

Irv Hall, Campus Radical An Affectionate Review

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Irv Hall can talk. When he sits down, he looks like he wants to be standing up. Ronald Reagan catches it from him, so do the students of Poly Sci 164G. So, for that matter, does the Academic Senate. Hall is not a leader, more a kind of glorified scapegoat, who takes people's sins and aspirations on his shoulders and makes them dramatic or startling. Or annoying, since he has no sense of timing, substituting a bouncy energy, bouncing in on everybody, starting the hell out of them and telling them the wrongs of the world. A good act: Irv Hall can talk.

"I want to go into a very short Marxist digression... I would like to talk about the relevant aspects of being a toadstool - - He's stoned in class, which is alright if anything exciting happens but it never does..."

The third week of the quarter: Hall bitches from the podium at a crowded LS1500, expressing epic dissatisfaction.

"I am not condemning for what you are -- I am condemning you for having stayed that way for the last two weeks." The beard bobs up and down; the arms trace enormous flopping ovals in the air, as if Hall is trying to take off. He is not, in fact he holds most stubbornly to the floor. There is a seesaw rhythm to Hall's auditory which makes it easy to understand, easier than it would otherwise be. Phrases are thrown up, subside then into an authoritative but very quickly flowing syntactical structure. This style of speaking can easily dominate an entire room; people are compelled to pay attention. Indignant conversation start up at the rear of the room; mournful looking co-eds clutch their books to their chest and pace out dolefully. But the class as a whole is like the wedding guest in Coleridge; it cannot choose but hear.

"Absolutely disgusting...worse than a war criminal...you've been exactly like society wants you to be... You sit around and watch TV... listen to rock records... half of you have never read a newspaper... you sit there with your fingers up your asses, talking about how wonderful revolution would be..."

On he goes, and soon people are yelling at him, trying to stop Hall, to get a word in edgewise. But Hall stand firms - - "just two more minutes" - - talking in anticipation, in readiness of the deluge which he knows is certain to follow.

The first time most people heard of Irv Hall was back last spring, when he hassled with the Political Science department over an excursion to Cuban, who's duration he wanted extended. Since that time, Hall has lost NDEA fellowship, and gained much notoriety, winning preeminence among UCR's grad student population for an unusual outspokenness.

He also has a reputation as a radical; but to the confirmed Hall-watcher, the political message is distinctly secondary. His intelligence is generally admitted - - "Boy, when Irv gets going he is really something," exclaimed one "moderate" poly sci prof during the recent UCR conference on the Latin American military - - but he is best at projecting a kind of massive visceral friendliness. Hall beams on everybody, and once Regent Canaday beamed back.

Sometimes Hall gets too friendly, and thus invariably ruins his speeches. He is one orator who must have something to attack, and though he tried the conciliatory mode, it clearly is not suited: "I wasn't going to speak today, cause this is my day off. But Carl can tap me on the shoulder anytime he wants me to stop... I want to speak about my father... my father comes from the shopkeeping life, and he is a proud man... and I think of my father at this time, and I think of my father's shop... and I hope no one is breaking the windows of my father's shop..."

The tightness goes; so does the energy. The logic, the *projection* of the logic suddenly disappears in a welter of repetitive words. Everywhere this particular speech turned, there seemed to be a deadend.

But Hall rises to Parnassus when he had a diatribe to deliver. Here we approach a rather delicate project: that of putting an entire Hall speech down on paper, of letting it sit there and hoping that it does something. Confrontations are peculiar situations, in that they are no good by themselves but depend on a larger context of events. They are like Victorian novels, possessed

of unwieldy preludes and epilogues, which turn out to be both cumbersome and necessary. Hall's confrontation with Ronald Reagan is certainly no exception...

It happened in Sacramento, at the beginning of April, under the depressing circumstances of the Western Political Science Association's annual convention. An invitation had been issued to Reagan to speak to the convention, but a 40% minority of the delegates objected, feeling that the invitation constituted a kind of endorsement. This minority coalesced loosely into the Caucus for a New Political Science.

There followed negotiations. No, the invitation to Reagan would not be withdrawn... yes, a panel would be allowed to question Reagan. In fact, the New Caucus would fill one of the eight seats on the panel, and the eight speakers would share a total of forty-five minutes with the Governor.

The Caucus, rightly or wrongly, decided that forty-five minutes was not enough: its opinion was in danger of getting buried, as was the spirit of the whole operation. Hall was mandated to go before the Convention, to state why Reagan shouldn't be there, and then to leave.

But ironically, only two members of the panel ever showed up. One was an old poly sci professor from USC, the other was Irv Hall, who carried out his instructions exactly, although it was clear that they no longer really made sense.

"Governor, I have been specifically mandated not to participate in this panel, and I'd like to say why. I was selected to represent several hundred professors and students at this conference who, although they may all disagree over what form our protest should take, were unanimous in their conviction that your invitation to speak to us this morning is an insult to us as educators. However, in a broader sense, as a doctoral candidate with no job prospects next year, I represent all the teachers in this State who can not find jobs, and all the qualified who can not attend school next year because of your almost single-handed cuts in the budget for California's public education. The people I represent, based on their own experiences within their various institutions, feel strongly, Governor, that you are destroying education in California.

At a time in the State's history when the expectations of hundreds of thousands of California families -- poor whites, Blacks, Chicanos -- have never been higher regarding the possibility that, through admission to the public educational system, their children can escape the vicious cycle of poverty, you, as Governor, have chosen to impose tuition for the first time. In your introductory remarks this morning, you voiced your approval of citizen participation in political decision making. Now I have spoken officially to the Regents just as I am speaking to you today. Your tuition plan was opposed by State legislators, administrations of the colleges and universities affected, their faculties and our student body presidents. Now I want you to explain to these political scientists what is the use of their political participation when their well-reasoned position is overruled by you, one man, and the Regents you appoint to dictate our destinies?

Furthermore, Governor, I object not only to the glib way you respond to the sincere efforts by students to communicate with you, but also the demagogic manner by which you manipulate the general public. You always imply that tuition-free public education victimizes the taxpayer, and, this morning, you compounded that fallacy when you expressed a political philosophy which has no relevance to real, power politics in California. In your opening remarks, you extolled your opposition to "big government" which you characterized in "major" threats to the people. The conflict, Governor, is not between "the people" and "big government" but between the people of California and the wealthy corporations which built the public, finance your election campaigns, provide the personnel for the Board of Regents, and which you refused to tax to pay a fair share of the cost of public education in California..."

Afterwards, as delegates filed out of the hall, Reagan is shaking hands. Suddenly there is Hall again, still full of beans, ready for another go-around. Repartee is not entirely his style, but he makes such a go that he wins, or at least has the last word. Reagan is merely unfriendly.

Hall: "Governor, you accurately presented a more damaging condemnation of the capitalist system than I could've ever done this morning."

Reagan: "What do you mean?"

Hall: "You described a system whereby the poor pay a disproportionately large part of the costs of public education through the inequitable tax system, and, in which the rich pay a

disproportionately small portion of the costs of an educational system to which they can send their children if they wish. The poor will continue to have the access of their children to the system denied and the rich will continue to provide the Regents and trustees to perpetuate the system."

Reagan: " You are an obvious example of the person who, for all of your education, got nothing what's so ever out of it."

Hall: "If that is the case, Governor, the tragedy is a double one because under the principle of 'study now and pay later,' I am \$3,000 in debt for my education."

Reagan: "It should be cancelled."

At this point, the Governor moves behind a line of plainclothesmen, one of whom begins deliberately to block Hall's way. As the Governor passed through the exit, Hall add "Will you be good enough to take care of that for me personally, Governor?"