

5-27-1969

[Letter from Mount Vernon Resident to Esther Raushenbush and Charles DeCarlo, May 27, 1969]

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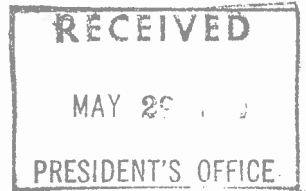
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[REDACTED]
COUNSELOR AT LAW
[REDACTED]

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10019
Room 1048



May 27, 1969

Mrs. Esther Raushenbush, President
Dr. Charles DeCarlo, President-Designate
Sarah Lawrence College
Bronxville, New York 10708

Dear Mrs. Raushenbush and
Dr. DeCarlo:

I am writing to you as a friend of Sarah Lawrence and resident of Mount Vernon who is deeply concerned at the abrupt closing down of the Institute for Community Studies. My reaction on reading of the student sit-in was bewilderment, and on reading of the decision to terminate the Institute, a kind of numbing disbelief. As feeling has been slowly returning, I have talked with staff people in the Institute, people in the community - black as well as white - and have read some of the literature of the protesting students. I now feel a deep sadness and a sense of frustration and loss.

Granting the vulnerability of academic institutions to the disruptive ractics of militant students, and the universal failure to have found any satisfactory way to deal with them (at least when they refuse to parley), the termination of the Institute was nevertheless an inappropriate response.

There seems to have been little substance to the charges which the students leveled at the Institute, and I have found little support for them in the black community they purported to champion - except among some high school youth. It appears that they knew little, if anything, about those projects of the Institute with which they were not directly concerned. The style of their ultimatum and their demands - except perhaps the demand for black persons on the administrative staff - were inappropriate in respect of the Institute and

incompatible with its freedom as an academic institution. It is a shame, then, that the administration yielded to the "either/or" threat of a group so misguided and to charges so wide of the mark. The administration managed to conduct the business of the College around an earlier group of sitters-in, and one might have hoped for like resiliency in the matter of the Institute.

It is reassuring to know that [REDACTED] will continue his work at the College, but the loss of the Institute as a constituent body is deplorable. The usefulness of its records, data and staff will inevitably be impaired. All the advantages of a going concern - accumulated staff experience, reputation, continuity, momentum - which attract able people, challenging projects, and funds, are now apparently to be sacrificed. But this need not be. Surely the situation is not irretrievable; surely the work of the Institute can be carried on, perhaps as a reconstituted organization with a revised orientation.

I, for one, shall miss the Institute sorely in Mount Vernon. As one of the lawyers for the petitioning parents in the school integration case, as a member of the Executive Board of NAACP, and of the Board of Trustees of the YM-YWHA, I have seen the Institute at work since 1964. According to my observation, its doctrine under Mr. [REDACTED] and Mrs. [REDACTED] has been to use its resources, human and material, to help those community groups that have asked for help, serving those groups without seeking to manipulate or control. Naturally, City Hall has seen this involvement in the community as meddling; the community groups who have sought help and received it see the Institute as an invaluable aide in dealing with their problems.

Such studies as the Institute may have carried on through all this were unobtrusive, and presumably conducted with the objectivity and rigor one expects of a first-rate academic body. Truly, the balance which the Institute has maintained in studying community dynamics while helping community groups deal with pressing problems reflects the greatest credit on Sarah Lawrence. It is ironic, then, that at a time when relevance is the militant's watchword the students should have recklessly attacked this most relevant of college institutions, and that Sarah Lawrence - of all schools - seems ready to sacrifice it to appease them.

I urge you to give most earnest consideration to reconstituting the Institute and its exceptional staff, so that it may continue its important work.

Sincerely yours,
[REDACTED]