

FEB 6 1975

NYTimes

The Watergate Money-Tree Harvest

By Irving Howe

I would like to enter the discussion that has started about the fees offered to and withdrawn from Ronald Ziegler and John Dean. I speak as a professor, not for all of them but perhaps for some.

Let me sketch a picture of the average American university today. Waves of financial panic sweep across it. Assistant professors are fired—and with faint prospect of finding new jobs. Graduate students find their wretched stipends cut. Salaries don't keep up with the rising cost of living. Administrators scream: Turn off the lights, type on both sides of the paper, crowd more students into each class. And who knows? Perhaps they're right.

Along comes Lecture Bureau X saying that for a mere four grand you can have Ron Ziegler or John Dean—and suddenly, there's money! The student council finds it, the "dean's fund" just happens to have that much left. Always, for some sort of spectacle, the coarser the better, the money can be found, even though younger teachers and graduate students are being thrown onto the streets. Do you wonder, then, that some of us grow outraged?

And then consider the proposed fees, higher still than what Tom Hayden and Stokely Carmichael used to get a few years ago, when the reign-

ing campus vaudeville was New Left rather than Old Nixonite. It is outrageous that someone of the intellectual caliber of a Ziegler, a confirmed enemy of the English language and an habitual evader of elementary truth-telling, should be offered a fee several times larger than that which universities customarily offer the most distinguished minds of our time.

I know several Nobel Prize winners who lecture for a good deal less than \$4,000 an evening. I know a great many gifted people—writers, thinkers, scientists, public figures—who consider \$500 an acceptable fee. What impulse, other than the degrading populist notion that notoriety pays, could lead anyone to suppose that a Ziegler just out of the Nixon White House or a Dean just out of jail is worth \$4,000?

(The one argument I can't cope with is Art Buchwald's claim that Ziegler is worth that much as a comedy routine; but then I've never been able to cope with Buchwald.)

There are grave murmurings on editorial pages that to "dishonour" Ziegler is a violation of academic freedom. Why? No one said Ziegler is prevented from talking at Boston University, only that the original fee of \$2,500 would have to be cut to \$1,000—which his agent apparently wouldn't accept. If Mr. Ziegler is so passionately desirous of telling us about the abuses of power, he might find it in his heart to do so for \$1,000 a shot.

The whole business of forking out vast sums from hard-pressed universities to unsavory public figures needs some critical scrutiny. In the fifties, when I was teaching at Brandeis, every year a tiny group of students tried to "embarrass" the administration and faculty by proposing to invite as a speaker George Lincoln Rockwell, the American apostle of Hitlerism.

Did we care enough about academic freedom, sneered these students, to give this Nazi the use of a Brandeis forum? And the answer we kept giving was that, even as we believed in Rockwell's right to speak freely, that didn't mean we had to welcome him to a Jewish-sponsored school or pay him a nickel for coming there.

Let Rockwell get up on a soap box—as many of us have done for far better causes—and talk for nothing. To believe that I have no reason to invite him to my campus is in no way to abridge his freedom of speech. I may grant people the right to indulge in all sorts of habits, but not, if you please, in my house.

There is a still larger moral issue. What sort of a society is it in which people who have been publicly convicted of betraying their trust as officials of the Government, or people who have shamelessly defended those who betrayed that trust, are then "rewarded" with enormous advances for book contracts, enormous fees for lectures?

The publishing houses that gave

those advances, the universities that offered those fees ought to be ashamed of themselves. For profit or publicity, they have done us all a disservice.

There used to be a time when a man who had done wrong, even after being relieved of punishment, thought it seemly to maintain silence for a while, perhaps in self-examination and meditation. Now he cashes in.

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