

World War I set back all attempts to think about economic alternatives. Most anticapitalist groups, believing that wars are created by capitalists to increase their profits and keep workers subjugated, opposed the war, at least initially. The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and strikes involving more than four million workers in the United

States at the end of the war alarmed capitalists into taking the offensive. Laws were passed enabling the jailing and deportation of people who opposed capitalism. Meiklejohn himself was probably a victim of this reaction. His insistence that college students consider socialism as one possible alternative to capitalism proved too much for Amherst's trustees.

It was several years after his dismissal from Amherst before Meiklejohn relocated at the University of Wisconsin, where his Experimental College got underway just two years before the Great Depression of 1929. Many of the faculty he assembled there had some kind of socialist orientation. They asked students to read the English socialists, Russell and Tawney, and the U.S. social critics, Louis Brandeis, Henry Adams, and Helen and Robert Lynd. When Meiklejohn addressed Chicago businessmen in 1930 he called his speech "What Ought We to Think About?" He told them in no uncertain terms that they had better think about redistributing wealth, about putting more people in charge of their destiny, about reducing the ugliness resulting from the industrial scheme, and about avoiding war. In the San Francisco School for Social Studies, Meiklejohn set up discussions around Marx, Veblen, and John Strachey's *Coming Struggle for Power*. Always in his role as teacher, Meiklejohn raised the economic questions and organized discussions to insure the expression of different opinions.

Being at the University of Wisconsin in the late 1920s and early 1930s meant being at the source of some significant developments. Wisconsin's economists played a strategic role in the economic thinking of this period. Perhaps the most influential of them, John R. Commons (1862-1945), had come to Wisconsin in 1904. When socialists won the election of 1911 in Milwaukee, they asked Commons to examine their city's government, and they accepted practically all his recommendations. Commons created U.S. labor history with his eleven-volume publication from 1909 to 1911 of *Documentary History of American Industrial Society*. Commons' views gradually changed from espousal of socialism to believing that capitalism could be made satisfactory if ameliorated by reforms. Many of his students wrote and shaped the legislation of Roosevelt's New Deal. Edwin E. Witte and his graduate student Wilbur Cohen (a member of the fourth class of the Experimental College), went to Washington to write the Social Security Act of 1935. Another of Commons' students, Arthur J. Altmeyer, directed the program set up under the Social Security Act. Paul

Raushenbush, who had studied with Commons and taught in the Experimental College, stayed on in Madison to write and administer the first state unemployment insurance legislation that later became the model for national unemployment legislation.

Although some of Wisconsin's socialists became reform capitalists, Meiklejohn did not. He voted regularly for Norman Thomas except in 1936, when he felt that Thomas was softening his platform too much in his attempt to attract more Roosevelt Democrats. The New Deal did not go far enough for Meiklejohn toward curbing the competitiveness of capitalism.

When the Experimental College came to an end in 1932, Meiklejohn wrote down in *What Does America Mean?* what he really believed about the U.S. experiment in democratic government (selection 5). He thought it possible to change the economic system without resorting to violence. He did not see the proletariat as the primary vehicle for bringing socialism, for he felt certain that as people of all classes studied their social problems they would come to view some form of voluntary cooperative commonwealth as in their common interest.

Six years after *What Does America Mean?* was published, World War II restored prosperity to the United States, stilling most criticism of the American way of life. Prosperity did not reassure Meiklejohn, who continued to warn against the inherent defects of capitalism. Men were dying for freedom, but if by that they meant the free enterprise system, then Meiklejohn was certain they were dying for something that would not make them free.

Meiklejohn was never active in a political party. Rather than join the Socialist Party, he joined the socialist-oriented League for Industrial Democracy, in which he served as vice-president from 1928 until his death in 1964. He did not write pamphlets or make speeches for the League for Industrial Democracy, but its leaders were his friends, and he was pleased to be named an officer.

The League for Industrial Democracy never took hold on the West Coast. In order to have a strong liberal organization in California, Meiklejohn helped found the Northern California chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. Some of the leaders of the new chapter were concerned when members of the Communist and Trotskyite parties joined. The leadership did not attempt a so-called united front. They feared that including Communists would drive

away some people who believed in civil liberties and felt that Communists did not. Nevertheless, Meiklejohn persistently defended the right of members of the Communist Party to sit on the national board of the ACLU, to teach in high schools and universities, and to serve as union leaders. (See the fifth section, "Liberty and Freedom," for further elaboration.)

In 1943, in an article in the Communist magazine, *The New Masses*, Meiklejohn discussed the question of why liberal progressives and Communists in the United States had seldom been able to cooperate effectively with each other. He analyzed several possible explanations, rejected all of them, and concluded:

What, then, is the source of the difficulty? It is, I am sure, one of tactics rather than one of goal. There is no basic incongruity between the ultimate aims of the Communist Party and the fundamental principles of the Constitution of the United States. But there is a basic incongruity between the tactics of the "class-struggle" theory, as now interpreted by the American Communist Party, and the American program of democratic political action. The difference is one between the tactics of war and the tactics of peace. I am well aware how much bitter and unscrupulous warfare underlies the processes of American political and economic life. I am not denying the existence here of the class struggle. And yet the fact remains that, as a people, we Americans are committed to the belief that even the fiercest and most fundamental conflicts among us can be settled by peaceful political action. Our majorities and minorities, our parties in power and parties out of power, are working together as well as working in opposition to one another. But the Communist Party seems, at present, unable or unwilling to accept that political faith. It believes that our American society is at war within itself and that, therefore, tactics of warfare are necessary in dealing with its problems. For that reason, the Party adopts the procedures of the military mind, both in its own internal discipline and in its relations with other groups. The bourgeois liberal, whom it invites to join in cooperation, is potentially or actually an enemy rather than a friend. That is why he can be used and then dropped. And this means that when the Communist asks for cooperation he is asking for something which he cannot give in return. And, further, it must be remembered that

men who are at war, no matter what their personal integrity, cannot be trusted to mean what they say. War is deceit. That is why the Communist asks for himself in America civil liberties which, when occasion arises, he refuses to others. He would like the liberals to be at peace with him while he is at war with them.

Meiklejohn concluded with the hope that "the day will soon come when, free from suspicions and hatreds, the Party will take its place as an active and recognized sharer in the democratic procedures of American political life." (*The New Masses* [October 19, 1943]: 16-18.)

## 4

# The Machine City

*In 1918, while he was president of Amherst, Meiklejohn spoke at the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. A city of almost 64,000 in 1918, Pawtucket was located on the coast four miles from Providence, a city of 235,000. Pawtucket was the site at which the first spinning machinery operated in the United States. England tried to prevent the export of its textile know-how, but an English mechanic came to Rhode Island, drew the plans of the Arkwright spinning machine from memory, and from them a Pawtucket blacksmith built a successful machine in 1790. Meiklejohn's father came to Pawtucket in 1880 as an expert in the technology of color design for textiles. During the last decades of the 19th century a continual stream of workers from the English textile industry arrived in Pawtucket.*

*From 1898 to 1901 Meiklejohn served on the Pawtucket Board of Education, as his father had before him. What Meiklejohn had to say on the occasion of the 250th*

*anniversary follows. Meiklejohn had it published in his collection of speeches and essays, Freedom and the College (New York: Century Company, 1923, reprinted by Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, New York, 1970).*

I am asked to speak to you tonight on the future of this city. I know only one thing certain about its future, namely, that no one can tell what it will be.

This is, in an extreme degree, a machine city. I do not refer, Mr. Mayor, to the nature of its politics, but to the source of its power, the nature of its social forces. This city has been made by machines. Here Jencks set up his forge, here Slater began the manufacture of cotton. And since their day this group of people has led the way in the building and using of machines for the making of goods which men desire. We are a machine city. It is our strength, our glory—and our problem.

If one could tell the future of such a city as this, one could answer many urgent questions concerning the modern world at large. Modern civilization, especially in our Anglo-Saxon section of it, has likewise been made by machines. We have become an industrial people. What is to be the future of an industrial civilization is a problem which vexes and tortures the spirit of any man who honestly and intelligently studies it. I should like tonight, on this occasion of our celebration of two hundred and fifty years of great achievement, to ask you to look with me at some of the implications which this achievement carries with it.

Machines have brought to men results, some of them aimed at, some of them quite unintended and unnoticed. May I give a very partial and hurried list of them?

First, machines have increased the numbers of our population and, at the same time, the supply of material wealth for the use of the population. The machine magnifies human work, makes it more efficient, multiplies it, in its effect, by ten, by a hundred, by a thousand it may be. It needs more people for its work; it can support more people by its products. As a result of the machine mode of life, we have more people in our communities, more wealth at their service.

But again, the machines have claimed the people themselves as parts of the machinery. They have made human life more mechanical.