

Statement by Fred R. Sheheen

February 5, 1981

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission:

I rise to comment on events described in the minutes of the last meeting, and happenings subsequent thereto with respect to the recommendations of this Commission on two-year occupational programs at the University of South Carolina.

I find it necessary to speak with some concern, not because of differences of policy which we may have with one or more of the institutions, but because the University of South Carolina, through its officers and agents, has elected to disseminate misleading information regarding our action in an effort to generate opposition to the proposals which the Commission has made.

The injection of false issues into consideration of the two-year occupational programs at the University, in hopes of altering that decision in the Committees of the General Assembly, reflects no credit on the current debate.

Specifically, I feel that we must not permit erroneous information to shape, unchallenged, public opinion and sentiment in the General Assembly. Therefore, I address myself to these specific points:

(1) The Provost of the University is quoted in The Gamecock newspaper as saying that the premise that the Commission's actions was based on the consultants' report was "fraudulent." I specifically deny his statement, and I reiterate that the Committee's recommendations and the Commission's actions were entirely in accord with the consultants' report, and specifically supported by the Chairman of the consultant team.

(2) The University has told its two-year branches that our action on the occupational programs at the senior University threatens the two-year community branches. We all know, as does the University, that the study was specifically limited to communities where two-year institutions and four-year institutions exist side-by-side, and the two-year University branches were not, and are not, involved in the recommendations.

(3) The University has said openly and publicly that compliance with the orders of the Office of Civil Rights in connection with affirmative action would be damaged by any changes in the College of General Studies. The fact is that abolishing the entire College would only reduce minority representation at the University by 1 per cent, from 13 to 12 per cent. More importantly, I would point out that if the best defense South Carolina can muster in favor of equal treatment consists of packing minority students into the program at the University with the lowest entrance requirements we are in grave jeopardy of applying dual standards within the institution.

I believe that if such a rationale is ever expressed to the Office of Civil Rights, there will be additional grounds for charges of discrimination based on setting up an internal tracking system for minority students within the institution.

Philosophically, I am appalled that anyone would point with pride to the fact that a larger percentage of black students (27 per cent) are in the weakest academic program than in the University at large. The percentage of black students in South Carolina College Honors Program -- the premier academic program at the University -- is 1.6 per cent. When the enrollment of black students in the Honors Program of South Carolina College reaches 27 per cent, or even the University norm, then I think we can talk about effective affirmative action and equal opportunity. Surely equity demands equal access for black students to all the programs of the University, including its scholarly programs, and not just to the College of General Studies.

(4) The University and its agents have spread abroad the notion that this Commission abolished the College of General Studies. We did no such thing. Its four-year programs remain untouched, and the Commission approved quite recently an additional institute for the College of General Studies.

Finally, I would like to point out a glaring inconsistency in the events of the past month. Immediately upon the completion of the Commission's action last month, in this very room, the Provost of the University served notice of appeal to the committees of the General Assembly.

The President of the University did so publicly soon afterwards.

And even one of the students personally served notice of appeal to the General Assembly.

Yet the law specifically stipulates that the appeals decision can be made only by the "governing board" of the institution, and the Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina has not even met since our decision was made.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that this Commission's action was right and proper; beneficial to the young people of South Carolina and to the system of higher education.

I am utterly confident that when we appear to present our case in a sane and thoughtful fashion, we will be supported by the committees of the General Assembly for carrying out the provisions of the Master Plan adopted by that very body.