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Statement of President Millar Concerning Speakers at Portland State College

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PORTLAND STATE COLLEGE PORTLAND 1, OREGON

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 7, 1962

STATEMENT OF PRESIDENT MILLAR
CONCERNING SPEAKERS AT PORTLAND STATE COLLEGE

In view of the considerable public interest being displayed in Mr. Gus Hall, who as representative of the Communist party has refused to comply with a requirement to register as directed by the U. S. Supreme Court; and in view of the fact that this current interest centers around whether Mr. Hall might properly be allowed to speak on college campuses in Washington and Oregon, it would be surprising if the students of Portland State College did not display a curiosity to hear what such a person might have to say under the circumstances. Accordingly they have sought approval to arrange for Mr. Hall to speak at the College. This approval has been granted in line with the College's established policy and practice of bringing to the campus speakers who represent diverse points of view on matters related to academic studies and to public issues. The College has followed this policy knowing full well that not all the ideas expressed and explained by various speakers could be met with equal interest for the simple reason that they are often in irreconcilable opposition to each other. It is a carefully cultivated academic practice to examine conflicting notions and beliefs both by themselves and in contrast to each other; to learn more about what works well or brings about desired effects by understanding with some thoroughness what doesn't, regardless of professed claims; to expect that rationally held beliefs can be examined rationally; to assume that fuller understanding follows fuller inquiry, including understanding of those things which may be impractical or unenlightened, foolish or repugnant, as well as those which earn belief and deep respect. If the business of a college is responsible inquiry, then the prohibition of inquiry, the closing of books, the muffling of speakers in matters of legitimate concern is contradictory to it.

The College continuously seeks to provide the best circumstances for the presentation of matters of significant interest. It provides a framework within which ideas, including those that will be rejected, may be understood, and being better understood may be more scrupulously contested, avoided, or accepted, as the case may be. On matters of public interest, it actively seeks to expose students to a variety of points of view, vigorously expressed, but subject to immediate and searching question, as well as to the continuous rigorous scrutiny of systematic academic study and the inevitable informal and

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often equally penetrating discussion which accompanies it. Whatever else happens in colleges, ideas are tested searchingly and values are brightly illuminated--that is what colleges are for.

Various reasons have been brought forward both inside and outside the College why Mr. Hall should not be heard. They have been well publicized, and they range from the propriety of giving a platform to an officer of a political party adjudged to be the agent of a foreign government to the notion that students should not be exposed to any ideas which their society does not currently approve. Because there is much public interest in the College's policies and practices in this matter, it seemed particularly important for me to canvass as thoroughly as I could the views of students and faculty at this time. I did not expect unanimity, and I didn't find it. Nevertheless the views of responsible members of the College generally and very strongly were to the effect that the present circumstances altogether are not such that the College's policy should be altered. They believe that since there have been heard at the College spokesmen for the actual governments and the political beliefs it is asserted that Mr. Hall represents, as well as spokesmen for directly opposing views also generally unpopular, and on the other hand a range of other political views generally accepted, then he too might appropriately be heard by those of the College who wished to hear him. They see no legal barrier, no clear and present danger, no breach of propriety involved in allowing Mr. Hall to speak here at the present time. I concur in their views.

For these reasons, I have indicated that a student group may properly seek to ask Mr. Hall to speak to the members of the College, provided that convenient and acceptable arrangements may be made. No arrangements have yet been made.

It is not to be expected that the College's position in this matter will be fully understood or agreed with. It is hoped, however, that this statement will to some degree explain the educational grounds upon which the College's decision in the present matter is based. It is of course hoped that the College's view of its objectives and its means of attaining them will be widely respected and supported. Finally, it should be understood that the College's giving its members the occasion for hearing Mr. Hall, as other speakers, under no circumstances should be understood as indicating agreement with or advocacy of his views. The fact that other colleges in this State, public and private, are presently confirming policies and practices similar to those described here may be taken, I believe, as a demonstration that there is a degree of consistency and responsibility to the academic views which we hold and practice, while recognizing that differing and responsible decisions may be reached in the matter at issue from closely allied grounds.

Branford P. Millar
President