

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
STUDENTS FOR A RESTRUCTURED UNIVERSITY

MAY 16, 1968
1

SPEECH BY JOHN THOMS, CHAIRMAN OF STUDENTS FOR
A RESTUCTURED UNIVERSITY, DELIVERED TO A MEETING OF STUDENTS
IN GENERAL STUDIES ON MAY 16, 1968 IN WOLLMAN AUDITORIUM

The physical symbols of the strike have been absent for several days now. The arrogant uncertainty of the policemen who held our campus, the even more uncertain picket lines, the barricades at either end of College Walk--all are gone. Yet the strike continues. Perhaps those external manifestations were never as important as they seemed. Perhaps, since our brutal night of truth, the strike has been pre-eminently a mode of consciousness, a state of mind. But this central consciousness has been split almost from the beginning, just as the Strike Coordinating Committee has been split between the so-called "moderates" and "radicals". We have worked together in a tender and tense coalition in order to demonstrate our fundamental unity in support of those who went into the buildings and the political demands for which they fought. This evening twenty-two delegates to SCC, representing constituencies of about fifteen hundred students, formally severed ties with that body and reconstituted themselves as a new group called Students for a Restructured University. Let no hasty fuctionary at Low Library or overzealous agent of Sulzberger's Times smile at the news. The strike is not broken. Those of us who left have not broken faith with our mentors in SDS. We continue to feel a deep gratitude to the original strikers for their role in awakening us to the political realities of our common situation and we remain in admiration of the efficiency and effectiveness of the dedicated team at Strike Central. But we have reached a point now where we must require of ourselves an affirmation of our own distinct identity, our own distinct concerns.

Although the SCC has been consistently united behind the demands of the May 3 resolution--notably the demand for amnesty-- there has existed a concurrent division over questions of emphasis and style. SDS has continually emphasized the necessity for viewing our political demands within a national political context; thus the political education of the community at large has assumed for them the highest priority. Their reiterated assertion has been that a free university is impossible in an unfree society. We, on the other hand, while recognizing the force of this analysis, have nevertheless been concerned with the wresting from the present upheaval some constructive rebuilding of our immediate context. Briefly, we believe that a free university can be the vanguard of a free society. We cannot view with equanimity the prospect of an indefinite future of polarization and unrest, while awaiting the total political awakening of the total society. We want amelioration of our condition, and we want it now.

Some of us have also felt uneasy with much of the rhetoric emanating from Strike Central, with its categorical rigor, its moral blacks and whites, its typical reliance upon generalizations. This kind of diction, with its startling catchwords--"racist imperialism," "capitalist corporate structure" --is, we believe, unsuited to the discourse of a university. We have constantly pressed for a language of reason and understanding, a tool for clarity and communication not only with our allies but also with those who yet misinterpret and mistrust us. We are, after all, members of a community of scholars. Ours is a deeply flawed one, scarred with old lies and new breaches of faith.

Nevertheless the ideal remains in our minds, and before this year's end we wish to speak to that ideal. We appeal to you now to strengthen our voice. We are not on strike, nor have we ever been on strike, merely to achieve an advisory role within the present university structure. We believe that the sovereignty of a university lies with the students and faculty, and that all power must derive from them. We are convinced that it is necessary for students to formulate their own restructuring proposals, undiluted by the sway of other interest groups. We hope that our efforts will help to lay the groundwork for a new community which will not be subject to such another breakdown in the social structure.

I confess myself to be deeply excited by the hidden promises inherent in our situation: to speak truth to those to whom we have been for so long merely polite; to claim our rightful share in shaping the context and content of our own education; to insist that we be listened to when we have something to say. Students are human beings. So, I understand, are professors. Human beings gathered together in the same room would do well to pay attention to one another.