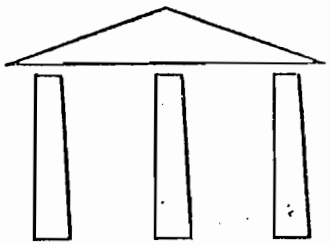
Seattle Community College District Office
Queen Anne Avenue North, Seattle, Washington 98109 / Area Code 206 587-5414



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

March 5, 1971

An Open Letter To Seattle's Asian Community:

In the aftermath of the March 2 demonstration at Seattle Central Community College--and after nearly 20 continuous hours of monitoring its related circumstances and reactions--I overreacted.

I made a number of publicly-released statements which I feel I want now to amend and clarify to the community.

First, at about 6 a.m. on March 3, 1971, I indicated that I considered the demonstration "juvenile and ill-advised." Those are inflammatory words and should be stricken from the record. A fact that was not reported is that on numerous occasions in the past, the Board of Trustees has acknowledged the legitimacy of the requests made to hire Asian administrators.

In my only television interview (on KOMO later the same day), I stated that I felt frustration because the students' cause was right and that I sympathized with it. However, because of a number of restraints--primarily financial--we were unable to meet the immediacy of their objectives.

Second, I said the demonstration reached "the depths of irresponsibility." I still believe that whenever property is damaged or individuals are intimidated (in this case, employees), there is a lack of responsibility. However, this statement has been misinterpreted as my beliefs that the Oriental Student Union was irresponsible. This is not true. We do not know the identity of all individuals involved and prefer to make no prejudgments.

Third, an unfortunate headline indicated the Board would "prosecute" the students who were involved in the demonstration. This was widely interpreted to mean that we were bringing criminal charges against our own students. Many people read no more of the article. A

verbatim quote from the news release is: ". . . prosecution of all students who were involved in the demonstration under the provisions of the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities."

It would have been more correct to say that we were invoking the grievance procedure provided under the Code. The word "prosecute" does not appear in the document.

I wish to point out, however, that the Code is a model throughout the state. It was developed last year by the students themselves with the assistance of the Attorney General's Office. It provides for an impartial hearing--free from Board or administration control--by students and faculty members. The options are many, ranging from a dismissal of the charges to probation or suspension.

The Board of Trustees strongly feels that this process will prove to the community that the students are fully capable of governing and disciplining themselves. We intend to leave the procedures in the hands of the student leaders as prescribed by the Code. There is no threat of jail, fines, or criminal punishment.

The Board has no intention of taking legal action of any sort at this time, but feels that it is necessary to be apprised of courses open to it. Accordingly, it has requested the Attorney General's Office to research the matter and report.

Fourth, an easy retreat for a public official--volunteer, elected, appointed or paid--is to say that he was misquoted by the news media. This is not so. I have just enumerated several quotes for which I have been criticized. I do not wish to cast aspersions on the integrity of Seattle's newspapers, radio and television stations. They have always treated us with professional fairness.

Fifth, there has been an unfortunate link between the destruction and the Oriental Student Union. It will remain for the process described in the Code to adjudicate responsibility. We do have information that a number of persons who participated in--or who were attracted to--the demonstration were not community college students in this District.

Sixth, it is the sincere hope of the Board that any reports of this unfortunate incident will in no way prejudice the student hearings as provided under the Code. Only by demonstrating the workability of this document can we justify its existence.

Thus far, this letter has been somewhat apologetic and negative in tone. Let me now conclude on a more positive note.

Last night, for two hours, the Board of Trustees and the College presidents, met with a group of distinguished adult leaders from Seattle's Asian community. Their presence and expressions indicated their sense of responsibility and concern.

There was some rhetoric and also a great deal of realism. The Board was not able to provide all of the "easy solutions" which have been asked of it. But, I believe, each party left with a better understanding of the other's position.

It is now up to the Board to prove the sincerity of its commitment to infuse Asians into visible, viable administrative positions. We will attempt to do this. We are adding further Asian membership to the District's Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Minority Hiring Practices.

In conclusion, I reiterate my apology for my unfortunate statements and for any misinterpretation which has been placed upon them. As one of the participants at last night's session said: "We may be at the beginning of a new era of human relationships within this city." That is the hope of all concerned.

Respectfully yours,

Art Siegal, Chairman
Board of Trustees

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