

The Case Against Political Parties

By David Hudson

The reader of the last Cluster was presented with two fine articles by Larry Finklestein and Wright Davis, advocating the reestablishment of political parties at Mercer. By comparing their arguments with the existing situations, however, one sees how weak such arguments really are. They base their claims on David Hudson rather vague generalizations mixed with a scattering of myth concerning the effectiveness of those parties which they advocate.



Looking first at Larry's article, he points out that parties were eliminated in 1959, to allow more than just two candidates in each race and to stop the domination of the parties by single fraternities. Larry says that without the help of parties, candidates must either flock to the Greek organizations or undergo a great burden in financing and staffing their campaigns.

In contradiction, however, one already knows that the winner of the presidency in the recent freshmen elections was an independent. The matter of finances is of individual concern. In three outings in campus politics, my total bill would come to less than forty dollars. And speaking of the burden of staffing a campaign, this is one of the challenges of politics. The candidate that can best recruit assistance and keep winning through the final run-off has already exhibited the potential of good leadership.

As far as the number of candidates is concerned, a large number of contestants shows excellent spirit, concern, and enthusiasm. Liberal qualification requirements are especially helpful in freshman elections where the candidates are relative strangers to the electorate. In comparison, in upper class elections, the qualifications and relative strengths and weaknesses of the aspirants are better known and there is a voluntary decrease in the number of candidates.

Larry was also critical of the present system for being dominated by different Greek organizations. As upper classmen, we know this type of domination is a short lived thing, and as such, passes back and forth between the different groups including independents. Furthermore, what would stop this type of temporary control within the different parties? Was this not one of the reasons for abolishing parties in the first place?

The charge was also leveled that the run-offs resulting from a multi-candidate system tend to cause a drop in enthusiasm for the run-offs build anticipation and excitement in addition to being a democratic necessity. In the party systems. Personally, I believe that run-off, would not the real election be the nomination in the dominant party? In this case, the campus wide election would just be a matter of this strong party getting its members to the polls. The real election would have taken place in the party, another step away from direct participation by all the students.

Turning to Wright's article, let's look at his different points in the order that he presents them. Wright first charges that Mercer has a "sterility" of issue-oriented politics. This is quite true for there are no great splits in student opinion. We have no proposed tax hike, open housing bill, or escalation in Vietnam to create such divisions. We are all in general unity in the effort to safeguard student interests, to obtain more autonomy, and to have interesting and entertaining campus wide activities. Even if it were possible to have politics void of personality and popularity, as

Wright advocates, we would not desire it. Our representatives are required to often stand in our stead and organize our activities; both of which are assignments that require more than a knowledge of political theory and fictitious issues. Even in national politics, personalities assume greater importance than the issues which are represented in little used platforms.

Wright next tries to persuade us to believe that a party system would negate powerful Greek in-

terests; but he should realize, like Larry, that this influence cannot and should not be destroyed. They must remember that uncontrolled fraternity influence was the main fault of the party system to which they now advocate a return. Under the status quo, each group on campus, social or otherwise, has an

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Rebuttal In Kind

By Wright Davis

Let us consider Mr. Hudson's argumentation in light of our original contentions. You will recall that the first question under consideration was the apparent lack of issues in recent campaigns at Mercer. Mr. Hudson's reply was simple — "there are no great splits in student opinion". "We are all in general unity in the effort to safeguard student interests . . ."

Indeed we can think of no more ideal situation than the political panacea described by our president. Just think what a utopia Mercer could be if there were no issues to divide student opinion. True we have no proposed tax hike, open housing bill, or escalation in Vietnam, ad absurdum, to deal with, but there are the issues of the cafeteria, the college store, the co-op, the post office, the library, the dormitories, the chapel, academic freedom, parking, womens rules, drinking, and so many others with which we shall not concern ourselves herein.

Yes, we will agree with Mr. Hudson in that all Mercerians are equally concerned with the resolution of problems threatening the student body, just as Americans are in general agreement upon the necessity of safeguarding our national interests. But is this not to say that there exists no dissention amongst Mercerians upon the best means of resolving these issues? Mercerians should think not.

If the primary issues which concern us students are to be circumvented by leaders who only seek to have interesting and entertaining campus wide activities then hire a social director. We would need no student government.

We went on to point out in our second contention that students do not have an effective voice in campus politics. History has recorded time and time again that only through organization can a group of people assert their influence upon what course that history shall follow. In other words, only through effective organization, can we make a collective evaluation of issues prior to the consideration of candidates. Under the present structure the student body votes on the candidates' self-claimed ability to resolve issues rather than the candidates' stand on particular issues. The issues themselves therefore become of secondary concern.

Our third contention is that the formation of a party system, transcendent of fraternal lines would provide the student body with a choice of the best leadership of all groups. The concept of campus parties is not intended to destroy the Greek influence, but rather to broaden the political base whereby the other 51% of the student body will have the opportunity to be heard in a more highly organized manner is.—political parties.

It is interesting to note that after reviewing the editions of the Cluster over the past years that political parties did not stifle competition as Mr. Hudson would lead us to believe. In fact just the oppo-

sition was true. In 1960 (parties were abolished in 1959) four major offices were unopposed including the Vice-President of the SGA. In 1964 ten major offices were unopposed including the President, and Vice-President of the SGA. In 1965, five major offices were unopposed including the SGA Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer, and Town Representatives. The 1963 records are unfortunately lost. It would also be interesting to check the record of that year. It has been this apathetic lack of keen competition since parties were abolished that numerous major offices have gone unopposed.

Let us move on to our fourth contention that Student Government members would be more responsible to student opinion in concrete form. The traditional campaigning techniques of posters, speeches, and handshaking cannot be neglected, true, but, a political party system provides a much more mature approach whereby students can decide on how a candidate stands on the issues formulated by his party before he is elected instead of how he resolves issues after election. This has been the normal procedure in democratic elections.

If candidates of political parties campaign on issues which are vital to students of Mercer University, is this a detraction from the main purposes of student government? We know that Mercer students do not look at their student government in this light. Mr. Hudson states that political parties do not have a control over its candidates after election and that officeholders owe their allegiance only to the constituencies. Are not members of a student political party to be considered constituencies? What control do "real" citizens have over "real" elected state and national leaders? The relationship is parallel for both cases.

We would hope that students do not consider student politics at Mercer as games to play. If Mercer campus politics is a game to play, then what is the status of our student government leaders? We also are electing "real" presidents, vice-presidents, senators, and appropriation committee members here at Mercer. We take our politics more seriously than just games to be played.

Mr. Hudson asserts that "the student activists position is more subject to criticism—a matter of intolerance versus too much tolerance". No one need be reminded that it was those intolerant activists who staged a sit-in in the library—the hours were changed; it was those intolerant activists who boycotted the cafeteria—the situation was improved somewhat; and it was those over 1000 intolerant activists who signed petitions in support of the Dean of Chapel.

These are not political games of issue hunting or needless political speculation. These are the issues that would be given a complete airing by those "evil" political parties during a campaign.

by Tom Cauthorn



Student participation in the recent Dulcine elections was something short of amazing. Student confidence and loyalty to the democratic system at Mercer makes one feel that perhaps dictatorships are the most effective forms of government.

A little over 500 students voted in the election when at least 800 were needed to make the amendment valid for passage. If students think that a literary magazine is not necessary then they have effectively made it so when less than 30 per cent voted.

When someone tells us that the cafeteria line is too long or that the women's restrictions are too stringent and archaic, then the editorate turns and fails to respond to something as simple as filing a ballot then perhaps the dictatorship of the deans is the most effective form of government. But if you want to stop the dictatorship of the deans the starting place is at the polls and the logical beginning in over simple issues such as a literary magazine editor.

Mercer students love to rally to the cause like the cafeteria but when something a little less extreme is in the fore then the support melts into the complacent cocoons called dormitories and fraternity lodges and the only talk is of the past. The past is a wonderful tool if applied as a guide to the future but if the electorate becomes sleepy then the dictatorship of the deans must take over and perhaps appoint a new editor.

Are we stupid or are we lazy? Perhaps it is both or perhaps we are waiting on another civil war to trot out our whipping boys and play hell with the great old cause.

Exchange Corner

by Russ Drummond

(from The FURMAN PALADIN)

Rat week hazing, fun, etc. It was rat week at Furman University. An annual event in which the upperclassmen harass the unorientated freshmen men. The blast of a cherry bomb and it was no longer fun. At first it was fruits, vegetables and water balloons. After the bomb, it was rocks and brick bats. This event has caused much controversy to come over Furman's Rat week.

(from The FLORIDA ALLIGATOR)

A young UF student has called for his classmates to stage a mass boycott against ROTC. At UF, as at many other schools, ROTC is mandatory. The student charged his classmates with the following statement:

"The boycott will have to include all lower division males — yes, all you secure little b — will have to find enough guts to refuse indoctrination by the military establishment: To Boycott."

U. S. MILITARY OBJECTIVES IN PANAMA

(from GRAMMA: the central organ of the central committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.)

While we are listening to our "FLOWERS" in one ear, let us listen to our neighbors in the other.

Communist propaganda tells the people of Cuba that the U. S. objectives in Panama are: "A base for aggressive war against the peoples of America and the other peoples of the world — Panama is being used in the counter-guerrilla struggle (in South America) and in aggression against Vietnam — More Panamanian land is being bitten off for Yankee military bases for the training of imperialistic troops." What can I say?

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