

# Mr. James, Council and the GSU

Student Council College representative Fob James' resignation Tuesday night in reaction to a vote to censure him for refusing to meet with members of the Gay Student Union raises once again the issue of the roles homosexuals are forced to take in society. Nonetheless, there can be absolutely no doubt in the minds of the GSU or Council members about Mr. James' attitude toward homosexuals. Mr. James has repeatedly and publicly stated that he has no compassion, concern or liking for homosexuals. Long before the now infamous notes were passed between former GSU President Robert Elkins and Mr. James, Mr. James asserted quite emphatically that he would have nothing to do with any member of the GSU. Clearly, this position is not a popular one or even necessarily intelligent. The fact remains that Mr. James had not only asserted his loathing for homosexuals, but had made his position no secret when he campaigned for a Council seat.

The question obviously begged is, Why were Mr. Elkins and his successor to the GSU Presidency, Peter Brehm, so determined to meet with Mr. James in light of his obvious intransigence on the issue? A few historical notes, as yet unpublicized, shed considerable light on their motives in pressing for a meeting. After Mr. Elkins originally requested a meeting with Mr. James on Oct. 13, and Mr. James replied in his traditionally definitive manner that he would have nothing to do with any member of the GSU, Messrs. Elkins and Brehm turned to The Cavalier Daily. In a conversation with the newspaper's editor, the two openly sought publicity of Mr. James' violent opposition to the GSU. After she informed the two that it was a personal problem and not newsworthy, Mr. Brehm again attempted to set up a conference with Mr. James. Having had the occasion to confront him while these activities transpired, Mr. James again made it clear that he would not discuss any portion of the issue with them at any time.

Having been refused the chance for publicity once, Mr. Brehm turned to Council. In a meeting with Council President Steve Mahan and Vice President Stefan Underhill, they discussed the possible courses of action the GSU, through its president, could take. A request for the censure of Mr. James was one of the possibilities discussed. The rest of the story has been duly recorded in the pages of this newspaper.

Some observations are worthy of note: 1) the GSU was obviously concerned about the bad publicity Mr. James was giving it, and in turn sought some recourse for Mr. James' position, 2) Mr. James is well known for his uncompromising personal convictions and unusual stances on a myriad of issues besides the GSU. He was in the truest sense of the metaphor a thorn in Council's side, 3) Council was far from endeared to Mr. James. Council members have repeatedly asserted that their vote to censure Mr. James was based solely on his refusal to meet with College students who are his constituents, a very reasonable concern. We agree with Council's contention that Mr. James should have met at least once with those individuals he had publicly accused of being an "emotional cancer" on society. Even the most extreme

opponents in any organization deserve the opportunity to present their case. We cannot accept that Mr. James' moral, political or even religious beliefs can justifiably prohibit an exchange of ideas. He need not even listen with an open mind, which is his right. But the fact remains that the GSU is a recognized student organization which has been and will most likely petition Council for consideration in the future.

The question remaining is, how grave was Mr. James' refusal? However grave, it definitely did not merit a formal censure by Council of one of its own members. Had there been some pressing need for a confrontation, or had it been uncertain what and why Mr. James felt the way he did, a meeting would have been more imperative. But everyone familiar with the facts, as were the GSU representatives and Council members, knew that the meeting would solve nothing and benefit no one. That a representative can be accountable to all his constituents is an impossibility. That he should meet with those who have a legitimate concern is considerably more reasonable. Regardless, Council overstepped the bounds of propriety when it decided to censure Mr. James. It has every right to, and should have, passed a sense of Council resolution stating that it is the policy of the University's student government to work for and with the students of its respective schools; that to accomplish this, Council believes that all its members should be receptive to meeting with any member of the University community who has a legitimate concern in University affairs. But a significant difference lies between clarifying Council's view of the roles its members should take, and formally censuring one of its members, a distinction Council unfortunately failed to draw.

We understand Mr. James' decision to resign his position. When a public body formally votes to hold one of its own members up to public shame for acting upon what he perceives to be his personal beliefs, how can any man with a sense of pride refrain from protest. After all the public disclosure and embarrassment to the House of Representatives Rep. Wayne G. Hays caused, he was not even censured. Perhaps he should have been, but the fact remains that a censure of members of any organization is a serious step that few Council members can have realized. Yet we cannot accept the statement by various Council members that Mr. James was censured solely for his actions in regard to the Elkins controversy. Various Council members have made reference of their distaste for Mr. James and the position he took on such issues as PIRG and GSU office space, the Virginia Law Review and salaries for this newspaper's staff. We question the ability of Council members to disregard their previous convictions about Mr. James.

Mr. James then, was wrong in taking such an uncompromising stance when there was nothing to lose. But his reaction is understandable, nonetheless, for the GSU and its officers were forcing the issue at what Mr. James felt was his expense. And Council subsequently overreacted to the entire situation.