Fred Shepherdson speech, May 7, 1970

Some of what I had to say has been said in different words by Dr. Armstrong. I'll try to go through that more quickly.

There has been a fire. Recitation Hall has been burned. In the words of the fire marshal it was clearly an act of arson. But I think we're all agreed that an act of arson certainly is not in keeping with the ideals and the principles we have been trying to encourage the last few days. I think it has to be emphasized that we cannot say who did it or who did not do it. We just don't know. We can't say that it was a Middlebury College student. And we can't say that it was not. The possibilities are endless, and we have to keep our minds open on this question. But we must keep in mind that whoever did it could do it again. It could have been somebody who was using this as a first example, or maybe it was somebody in a last desperation. However, we have to guard against its happening again.

The students and faculty will have to join together to defend all the buildings on the campus. Perhaps continuing this as long as the College is in session. Already there is a committee being set up under the direction of Obey Benz, Dean Peterson, and Officer Spencer to organize student patrols and vigils to make sure that no further acts of violence occur to our buildings. I personally feel that the suspension of classes through May 10th should continue.
We've built up a lot of momentum in the last few days, and I think we're doing a lot of constructive work towards very serious purposes, with the main goal being to end the war in Indochina. If we continue to work in the next few days as we have in the past perhaps we can achieve the goals that we've set up for this week and hopefully much more. But it is very important that if, and when, we continue, we come back even more strongly as a cohesive group to insure there is no recurrence of the violence that occurred last night. We must pledge ourselves to complete non-violence. Robert Pack, [today], very early this morning, in a special meeting, asked for a moratorium on all violence, including flagrant actions and inflammatory rhetoric as well. Because such rhetoric does sometimes lead to violent action although that was not what was intended. We must control our words as well as our deeds. In this manner I think the student strike should continue. And when the College, as a unified community, has made its policy decisions, I think we should take up the idea of canvassing the townspeople once again. This would have to go on in a very careful and a very controlled manner. There is a great deal of fear in the town right now. We've been talking with the men from the fire department, and the townspeople are not happy with Middlebury College. And there is not only a great deal of fear in town but there is a great deal on the campus respecting how the townspeople think
about us. And I think it's only a natural tendency to shy away from communicating with them. To say, "I'm scared of them, they're scared of me, I'm not going to go near them. We're just going to cause trouble." But I think that that is overlooking one of the main goals of the student strike. One of our principles is that we have to communicate the way that we feel, and the ideas that we have, to the people in our community and throughout the country, and hopefully throughout the world. And so we're going to have to go out and meet these people and meet them more than half-way. We're going to have to be ready to sacrifice, to wear jackets and ties, to cut our hair if need be. We're going to have to go out and talk up to them, talk with them, ask for their opinion, and try to encourage a dialogue. This canvassing may have to be taken up very slowly, very carefully, and I think it should probably continue whether or not classes resume on Monday. I'm not dictating that classes will or will not resume on Monday. I feel that that question is up to the student body. That each individual among us must decide as a matter of individual conscience whether the strike will continue for him. The faculty can vote; they can make a policy decision; and I think we should weigh their decisions and their recommendations, and their advice very carefully. However, I think the final decision, as I have said, is a matter
of individual conscience for each of us. But we
must not only consider what we will do with the
strike if it continues — this is a very important
aspect — we must decide whether we will use our time to
the best advantage if we continue to strike, and
disband further classes. If we split up and a lot
of us go home, are we going to lose our momentum?
How many of us will keep on working for a strike,
and how many of us will go to work to support our-
selves? And also, we are going to have to consider
what will happen if we go back to classes. We must
think about our formal education, and what it means
to each of us. And when we have decided its worth
for us, then we must decide whether this situation merits our giving up that worth.

For myself, I feel that the situation has not yet
merited it. I feel that classes should resume on
Monday. An institution of learning and education
must, in the final recourse, be transcendent of
politics. Our institution does have a dual nature
of responsibility. We must be aware of the political
situation. We must be involved in it. We cannot be-
come merely tools or pawns of either the right or the
left. We must, in the last resort, be ready to be
independent. And to go on regardless of the political
situation. The College cannot make politics the entire
life of the people in it. And going back to classes
is not necessarily going back. It can be going ahead.
I feel we have to work to make the College the vehicle of formal learning. We must work to make sure that what we want, and is what is relevant, or what we feel is relevant, and our teachers feel. But I think that for those who have not lost faith in the university structure, that as a matter of individual conscience, cannot go on this year, they feel they must go out and support the strike to work for peace in Indo-China. I hope that the Administration will allow these individual students to leave and not be penalized for it... be allowed to make it up or in some other way to continue next year if they feel they can come back at that time.

Thank you.

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