

# AN APPEAL TO REASON

## CONFRONTATION POLITICS AND THE FREE U VISION

by mark jensen

I have become alarmed lately over certain trends in the Free U away from my vision of what it should become. My vision of the Free U is that of an increasingly cohesive urban community, serving as a model for a new style of urban living for the whole world. I see the Free U becoming a powerful political and economic force. I see it as a tremendously creative, adeptly maneuvering, quick-responding community with a strong sense of humor and strong sense of honesty and responsibility to mankind. I further see it as the mischievous prankster exposing the tender spots in the rest of society, as the bold innovator trying out new freaky ideas that eventually become accepted by the rest of the world. Much of what I see is already happening, and it makes the Free U a joy to be a part of.

### (ARE WE STILL HONEST?)

However, lately I have detected some changes in the Free U that I view with alarm. The most ominous change I feel is a real breakdown in honesty towards the rest of the world. First of all, I feel that many of the justifications we have given for the Community Center are dishonest. The Free U Community Center is not going to decrease drug use or experimentation, and the uptight world knows this. On the contrary, it will probably increase drug traffic by

increasing contact between members of the community. Secondly, I do not feel now that our liberation festivals are really designed to get us a community center. On the contrary, I feel they are being done as a protest and, by many, as a means of confrontation with the police. I feel that if we continue these confrontations we ought to drop the issue of trying to get a community center.

That brings me to my next point. In spite of the increase in the community spirit that these confrontations have done grave damage to the Free U. A third example of our dishonesty is the incredible delusion that these demonstrations have brought us closer to being able to rent a community center. On the contrary, I believe that they have convinced the people who may have rented to us that their worst fears were justified and made it almost impossible for us to rent a place at this time. Another delusion is that the downtown merchants are for us. These merchants see in us the threat of riot, increases in insurance rates and the reduction of property values. To pretend that they are on our side in any substantial numbers is not only dishonest but absurd.



### (POLARIZATION: CAUSE OR EFFECT?)

Another trend that I see developing in the Free U is a we-they polarization that is a direct result of the confrontation philosophy. I feel that this type of thinking leads to incredibly wasteful paranoia and eventually to the depressingly pitiful stalemate which exists in Berkeley. I think that this polarization has made certain organizations such as SDS very unsatisfying movements. I feel that it tremendously diminishes the flexibility of our response. I believe, in a way that my Yoga has reinforced, that if we want this polarization we will create it as we are doing now, or it doesn't exist, and we can do our thing far more effectively.

Lastly, I would like to turn to the future. I see a tremendous potential for Free U business interests, and I know I share this vision with others in the community. I see a beautiful vehicle for this with members owning property and renting back to the Free U, as the store is being handled now. Hopefully this will evolve into community ownership. However, there exists a certain attitude among many Free U members that is deterring the development of the Free U in the area of economic expansion. This attitude is basically a mistrust of money and of people with money. It amounts to a feeling that people with a little bit of bread are not really part of Us but in fact are one of Them. This is a further unpleasant result of the we-they polarization thing I mentioned earlier.

### (WHAT DO WE REALLY WANT?)

We might as well face it. There are a fair number of people in the Free U with money, and they represent a source of great strength to the community. I have no doubt that, with a minimum effort, many of these people could be convinced to enter into financial arrangements as silent partners with the Free U. Personally, I would really dig being co-landlord with other members in a community center building. I see this arrangement being very satisfactory and fair financially. But some consciousnesses have to be changed before this can happen, mine included. First of all, not many people are going to be interested in putting money into Free U ventures with the kind of dishonesty which I see coming out lately. Secondly, the confrontation style really discourages people with bread. And lastly, people with bread have to learn to live with the unexpected and not get terribly uptight about the safety of their investment.

If we want a community center now, there is only one way that we can get it, and that is through member ownership. Maybe this was the case before the demonstration, but these acts have definitely hurt our chances of renting a building. I do think that they may have improved our chances as far as member ownership is concerned, since they have vastly improved community spirit. But, if continued, I see the confrontation thing quickly destroying our chances for even this method of getting the type of community center we desire. (The city manager offered us some mud flats.) The choice boils down to this: do we want to spend our time and energy in wasteful confrontation and pick up a lot of bad karma, or do we want to spend our time and energy creatively towards building a powerful, world-shaping community?