

Lobsinger at Oakland

Lee Elbinger

1967

In a spasm of concern for the political education of Oakland University students, the O.U. Young Dems invited Donald Lobsinger, chairman of the ultra-rightwing Breakthrough organization, to address the student body on Monday, February 6.

It was a circus. Over 400 people packed Oakland's Gold Room to point, gape, and laugh at the Superfreak. All the campus hippies were there. SDS came to chuckle. A festival atmosphere pervaded the crowd.

Lobsinger arrived with a friend and two boxes of literature. He spread his pamphlets and tracts out on a nearby table and they were immediately snatched up. And why not? How often does such camp entertainment come so cheaply and in such abundance? The leaflets were utterly predictable—all sorts of outlandish accusations, paranoid predictions, titillating revelations, improbable conclusions. "Why does MARTIN LUTHER KING always support the COMMUNISTS who are sworn ENEMIES OF CHRIST and of OUR COUNTRY? Tortured Clergyman Relates HORROR OF RED SLAVERY! Rebels drug-crazed ..."

A leaflet attacking James Lafferty lavished praise upon THE FIFTH ESTATE: "A PEDDLER OF SMUT might blush if he read the pages of the FIFTH ESTATE newspaper." Another leaflet castigated the British position on Vietnam via poetry: "TO THE BRITISH CONSUL: As in Washington's day when we thought you unjust / we once again look upon you with mistrust . (etc. for 16 unbelievable lines). Interestingly enough, the atrocity photos that Lobsinger distributed (signifying Viet Cong terrorism) resembled the atrocity photos printed in THE FIFTH ESTATE (signifying American aggression).

Lobsinger viewed the size of the assembly with great pleasure—as if he didn't know they were assembled to laugh at him. He started his speech defensively: correcting lies that the Detroit papers printed about him (where have I heard that story before?). The minute he began to speak, the microphone started to feedback. "Sabotage—I knew it was going to happen," he cracked. Was he kidding?

He explained the virtues of a brief speech and promised that his speech would be brief. When the students clapped, he said, "I'm not through yet." That set the tone. He went on to explain that Breakthrough is not an extreme right-wing organization: the extreme right-wingers are anarchists and Breakthrough is not anarchistic.

Lovable Lobsinger, on the whole, is a good speaker. His lack of formal education is painfully evident and he occasionally screws up words and sentences, but his voice doesn't quaver and he handled the politely hostile audience with considerable aplomb. Every so often he talked himself into a fervor—at such times his wiry frame would grip the podium tightly, he would grit his teeth, squint furiously, jut his jaw and emphasize each word. Although he often made the same point again and again, it occurred to me that he might be intelligent if he wasn't so grotesquely dogmatic.

Lobsinger continued to spray us with gems of hawk-brain wisdom. Choose your favorites:

"The Communists make the Nazis look like humanitarians." (We oohed.)

"Peace marchers are crypto-Communists." (We laughed.)

"A Communist is a traitor in every sense of the word." (We ahhed.)

"We should invade Vietnam." (Someone gasped.)

“Anyone who condemns Nazism and not Communism is a hypocrite of the first degree.” (No one cared.)

“I have yet to hear Ed Sullivan apologize to the American people for calling Castro ‘The George Washington of Cuba.’ And he still brings the Bolshoi Dancers over here.” (We howled with glee.)

Lobsinger described the Moscow Chamber Orchestra thing with such relish, it was unreal. He loved to recount the absurd details, and the audience loved to hear them. “The Protestors had tickets to get in. There wasn’t a thing on the ticket to say you couldn’t bring in a coffin. There is now. He chuckled with us as he described the police sirens and traffic court and the slanted newspaper reports. There he was, Lovable Don, laughing and joking and basking in the warmth of audience approval. But were we laughing at the same thing? He talked about Jews carrying a coffin into a performance of a mythical Nazi Chamber Orchestra, implying that his action was just as noble. Someone went “Ecch” and we laughed.

For a short time he came across as a human being who was able to laugh at himself and for that short time, the audience was his. But not for long. He fumbled the ball by talking about educating people to have a “victory psychology.” Spirits got quite high, he went into a trance, and a member of the audience screamed inanely: “What about the American Indians?”

He glibly answered: “I’m for giving this country back to the Indians.” We howled. He got furious.

Then he said, “If we are not in there (Vietnam) to win, we shouldn’t be in there at all.” We roared and stamped our approval of his last suggestion. This made him more furious and he sought to save the situation by clarifying the point.

“Let them (our troops) come back here if we don’t intend to win.” We clapped and some people shouted, “Yeah! Let them come back.”

Lobsinger retaliated by reading horror stories of Communist atrocities. He concluded by knocking advocates of free speech who claim Communists should be allowed to speak “to let people see how ridiculous they are.” (That line got peals of laughter.)

The question and answer session was as unenlightening as the speech. We learned such valuable facts as:

James Burnham of THE NATIONAL REVIEW is the foremost authority on the Vietnam war.

Dr. James Laird and Ernest Mazey are Communists.

James Brickley is not fit to untie the shoelaces of the men who marched across the stage in protest against the Moscow Chamber Orchestra.

Perhaps Lobsinger’s most subtle slip occurred when he quoted a statement by that “great patriot” Sen. Thomas Dodd, which ended “... open aggression across naked frontiers -marked frontiers—excuse me.”

The questions got embarrassingly hostile as time went on and the whole thing disintegrated into blithering idiocy (from whence it came).



Lee Elbinger
Lobsinger at Oakland
1967

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/24-february-15-28-1967/lobsinger-at-oakland>
Fifth Estate #24, February 15-28, 1967

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net