

**students today**

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**young fabian pamphlet 17**

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**ARGUMENT**

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**Dick Atkinson**

**Colin Crouch**

**Trevor Fisk**

**Stephen Hatch**

**Tony Rodgers**

**Peter Scott**

**Jack Straw**

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# 1. introduction

## Colin Crouch

In 1966 the University of California at Berkeley was brought to a virtual standstill by a large group of students protesting against restrictions on the freedom of political discussion on the campus. The dispute smouldered for several months, with the issues involved becoming wider. The Free Speech Movement was born, the experiences of the civil rights movement was put to new uses and developed new ways of thinking, the concept of the university sit in began, academics began to write books on the significance of the student revolt, and the population of California took refuge by electing the far right film actor, Ronald Reagan, governor of their state.

By March 1967 the slogans, techniques and ideologies that had developed at Berkeley, together with a few of the same students, could be found at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Since October of the previous year the students there had been protesting against the appointment of Dr Walter Adams from the University College, Rhodesia, as director of the LSE, because they disapproved of what they considered had been his conduct in Rhodesia. The conflict finally flared up in the Lent term, when two student leaders were disciplined for holding a protest meeting that had been banned by the director. A full scale sit in lasted ten days until the end of the term.

The following academic year these early ripples of student protest and direct action developed into a flood of different demonstrations throughout the western world. For students to be playing an active, even revolutionary, role in politics was not a new phenomenon, except perhaps in the USA and Britain. What was new was the nature of the criticism of existing organisations that developed in the course of the protests, and the fact that a common theme in many of them was a demand by the students for participation in the government of their own institutions, backed by a particular view of traditional political attitudes. Such a demand had been in the background of the LSE dispute, although the immediate causes of the outburst were somewhat

different. The first student sit ins in Britain after the LSE affair, in December 1967, were directly concerned with the demand for student participation. These brief protests took place at the Regent Street Polytechnic and the Holborn College of Law and Commerce, both in London. In the following month students at Aston university in Birmingham, disrupted their institution in pursuit of similar demands, and in February Leicester University was the scene of a sit in lasting several days following rejection by the university authorities of very modest proposals of student representation made by the students' union.

## harassment of speakers

During the same month the first two examples occurred of what was to become a new factor in the student protest—strong, possibly violent, demonstrations against visiting speakers of whom groups of students disapproved. The first to suffer was an official of the US embassy who was covered in red paint following a speech on Vietnam he made at the University of Sussex. In a smaller incident at Essex University, two Conservative MPs, Enoch Powell and Antony Buck, had difficulty in leaving the university after a meeting.

In March several similar events took place. The Secretary of State for Education and Science, Patrick Gordon Walker, was shouted down when trying to address a meeting at Manchester University; students at Oxford threatened to duck James Callaghan in a pond; and at Cambridge Denis Healey had difficulty in reaching a meeting.

March was also the month of the first violent encounter between demonstrators and police outside the American embassy in Grosvenor Square. Although this was not entirely a student event, it fitted into the pattern that was being set by the new student left in many places, a pattern of recourse to semi-violent action, not through irresponsible hooliganism, but because of a definite belief in the theoretical and moral appropriateness of such

a course of action. It was part of the developing ideology of opposition to institutional politics and the use of traditionally established channels which was growing up parallel to and related to the demand for student participation in the running of universities.

Student demonstrations were becoming a main topic of news comment and conversation. At the beginning of the summer term, usually a quiet one in student affairs because of examinations, there were new protests. At Leeds University Patrick Wall MP and his wife were the subject of mobbing when he went there to address a meeting, and at Essex University there was the most important of all such incidents when students prevented a scientist from the Government's germ warfare research station at Porton from giving a lecture. This was especially significant, not merely because it led to wide public concern about the work going on at microbiological institutions, but because the students at Essex were among the first to give coherent and explicit exposition of the case that students had a right to prevent from speaking those persons whom they considered to represent immoral and inhuman views or institutions. It was a paradoxical development of the Berkeley free speech movement.

A further aspect of particular importance of the Essex affair was the reaction of the university authorities. The Vice-Chancellor, Dr Albert Sloman, sent down without trial or defence and purely on his own authority, three students whom he had reason to believe were most closely involved in the event. This decision brought the institution to its knees, with a full scale student sit in and a considerable amount of criticism of Dr Sloman's decision from members of the academic staff. Eventually the students were reinstated.

This dispute raised issues similar to those that had predominated at the LSE—the question of the right of university authorities to exercise disciplinary powers on questions that were not cases of “naughty” students guilty of trivial of-

fences, but clashes of political approaches and ideology. This had occurred on a smaller scale in some of the other disputes, when university authorities had attempted to discipline students involved in political demonstrations. This issue took its place alongside and in relation to the demand for participation and the changing political perspective of students, as part of the main burden of the student cause.

## events overseas

May 1968 was also the month of student events on an international scale, many of which made the British protests seem very gentle and unimportant affairs. Several American universities had for some time experienced events similar to those of Berkeley. The main one was at Columbia, where a student protest against the university's decision to build student recreation facilities in open space valued by the negro “ghetto” community eventually led to occupation of the administration buildings, the raiding by students of the offices of senior members of the university, and the expression of the total student ideology of direct action, participation and rejection of the values of the surrounding society. Other American universities experiencing sit ins included Stanford, North Western, and Ohio. In Germany the Free University of Berlin, established after the war as a showplace of a new German liberalism, was virtually brought to a standstill by recurrent student unrest. As the year progressed other German universities were the scenes of large scale protests, culminating in May and June in wide resistance to the emergency laws being approved by the Bonn Parliament.

Student protests also took place in Rome (where massive and bitter confrontations took place between police and students), Geneva, Milan, Brussels and Vienna. Students in Belgrade managed to enlist the support of the Government in their demonstrations, and, under somewhat different social conditions than all the above, students were involved in protests in Madrid, Brazil, Tokyo, Chile and

Jakarta. But towering over all these were the vast events that took place in Paris during May. Starting with students at the Sorbonne and bloody clashes in the Paris streets with the fierce riot police, the Paris uprising eventually engulfed several other French universities and important industries. At one stage the revolt seemed close to destroying the Fifth Republic, although in fact its result was a massive victory for General de Gaulle. This uprising included much that had featured in previous smaller disputes in other countries: recourse to civil disorder as a legitimate political weapon, rejection of the prevailing system of representative government, demands for the democratisation of the universities, and calls for "participation" by students and others in the control of events that affected their lives.

Meanwhile, on a more humble level, British students also made much of the month of May. Partly perhaps these events were influenced by the French disturbances; there was, for example, an abortive sit in at the LSE in solidarity with the French students. But most of the protests were home grown. At Oxford, where the university had already established a distinguished committee to study the question of student representation, there was a successful attempt at removing certain restrictions on the circulation of political leaflets by students. At Hull University there was a sit in calling for reforms in the examination system and for student participation in the government of the university, while at the University of Kent at Canterbury there were, appropriately, quiet demands and polite threats from the students, again on the issue of participation.

## art colleges

But during May, and in the weeks to come, the initiative was stolen from the universities by art colleges. First, students at the Hornsey College of Art started a sit in on the issues of autonomy and better facilities for their students' union. But by the time the local education authority had conceded this demand

some weeks later, the students had dispensed with it and were involved in a radical, energetic and fascinating questioning of the whole basis of art education. They set up their own system of teaching within the occupied college, attracted the sympathy and support of several prominent persons in the art education world, and were followed by several other colleges of art in early June. The art colleges at Croydon, Birmingham and Guildford were the scene of the most important student protests, the last mentioned lasting on into the summer vacation and leading to the abrupt dismissal of several sympathetic members of staff by the Surrey County Council. Although criticisms of curricula had been in the background of several university disputes, none had taken it so seriously and thoroughly as the art college students, who have now set up a Movement for Rethinking Art and Design Education (MORADE).

June also saw a variety of student protests in other institutions. At the University of Bradford there was conflict following the disciplining of students involved in disturbances at a meeting addressed by Duncan Sandys MP. There was a short sit in on the issue of representation at Keele University, and a more serious affair at Leeds following concern by students at the activities among them of the university's security officer. During the examination period itself there were occasional instances of examination boycotts, and there was a distressing affair affecting students taking the University of London's external degree in sociology when some examination papers were leaked before the examination took place and some students tried to organise a protest against the need to resit.

By the end of the academic year 1967-8 student protests had made an impact on the public life of the country. There were also signs of a new co-operation among dissident students at different institutions both in Britain and abroad. A Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation had been formed and had held its first conference at the LSE, being attended by prominent student activists from overseas

conveniently invited to Britain by the BBC for a television programme. *The Times* had deemed the whole affair worthy of a special series, and the heavy Sundays and the weekend colour supplements had had a field day. The House of Lords felt moved to hold a special debate, and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors held a meeting with leaders of the National Union of Students to discuss a programme for academic reform that had been drawn up by the union, an essentially "middle of the road" body.

It is against this background that the authors of this pamphlet write. Several issues of importance have been raised by the new student protest movement, concerning both the future of the universities and other academic institutions and the political philosophies and means of action of a new generation of radicals.

There is a need for a detailed discussion of the implications of all these developments, both in the academic world itself and among those concerned about such problems.

## aims of pamphlet

This pamphlet is intended as a contribution, or several contributions, towards this discussion. The authors are not in agreement among themselves on many issues, and no attempt has been made here to reach that agreement. There is more emphasis on the detailed internal arguments about the future role of students within their institutions than on the wider implications. However, as most of the contributors point out, these arguments have to be seen against the wider context.

Although the authors' views differ, similar themes appear in most of the essays. There is general acceptance that the universities are now working in a very different world from that of previous years, and that the relationships between authorities, academics and students are in need of change. There is concern with the problem of participation and an attempt by the authors to reach beyond

the slogans that can too easily predominate in the debate and consider some of the real difficulties and wider implications that these ideas involve. There is concern with the ideas that are current among young people in higher education today and the meaning of these ideas for traditional assumptions.

It is in their approaches to these questions that the authors differ from, even contradict, each other. This difference in itself reflects the present state of the debate. It is difficult to discern at the present time exactly what will result from the issues that have been raised by the politically conscious students, even on internal matters. Several universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, are studying the question of student representation, but few have reached conclusions. The first college to begin the new movement, the LSE, has seen a staff, governor, student committee present a report, with a string of minority documents and notes of dissent, which was then rejected by both academic staff and students. On the more political level, it is even more unclear what the student revolution will bring about. California made Ronald Reagan governor after the Berkeley affair. France gave General de Gaulle a bigger majority after the events of May than he had before it. In Western Germany, scene of many major student demonstrations, the near Nazi National Democratic Party has increased in strength. In England public reactions, like the student demonstrations themselves, have been quieter, though one can reasonably assume hostility towards the students. The only democratically responsible authorities affected so far Haringey London Borough Council and Surrey County Council have shown little sympathy towards their students.

But so far the wider political implications of the student revolt have not been important enough to enable an assessment to be made. It is mainly for this reason that these essays concentrate on the internal aspects of the question. But the wider issues may before long assert their significance and should therefore engage our attention.

# 2. aspects of student power

## Dick Atkinson

Five stages can usefully be distinguished in the development of student protest in this country. The first of these stages has usually been initiated by a minority of students. They have demonstrated on particular issues: union autonomy, race, Vietnam, biochemical warfare, and against particular individuals who symbolise reactionary positions: Patrick Wall, Harold Wilson, Enoch Powell, Dr Inch, and Patrick Gordon Walker.

The second stage has been reached when the college administration has taken disciplinary or other repressive action against some of these protesting students. Before the spring of 1967, when the LSE students sat in for eight days, there were no subsequent developments to such action. The students had always accepted, for a variety of reasons, the prevailing distribution of power and authority within the college.

The LSE sit in marked the first occasion on which the third stage of development was reached in this country. This stage is now frequently reached. Often with idealists, liberals, and otherwise uncommitted students to the fore, the right of the administration to take decisions affecting the lives of students has been directly challenged. The ability to disrupt the day to day functioning of the college by the sit in technique has, in the last two years, produced many dramatic and successful results. But development can rest at this stage with students winning or losing on specific issues. They may even, with the assistance of sympathetic staff and administrators, gain limited representation on disciplinary boards as well as on the most central decision taking bodies.

The fourth stage is only reached when students extend their particular criticism of isolated, repressive acts and such minor technological reforms as representation to a general criticism of their learning or work situation, and back up the demands which flow from such criticism with further demonstrations, sit ins, and the creation of free universities. This stage can be reached, as the art colleges at Hornsey and Guildford illustrated,

without passing through the first three stages. The same now applies to the fifth and final stage. Students expose the institutions of higher education, then the schools to rigorous criticism and alternatives are raised which demand mass involvement, participation and the maximisation of control by the individual over his life situation. At this point these criticisms and demands are adapted and applied to other disenfranchised and exploited groups in society. The protest and criticism is taken to a national and international level.

The more vulgar and conservative Marxists, student and non-student alike, select only the "working class" as such a group, and represent the students as mere catalysts to the traditional agency of change. Others recognise that not only particular groups of manual workers, but also many others, work in situations over which they have no control. These groups tend, however, to feel grievances only in individual ways. All such groups are potentially capable of radical action if only they can discover, or be shown, perhaps by the popularised success of student militancy, that they too could appropriate the power of the authoritarian few who dictate the shape of their lives.

There is here the germ of a new approach to social criticism and political activism. It is more potent than the outdated conservative theories of the old left. And, importantly, it is applicable to those changes in complex technological society which even make the bureaucrat or educator or Latin American priest a cog in an embracing, if materially affluent, machine. This is a crucial development in analysis, for it excites and involves in militant activity the growing number of people who are "turned off" by the old Marxist approach, yet who deeply resent their own isolation and who sincerely wish to swell the ranks of the radical left. There is a vast potential for growth in the extra-parliamentary left.

This article will be concerned with only two themes. Firstly, it is important to

show the extent to which the students' arguments for radical change in their own places of work are supported by the most advanced educational research. Secondly, we must illustrate the connections between, and influences of, educational situations, politics and industry. At this stage the possibility for a new and flexible criticism of the shape and direction of society can be discerned most clearly.

Students are increasingly coming to see education as a genuine two way process. They seek to break down artificial barriers between student and teacher, to demand a control over the direction, organisation and content of their learning situation. They see themselves as partners with the staff in the learning process rather than as passive recipients of "handed down" knowledge, which they are not fit to question. This growing concern for a control over their academic situation by students should also be seen against the background of a growing threat to academic liberties from the Government and industry. But, first, it is necessary to examine in closer detail the arguments for student participation.

If the structure round scholarship remains rigid and authoritarian it encourages the student to learn in the traditional way, as he was accustomed to do at school, where he memorised but did not discover. His interest was never engaged. And, at exam time, the bored teacher repetitively marked the same answer to the same question; it was the answer the teacher himself had taught. The student now recognises that a similar situation exists at colleges as at schools. At college the method and theory, the practice of doing and discovering a subject, remain set structures to be learned and taught in lecture or tutorial, structures through which only the accepted and the ordinary has a place. The student fears that his mind becomes prematurely closed while he came to the college with vague hopes that college would, somehow, be different. His interest, what little is left after the schools, have finished with him, recoils from this final onslaught. But pre-

viously he felt impotent to question the nature of what is being done to him (see *Breaking the chains of reason*, A. MacIntyre, *Out of apathy*.) Now, in collective action, he sees the possibility of changing things by specifying analysis and the threat of direct action or the creation of separate, free, universities.

These consequences must apply equally to staff who teach and research within this setting, where competition to publish is harsh, where the student is too often an "undesired encumbrance" and the college administration is a "rival" (T. Caplow and R. McGee, *The academic market place*). His ability to teach or stimulate vanishes, as does his concern with genuine research. The whole process which involves teacher and taught becomes a closed circle from which there is no escape. But the staff do not act. Students would like to enlist their support, pointing to the "real" source of the limitations on the freedom, which is the Government, industry, college administration and the modes of teaching, not, as too many staff seem to believe, the students.

An important part of this closed circle is the hierarchical system of status relations which exist within the staff as well as the sharp distinction drawn between them and the student. All these divisions act as barriers to communication which may be crossed only in certain specified ways. Authority tends to move only downwards, deference to move upwards. This subtly inhibits the process of free enquiry. Sometimes, when the staff member is dismissed or told he will lose his promotion chances, if he continues to teach or act in a certain way, the authority is not even subtle. Timidity, restraint, reverence are encouraged. Boldness and unorthodoxy are vital. It is only where ideas and action, unchecked by a restraining hierarchical organisation, are positively encouraged, that real learning can take place. Students wish to abolish the distinctions of status and authority in colleges to this end.

Intellectual "leadership" is strongly argued by some staff as vital for "true"



learning. But the "good" teacher is one who most quickly ceases to "teach", where his student rapidly becomes independent, becomes able to research, question, and construct on his own. This is the intent of teaching methods now being increasingly adopted in state schools. It should be the purpose of university staff to achieve this position as soon as possible—by the end of the students' first year when the school which the student typically came from had failed in this task, from the first month where the school had not failed. But as the schools which service the colleges have usually not adopted these new methods, the staff at college have the added task, which they do not typically recognise, of inducing the student to unlearn what he has memorised at school.

If the students share control over courses, syllabus and overall academic policy, they feel this will also counter, to some extent, the constraints under which they suffered in the school system. It will encourage an interest which at the moment is caught only by chance, yet to be removed, once again, by the competition and narrowness of final exams. To participate the student is forced on to his own resources, to discover, to question the dominant values of the university and of his previous schooling. Only then can he acquire a responsible, creative attitude to scholarship and social action.

The situation, then, more than the individual staff, creates the atmosphere for an interest in learning. But such a situation has to be consciously created.

## examinations

It is also insisted that examinations should come under question, and that they should be abolished if it is found that they limit learning and teaching. They shape too closely the often contradictory and dull content of courses and the style of teaching as well as learning. They are the means, at the moment, of grading students so as to be most efficiently allocated to certain sectors of society.

It is difficult to see why schools should be asked, in their final year, to conduct the exams by which the selection and grading takes place which determines that section of the divisive binary system of British education, if any, the school pupil is most "fitted" to enter. A child, even before the age of thirteen, by being forced into certain specialities, has had his choice of sixth form subjects and therefore his college subject and his attitudes to that subject determined for him (A. Dawe, *Class education and the Labour Party, Views No. 5*). But colleges tend to reinforce the approach acquired at school. They could, on the contrary, put pressure on the schools to abolish exams and grading.

## decision making

Recently students have come to demand not only that all staff should be represented on departmental committees which decide academic policy for the department, but that students should be represented with staff, and in equal numbers, and with equal decision rights, at the centre of college decision making.

It follows from this kind of idea that staff common rooms, which students are not permitted to enter, should be open to all members of the college. Sussex University has integrated its senior common room by opening it to all staff and students. This invasion of the separate staff culture can only have, in the long run, an enlivening and radical consequence. Even a discussion of "flower power" is better than one of "mortgages and motor cars".

Another step which is increasingly being argued is to include students, and junior staff, in staff appointments. Departments invariably develop one sided interests in their subject and its relations to other fields as a partial consequence of the hierarchical form of departmental organisation. At the moment staff are appointed with these accepted assumptions very much in mind. The consequence for the student is that large areas of his subject and its relations with other dis-

ciplines are not easily accessible to him. Given the constraints of the exam system he has no time, and a diminishing initiative, to research into and question areas that are not taught, or are not on the syllabus. In the end it becomes possible to classify graduates in terms of their department and university as soon as they open their mouths.

Include students in staff appointments and these tendencies are countered. There should be nothing sacred or secret about this area of university tradition. Restrictions on "academic freedom" lie in many, and often unseen, areas of university organisation.

But what about this academic freedom? Given the way the staff usually define this concept, almost every one of the above ideas is contradicted (see S. M. Lipset, *Berkeley: the student revolt*). Students extend the concept to include all members of the university, junior staff, and professors, as well as students. They claim that many vital interests are, or should be, held in common. These especially relate to the preservation of the freedom of inquiry, learning and communication, as well as action. But this implies many consequences, not all of which have yet been spelled out by the students. They relate particularly to how university might react to the pressures of "society", as well as to the organisation of their own college (H. Draper, *Berkeley: the new student revolt*).

One aspect of academic freedom needs spelling out. No scholar questions the right of the natural scientist to conduct experiments to check his ideas, and to put these ideas into action, through working models, which have consequences, both good and bad, for the surrounding society. This freedom for the scientist is not readily accepted for the social scientist, whose field of work lies explicitly in society, for political and moral considerations are obviously involved.

In order to discover any scientist must be aware of himself, his assumptions and his social environment. He takes up, im-

PLICITLY, positions of commitment. It is because of this that we can question the right of the natural scientist to try out some of his more dangerous ideas for, in his actions, we can see his motives and commitment. The social scientist whose field may be race, inequality, social class, or power, cannot ignore those features which he examines academically in authority systems, in Africa and Vietnam, when he finds aspects of them in his own society or in his college environment. He may not simply observe and then fail to act, for discovery itself lies in and encourages action. Even to take a position of "neutrality" is to be committed to a particular state of affairs. Thus, for the social as well as the natural scientist his task is not properly separated from innovation and social experiment. (Lipset *op cit*). To give the student the right to participate in the politics of his society while denying him the right to help in forming his own situation—from participating, for example, in his own college government—is to take a political decision as well as one which can no longer stand in the face of educational reason or the redefined concept of academic freedom.

## need for parity

It is argued that the students should be represented, in parity with the staff, at all levels of university government, that the administration should be specifically subordinate to policy decisions reached by staff and students, and that universities should take stands on issues in society particularly when those issues affect the life of the college.

Many academics will not immediately understand why students at the LSE, Berlin, Regent Street, Berkeley and many other places have quite separately come to the same belief—that parity of representation with the staff is an ideal to be aimed at. An example can be taken from the committee set up at the LSE to examine the machinery of government of the school. It had nine outside governors, nine staff, five students. Non-student members of that committee admitted in

private that "students won all the arguments hands down", that "they succeeded in educating the rest of the committee in a great variety of ways". But when it came to decision, to voting, these and other members of the committee decided not on the merit of the arguments but with reference to what can only be called a certain type of authority. Some of the student members registered their dissent. "Yes," they were told, "you are allowed to do that". Numbers, they felt certain, were a critical factor in the making of decisions. They did not want a majority, nor felt there to be any educational arguments which would support such a case. They did, however, feel there should be sufficient numbers to ensure that student ideas and interests were taken very seriously indeed.

Thus students have come to think that, in the present situation, it is only possible to influence events and decisions by their numbers as well as their arguments. In a more open situation, where positions of authority and interests are not so rigid, this reason for parity of numbers would not necessarily be thought important. The need to get the most constructive, combined effort from staff and students and the needs to represent as many individuals as possible in decision taking would then be the best arguments for parity.

In time of crisis, in situations where students and the need to represent as many parity, there are only two alternatives—to use the power of boycott and sit in or to adopt an attitude of disinterest and apathy. Student power was only used, however, when they were very sure, both that they had a very strong case where all alternatives had been explored, and that the issue was one of fundamental importance.

If, in situations of parity, or near parity, such "crises" arose, students would feel that the recognition, the authority, given to them would be such that the issue could be argued, debated, and decided without any need for "strike" action on the one hand and "discipline" on the other. Then a mutual trust could develop,

where the recognition of common interests, by staff as well as students, would allow members of each "side" to cross regularly to the other "side" without fear of persecution from their own ranks.

## staff attitudes

Students are at present not afraid openly to support staff over the question of their interests and control. They, therefore, instinctively find staff reluctance openly to side with students (when they think them right) difficult to understand. But this is what has occurred. They have had to learn by experience that they cannot expect private commitment to become the public statement.

The present situation of unwillingness of staff to give open support to students is quite shocking. It is always students who are accused of "seeing all staff as one", or of viewing things in terms of "them and us". Some students are guilty of this, but it is very true of many members of staff. I have sometimes been astonished to find the consensus of staff opinion so rigid as to force "student sympathisers" among them to resort on occasion to clandestine meetings with students; where "no names please" is the constant request. This is what hurts most.

In opposing student participation the staff have been fighting the wrong battles. Their own control has been diminishing for so long, and often without conscious recognition of it so that they have come to accept the status quo. Staff must be shown that students have very important interests which are shared by both sides. It is a difficult thing to ask, that basic assumptions, held for a long time, should be challenged and changed. But it is necessary to ask this of the staff. It is not students who are a danger to staff independence, but the structure within which they teach and do their research. Students do not take what they believe to be the staff "side" for entirely selfless reasons, for student interests are unquestionably bound up with those of the staff. The reverse of this equation is equally true.

Current trends in the development of Government policies on higher education indicate the nature of the threat to academic freedom against which the academic community of staff and students should stand united. Although higher education has been traditionally comprehensive in its approach once the pupil has been selected to be a student, it has nevertheless developed in a divisive way.

Recently the whole area has been formally divided into what is known as the binary system, the one half containing the universities, the other the colleges of education, technology and art.

The 44 universities have traditionally been autonomous, receiving their grants from private donation and industry, but predominantly from the Government. They award their own degrees, and have developed their own academic "standards". On the whole they are concerned with the theoretical, non-vocational aspects of disciplines or, if you like, with the "whole man", amateur attitude towards education. But some of the applied science departments of the provincial universities and the ten colleges of advanced technology which had their status raised to universities are very concerned with applied and vocational training. They are thus becoming geared very closely to the projected "needs" of an industrial society, and their size, as well as their number, has increased rapidly in the last ten years.

In contrast with the universities the disparate range of colleges in the public sector are controlled and financed through local authorities and, through them, by the Government. They have less money than the universities, have worse staff-student ratios and deficient facilities generally. They do not make their own awards, which are made by a central body, the CNA. They are far more vocationally oriented than the universities, and are closely geared to many aspects of industry. Their intake is less well "qualified" than the universities, taking the pupil they reject or who does not think he would gain entry. These pupils come almost solely from secondary

grammar and comprehensive schools. This division has been encouraged by the Labour Government.

## Wilson's threats

Shortly before the 1964 election Harold Wilson argued (in *The new Britain and Purpose in politics*) that in "this highly organised age . . . ability must be the test", not the "amateur" but the "rugged" professional approach. "To make the best of our scientists is vital, but it is just as important to do what we can for . . . technicians, craftsmen and skilled workers." "There is only one way this can be achieved—it depends on our national production." "Everything depends on a firm basis of economic power."

We can see here both Wilson's concern for the technological revolution, and his own form of technological economic determinism. But this is qualified for, to obtain that revolution, he needs to encourage and "produce" new men, with "new attitudes and skills". Thus it follows that there must be selection in education, but selection by "ability", "merit" and "achievement", not, as previously, by social and economic background, which the secondary modern and grammar schools fostered. The fifteen "ability" streams of the formal comprehensive schools fit the Government's purpose admirably. The products of such schools enter industry and will enter college with just the right attitudes and skills necessary to create the changes the Government wish to see, which in turn will boost the economy. Only time is required. If the Government is turned out at the next election the Tories' only difference will be to proceed at a slightly slower pace.

Anthony Crosland agreed with Harold Wilson. He regarded (in *The future of socialism*) fully unstreamed and comprehensive schools as "egalitarianism run mad" and an "excessive handicap to the clever child". Of the binary system he said that "the Government accepts (it) as being fundamentally the right division". His arguments included the need

for vocationally oriented courses, geared to the needs of future industry. Thus a large section of higher education, he argued, had to be under state control. Patrick Gordon Walker echoed everything Crosland stood for.

## erosion of independence

We can thus begin to see the logic for the comprehensive revolution, and the timidity and disinterest in the unstreaming and content revolutions in the schools. But why the binary division in higher education when the comprehensive school gets rid of what seems to be the same kind of division in secondary education? The answer to this becomes clearer if we look at several actions which the Government has taken in the past eighteen months. All were aimed at the university sector, which, remember, is independent of the state and claims to teach width and depth of questioning to the student.

The Government first raised overseas students' fees from £70 to £250 thus making it almost impossible for students to come from the third world. Then university finance was opened to the Auditor General. The University Grants Committee gave all universities a memorandum laying down "general guidance" as to the policy they should follow. Most Vice-Chancellors, the heads of both university administrations and staff, have accepted these inroads into their independence. However, the Association of University Teachers, the staff's union, has been deeply suspicious of all of them.

In November 1967 ministerial representatives of most European countries including England, attended a conference which was aimed at "reconciling the independence of the universities" with the "demands of an expanding and sophisticated economy for highly qualified manpower" (*The Times*, 27 November, 1967).

Finally, and not just from the students' point of view, there has been the constant threat of either increased fees for students or, in addition, student loans

from Government sources which would tie the student to the need to take an industrially based job on the completion of his course. If these are the first steps, what is the undisclosed aim?

It should be pretty clear that in encouraging the binary system the Labour Government and civil service wanted to create, through the "public sector", a large, state tied and industrially oriented training ground for students. Then it intends slowly to remove and alter the independence and general education orientation of the universities until they become indistinguishable from the elite of the technical colleges. Only then would higher education be fulfilling the needs held out to it by the "technological revolution" of Harold Wilson's vision.

# 3. the new unitechs

Tony Rodger

This essay should be seen against a background of recognition by authority of the part to be played by the student body in the development of the university. Whether this is the familiar phenomenon of the Establishment retreating before the storm or the recognition of the genuine grievances of the student body remains to be seen. The students deserve to be taken seriously; their protest is valuable in making everybody question his own complacency. To crack the self-satisfaction of the Gaullist regime in France is the largest achievement so far; only a little less spectacular has been the breaking down of the barriers of the education establishment whose professional conservatism is entrenched and highly resistant to change. In Britain there has been a steady increase in student representation all over the country.

The breakthrough has come with the setting up of the new technological universities and the recognition in their respective charters of the role of the students' union. My experience of student activity has been in the field of these recently created Unitechs. They are far removed both in concept and practise from the Oxbridge ideal of higher education and also incidentally that of the municipal universities. The students at these Unitechs and, in the future, at the polytechnics, have a much greater experience of the workings of industry. For sandwich course students, unlike their colleagues in other universities, spend up to one half of their university career in industry. They would seem to be more mature, show an increased awareness, are definitely more career minded and conservative in outlook, perhaps because of this period spent in industry. There is a sharp contrast here with the left wing radicals found overwhelmingly among the students of sociology, psychology, the liberal arts and related subjects—those subjects which are training the critics, analysts and reformers of society.

We have the freedom and resources to run an autonomous students' union free from interference from staff and administration. This involves the right to budget independently and estimate the finan-

cial needs of the union independent of staff and administration. With this has come the recognition of the need for participation by the students in the running of the university. The importance of a better understanding between the students and academics cannot be overstated. Genuine student participation, including not only the right to state views but also the right of access to the facts on which to base these judgments is a sound basis for a democratic institution. Power and knowledge are inseparable, and one of the ways power has been retained in the hands of those who hold it, is that knowledge of the manner in which power is exercised has been confined to a very small number of people immediately surrounding the men holding it.

## organised conspiracy?

Many people believe there is an organised conspiracy behind student protests in different parts of the world, especially the United States and Western Europe. This is patently untrue since student organisations by the very nature of their make up and the continued changeover of personnel involved, are extremely difficult to infiltrate and control. In each place the grievances are rooted in the native soil. At the same time, however, it is not pure coincidence that students in different places often protest about the same things in the same way. The confidence and techniques to express their grievances such as the sit in, the teach in and the creation of free universities are passed down the line from one institution to the next and from one country to another. Many students are affected by the same issues—the war in Vietnam, racial discrimination, consensus politics and overstrained education systems. There is a great deal of cross-pollination, some of it organised and some of it not. There is also the powerful effect of mass communication. Every student has only to read his newspaper or turn on a television set to know all about the latest outbreak or protest in another country and perhaps feel moved to follow suit. The power of example is strong.

The prevailing ethic of the movement from the start has been participation: a rejection of consensus politics and disgust with the feeling of being manipulated by uncontrolled concentrations of power both political and commercial, and rule by a distant generation imprisoned in an irrelevant mythology; disgust with the contrast between myth and reality in society. People, particularly students, do not like to be pushed around unconsulted. Participation implies not only fair and open discussion but also a readiness to accept the best advice and abide by majority decisions. We repudiate the idea that students are an elite learning in order that we can play a leading role in getting things changed the way we want. The universities provide the right place to develop the politics of participation—now taken up by de Gaulle as a cure for the French malaise. For too many years this question has been argued in private, occasionally mentioned abroad, but rarely discussed widely, and it has taken international rioting by the student body to bring the subject into the open. Many of the problems are now being aired and now that the student body is using its ultimate weapon—civil disobedience—there is every hope that many, if not all, of these problems can be attacked.

Violent action is not justified unless it is in response to violence and even then not always. It can never be a socially desirable end in itself and, in general, student violence in Britain is the exception rather than the rule. Within a truly democratic society in which all participate in the making of major decisions, there would be no need for violence at all. Everyone in the university is concerned with the process of discovery and plying of knowledge. There is not on the one hand a set of passive recipients of expertise and on the other a group ladling it out to them. The university is one community in which every member is seen as a student. All must be allowed to participate though it should be recognised they may not all be in the same position. Lecturers are not regarded as father figures but as significant people in the process of learning, more knowledge-

able and effective than students but with no superior claims.

At the core of much of the unrest and indeed at the centre of most of the imbalance in modern professional society is the lack of correlation between educational approach and the professional performance expected of the student when qualified. There is a dichotomy between the way in which students are educated and the performance expected in later life. The universities produce qualified students who have been through a quite arbitrary process of selection; if they turn out to be good scientists and technologists it is little more than a fortunate coincidence. Students see intimately in a most immediate and urgent way the inequality and waste of talent and money which is endemic in our education system. This is why there is such widespread disillusion among the student population and why we feel that much of the university establishment is outdated and useless. The tragedy of the situation is that many students are frustrated; any attempt at originality is stunted.

The criteria for an expert technologist are probably these qualities: intellect, creativity, an independence of approach and a healthy kind of heterodoxy in analysing solutions to a problem. One of the most important characteristics of leading technologists, Isambard Brunel, for example, is an independence of spirit which allows him to look for the unusual solution, which is often retrospectively seen to be the right one. This kind of nonconformity is not merely ignored by the present system but actively discouraged—the student with an ardent rebellious approach to any subject who is likely therefore to find the unexpected solution to a difficult (scientific) project is unlikely to succeed in a university at all.

What criteria are fulfilled by the education pattern in the universities today? What are the reasons for the lack of vitality, interest and eagerness in the field of honest enquiry that one would expect to find? This failure is illustrated, perhaps dramatically, by the failure of

the universities to attract students to the science and technology faculties, and the wastage of students therein. A recent survey found that only 10 per cent of the students on sandwich courses at my own university deliberately opted for that type of specialist degree. The expansion of higher education has made the degree a key factor determining the career choices of the student. Failure can be both wasteful and disastrous for the individual since it could mean a change in the character of his whole working life. Institutions heavily committed to technology, such as the Unitechs, have the worst figures for wastage (wastage here relates to academic failure). Figures produced by the University Grants Committee in their *Inquiry into student progress*, show that in the year 1965/66 only 60 per cent of students managed to get a degree in the normal time. There are grotesquely large variations between one university and another and between one subject and another. At one extreme are the Cambridge arts faculties, where 1.1 per cent are failed. At the other end are the Strathclyde physical science faculties, where the failure rate was 42 per cent. At my own university the percentage of drop outs is currently one fifth of the total.

Assuming the average cost of keeping a student at university is approximately £1,100 and that each student had this spent on him for the year in which he dropped out, the annual cost of non-graduating students is £8.8 million. But because the dropouts are so largely concentrated in subjects needing expensive reserves, engineering and technology, for example, the true cost of wastage may be much more than £9 million.

The plain fact is that the theoretical basis of university examinations is shaky in the extreme. It doesn't stand up to the demand for a completely objective assessment of the merits of the students. The teaching methods are anachronistic, haphazard and harmful. They are based on a traditionalised introspection, a kind of doctrinaire convenience, and a blind belief that it has to hurt to do any good. The syllabus bears little relationship to the professional needs of the qualified

technologist, simply because of the arbitrary evolution to which it has been subjected over the years. The present scope of material within a syllabus has been determined by the changes of attitudes and instruction within the university profession rather than any conscious attempt to fit students for a successful career. The list of subjects learned has remarkably little to do with creative ability, which is one of the fundamental requisites for science. Much school work is repeated in the first and second years, wasting valuable time which could be spent, for instance, equipping people not only with the ability of make management decisions, but also an understanding of the industrial and social implications behind each decision.

We wish to see the educational content of science courses widened to include non-technological studies. It is in this contribution of education and training that society will best be served by the universities. The whole basis of the examination system demands a good memory above all, so that a successful student is selected because of his parrot like ability to reproduce factual data like a nursery rhyme. He may be highly intelligent, but if he is it is likely to be in spite of the system rather than because of it. There is no means of selecting a student because of his truly scientific capabilities at all. It is reduced to the easily accessible parameter of memory. We have a system of selection which passes students with abilities which are quite different from, and in some cases quite contradictory to, the basic essentials of the true technologist.

## the lecturer problem

Perhaps the most important factor of all is the university lecturer, who has been selected largely for his academic and/or research ability. There is no means whatever of sifting the good lecturer from the bad. There is no machinery for examination in realistic terms, and as a result even the most imperceptive and obtuse lecturers remain in office, while the generations of students in their charge grin



and bear it and may, as a result, fail their examinations. It is not necessarily true, however, to say that a bad lecturer will invariably produce poor results in his students. The curriculum is such that no matter how poor the subject may be covered it is always possible to cover the work out of hours. It is remarkable that when the lecturer is at the very centre of the university education, there is no machinery for training the lecturer; no qualification to delineate the good from the bad; no selection procedure to decide whether a person is fit to be entrusted with the responsibility of teaching; and most important of all, there is no feed back machinery to decide whether he is doing his job properly and effectively. The situation with regard to lecturing at the moment is inconceivably biased, irrational and unscientific. No matter how qualified a university lecturer may be, there is no means of being sure that he is in the least degree able to carry out his function. That in itself implies the most urgent need for radical reform.

The essential prerequisites of any successful reform is that students should be consulted about them and be involved in the decision making. Students should be the creators, yet they are the product of the system. There is a need for student/staff consultation on these very crucial academic issues of teaching, syllabuses and the future of the examination system. If indeed they are now recast as a result of the recent upheaval in the universities, it will be an advance that years of nagging dissatisfaction have failed to effect.

## implications of expansion

The dramatic expansion that has taken place in the field of higher education in this country has focussed a lot of attention on the Unitechs and new universities. This is because the older long established universities have changed little since their foundation, and have remained to a large extent insensitive to the needs of society. The secluded life of the student or undergraduate of pre-

war years bears scant resemblance to that of his counterpart today. Whereas they came from the leisured classes and hence took little part in society when they emerged from the spires and cloisters, today's students are very much aware of their place in society and the role they have to play. This change in the type of person studying in the university has brought into the open the particular issue of discipline. There is a real and urgent need for the overhaul of the present disciplinary procedures.

The ideas of *in loco parentis* and *in statu pupillari* make no sense in the post Latey, post Paris period. The spirit of the day is profoundly anti-authoritarian. The university establishment can no longer rely on moral authority. There is a need for a fuller disciplinary code and an independent staff/student machinery for enforcing it. This will not only be fair, but will be seen to be fair, and will only be meaningful when fully discussed with the students and their agreement formally sought. Academics may think they are being liberal, reasonable, open minded, about the students' claim to run their own lives, but the students think they are being paternalistic. Sceptics have retorted that though students shout for power, they would not accept the responsibility that accompanies it. Yet the university is an institution which will mould perhaps the most important three or four years of a student's life. Students in this and other countries have willingly sacrificed their time and accepted the burden of responsibility to increase their share of control over their own lives. For students, like others, live in a world which is not of their making. As Shaw wrote in the preface to *Saint Joan*: "Though all society is founded on intolerance, all improvement is founded on tolerance". Yesterday's heretics are tomorrow's saints.

# 4. three approaches to student participation

Colin Crouch

Once the issue of student participation has been raised in a university or college, it is likely that the term will come to be used in three different and conflicting ways. These are best described as consultation, representation and mass involvement. Consultation is the system that tends to be advocated by university authorities and senior academic staff, while mass involvement is a doctrine of the student far left. The third position, that of representation, is broadly that taken by more sympathetic members of staff and "moderate" students. This does not mean, however, that it is in some way a "half way house" between the other two approaches.

The essence of the consultative approach is that it accepts the legitimacy of student demands to know what is happening in their institution and acknowledges that students may occasionally produce ideas which academics might find valuable. But it is not willing to go any farther than this. It is not prepared to allow students to take part in the decision making process itself, and rejects several of the premises on which such demands are based.

The consultative view rests on certain principles, an important one of which is that a university is a community of members seeking the same ends, that there are no legitimate divisions of interest between staff and students, and that some members of this community are qualified to guide its affairs while others are not equipped to do so. Where there is a true community of interests, the only disagreements and disturbances that can occur result from failures of communication; hence the frequent references to such failures by academics, university administrators and Government spokesmen making statements on the student question.

An interesting example of this was a recent article by John Sparrow, Warden of All Souls, Oxford, in *The Listener* (June 4, 1968). Speaking of the claims for representation made by Oxford students, he says, approvingly, "The form and substance of the students' demand,

therefore, suggest that it is not to seize power, but to remedy a breakdown in communications; they want to be assured that those who are on the other side of the gulf that separates, or seems to separate, the teachers from the taught, really listen to their representations, understand what they are saying, and are concerned about their interests".

## attractions of elitism

This is a typical expression of the view of an elite confident in the legitimacy and morality of its own authority, and convinced of its own benevolence and freedom from personal interest. Such a characterisation is not necessarily a critical one; there is nothing wrong with confident elites, so long as their confidence is justified. The point is that, given this view, demands for a student share in the control of a university come as an affront, an insult. Some academics are deeply hurt by the assertion that students should have a share in administration. It implies a lack of faith and trust in the benevolence of the academic hierarchy and introduces an element into university life that many lecturers consider as contrary to the very concept of a university. Again, Sparrow's article is a good example of this feeling: "Representation . . . would introduce into the life of the university an element quite alien to a place of learning and more suited to an industrial enterprise, where workers' representatives bargain with the management in an atmosphere of mutual mistrust".

Groups with authority cannot afford to admit that they have ignored or acted against certain interest groups. Their position can be made more secure if the system can be seen as a consensual one, in which differences of interest disappear, and in which as a consequence no one need feel opposed to the authorities. They therefore assert that there are no real political and interest divisions within their institution. From this fact they can draw the conclusion of their own unchallenged legitimacy to maintain authority. It is a case of setting the Platonic

against the Aristotelian view of society. For a university the Platonic ideal is an attractive one. Universities are meant to be worlds of pure reason, where vulgar entities like "interest" do not affect the rational settlement of issues. Such a view fits in well with Plato's concept of the Guardians. Furthermore, there are within the university good grounds for legitimising a non-democratic hierarchy as required by Platonism. The task of universities is the acquisition of knowledge and the pursuit of excellence. Those in superior positions in universities are, presumably, those who have advanced farthest in these pursuits and should therefore have the greatest claim to positions of authority. If the assumptions behind such a system are valid, it is not one which should be lightly disturbed.

A further argument in favour of a system of consultation is based on the view that the academic staff would often find it valuable to know what students are thinking, so that they may take advantage of the student perspective on questions of teaching. This rests on similar assumptions as the "failure of communications" argument. There is an assumption that academics are trustworthy men of goodwill who will be prepared to weigh any proposal objectively and, if it is good, will act upon it. Again this is government by the Guardians. The only reasons a student proposal might be rejected are because they are poor or unworkable; it will never be because it would disturb someone's established routine or create extra work.

## representation

But these more practical arguments against student representation are usually the result of a certain philosophical and political position, and it is this position which I have tried to describe. I have tried to present the view of the university as it appears to the traditional administrator and senior academic. It is in many ways a pleasant and idyllic view. It presents the university as an entirely rational world unsullied by vulgar problems of politics and interests, with a hierarchy

whose position is legitimised by appeal to superior competence as individuals in the task at hand. One must genuinely pause before disturbing the order and tranquility of such a scene.

But disturb it one must. For a variety of reasons universities are coming to seem increasingly unlike the communities they are meant to be. Partly it is a question of increasing size. John Sparrow identifies the Oxbridge college system as being a safeguard against demands for student representation, and the reason for this is probably the small and intimate scale of the college. The smaller a community the more interaction there can be among all its members. And the more interaction among the members of a community the more consensual it will be, as there will be more shared assumptions and perspectives.

There is a further point. The length of time taken by decision making in a university is often a safeguard of the freedom of academic staff, but the result of it as it faces the student in a large college is something like Kafka's castle. One is never certain what is going to happen or why it happens. As soon as a student learns that a committee in the college is prepared to take a certain step, he learns of a plethora of veto groups who will probably prevent it ever occurring for reasons of whose excellence he is assured, but of whose precise content he is never informed. It is for this reason that students have been dissatisfied with, if not contemptuous of, consultative arrangements and have seen direct representation as their only opportunity, not of uprooting the maze, but of finding their way through it.

## the question of trust

Academics are genuinely hurt when it is implied that students no longer feel able to trust them to look after their interests. But such a lack of trust is not surprising in the light of the reactions of several university authorities when students have taken steps to make a political case against them.

The point is that such events have a deep effect on students who see them taking place. Whatever their views of the behaviour of a minority of militants, students will not stand idly by while authority acts arbitrarily. And once such things have occurred it will be no use appealing to students to trust in the intrinsic benignness and justice of the authorities.

This point has relevance beyond the specialised world of disciplinary affairs. The Platonic view of the university depends on one crucial fact: the complete integrity and freedom from interest group pressures of those in authority. But academics, like everyone else, are not above such pressures. They have an interest in the way the university is conducted, and that interest is not necessarily the same as the students'. They have a sectional interest in the distribution of financial and other resources within the college, in the distribution of their own time between teaching and research activities, in the allocation of physical space within the university's premises. To deny that such interests exist, and to deny that there is ever any competition for the resources concerned between students and other interest groups, is to deny facts that are evident to anyone with at least a little knowledge of the intricacies of university life.

There are further divisions of interest among academic staff themselves. Different departments are in competition for resources. Different ranks of staff are often in competition with one another. The great prize of promotion and the ability of certain individuals (senior professors) to give or withhold that prize are further elements that make it impossible to regard the university and its government as above politics. To argue this does not mean to argue with the far left that it is the role of the student body to intervene in this situation and restore all to pristine purity: one of the sad things about the far left is that it sometimes identifies real problems and difficulties within universities, but quite illogically and falsely concludes from this a case for "student power". The only reason I

refer to the political nature of much of university life is to make the point that it is hypocritical of academics to throw up their hands in horror and exclaim that students are now trying to introduce completely alien concepts of pressure and interest into the university. These things have been present in universities for a good many years, and they are there for the simple reason that the people in universities are human beings with ambitions, interests and desires like people in any other walk of life.

Thus the case for student representation argues that students must regard themselves as a group within the university who have certain interests which must be represented along with the other interests which, whether formally and openly or informally and privately, find expression in the institution's proceedings.

## the industrial analogy

But what are the implications of this? Does it not see an end to all close and friendly relationships between staff and students? Will it not lead to a position where staff and students adopt the attitude of quiet mutual hostility which often characterises industrial relations? This is not necessarily so. University life is described as inaccurately by the trade union analogy as it is by that of pure community. The truth is somewhere in between. There must be between academics and students a wide area of common interest, common purpose and shared norms and expectations. If this is lacking, the institution might as well cease to exist. It is against this background and within this context that there is nevertheless scope for the conflicts of interest that have been mentioned above.

The theory of representation is not opposed to this view of essential consensus laced with elements of conflict. In fact it depends on it. Given the kinds of numbers that students are likely to be given in any system of committee representation, and given the narrow scope for rapid change that probably exists within universities, it is an essential pre-

condition of student representation that there be a fair degree of consensus. It is very doubtful if student representation could work at all in a college with an extremely radical student body who refused to accept any terms of reference, who insisted on raising fundamental issues of principle at every committee meeting, and who insisted on "committing" the university and its members to a variety of stands on issues in the outside world. Such an institution would grind to a halt.

What the theory of representation asserts is that, given that students are intelligent, reasonably adult beings, and given that, within the broad consensus of the university, there are valid instances of differences of interest, it is a prerequisite of the existence of some kind of community that students be accepted as part of the body politic.

Of course decisions should be taken as a result of a process of rational argument and not as a result of pressures and threats. But rational argument can only take place when all concerned have a necessary commitment to such a procedure. So long as university authorities have an unchallenged power they do not have that commitment. As far as the argument that students are junior members of the university who cannot possibly have the competence to take part in decision making is concerned, it would be argued that this competence is relative, that to suggest a rigid line can be drawn beneath which all members of the college are unfit to have any part in decision making is to make a false and artificial division. There is something in the argument that lack of experience does mean a certain freshness of approach and willingness to question that is of value in itself. It is also true that among a student body of any size will be individuals who are competent at decision making and from whose contribution the university would stand to benefit.

It is here that we meet the strong contrast between the claim of student representation and that of mass involvement. It is the latter which has been the

inspiring force behind the demonstrations which have attracted so much public attention in the past year. Academics and others have expressed surprise at the passion generated by student activists over the idea of participation, which is seen as demanding the right to sit on boring and time consuming committees and to acquire masses of unexciting files and documents. This may well be a correct description of the real results of representation, but that is not what is meant by the advocates of mass involvement. They start with a few general precepts. The main one is that every human individual should participate fully in all decisions that affect his life. To fail to do so is to pass that sacred right of autonomy to another, to become alienated from that particular aspect of control over one's life situation. To do this is in terms of the left's mythology, to commit original sin, to sell one's birthright. The plea for student participation couched in these terms is therefore part of a general theme taken up by the new left over the past few years, revolving round the polarised positions of alienation and participation. If the former condition is that of original sin, the latter is the search for the state of grace.

Above, when discussing bureaucracy in university administration, we referred to Kafka. It has been suggested that "The Castle" is really about man's search for the state of grace. If so, this work ought to qualify as one of the sacred texts of the supporters of mass participation. It is the same picture of man struggling to free himself from the mundane world below and enter into a situation where he can fulfil his true and proper vocation. (In the case of Kafka's character, the role of land surveyor; in the case of the new left, the Marxist concept of species life). But in both cases man is frustrated in his attempts to do this by the "structures" of the malevolent world about him: bureaucratic machinery, the waywardness of authority, the maze of false approaches to knowing how to reach the desired goal, sinister interests in controlling positions with the ability to prevent man reaching his objective—all these conspire to crush him.

The big difference between Kafka's vision and that of the far left is that Kafka's man is an individual, whereas theirs is that contradiction which has remained unresolved through a century or more of socialist thought—the individualised mass. Applied to the smaller sphere of student participation, this concept of man in some way needing to be in full control of his life situation but being alienated from this by the “structures” around him, linked with the view that the structures are seen as intrinsically malevolent, has several important implications. Because the claim for participation is couched in these terms, the emphasis is almost entirely on the exciting and personal aspects of participation and upon the political aspects of university government. Behind it is the belief that “participation is good for you”, that when the individual is involved in the act of participating he achieves a state of well being, of fulfilment, which is good in itself, irrespective of the ends of the participatory or decision making process.

It is somewhat difficult to translate this ideal into practical questions of university administration, but it does have certain implications. One is that all arguments about *competence* to participate become irrelevant; the only criterion of competence is willingness to take control of one's life situation. Thus the advocates of mass involvement have no qualms about proposing student parity with staff in all decision making. Indeed, given their view of the distorted nature of human thought and the corrupting influence of the world, they stand the argument about the students' “freshness of approach” on its head and assert that this freshness gives the student an unsullied purity. Because of his lack of experience in and influence from the world, the student is likely to be less alienated. Further, since all is biased and twisted, all is political and all is subjective, very little value is placed in factual, empirical knowledge. Thus one of the main claims to staff superiority, advanced knowledge, is not considered a very important criterion at all. It is not the extent of one's knowledge, but the acquisition of true

consciousness of one's life situation that qualifies for participation; only believe and thou shalt be saved.

## down with structures

Such an approach soon arrives at a paranoically hostile view of the very *idea* of “structure”. Divisions between subjects are viewed suspiciously; the very act of making a subject called “economics”, for example, is seen as a fiendish device to prevent students talking about social class and Vietnam. Subject divisions are seen also as an arbitrary act by bureaucratic authority which imposes a limit on the individual's freedom to develop in whatsoever way he wants—the original sin again.

Examinations represent the forces of bourgeois alienation *par excellence*. There is again the imposition of power over the individual, the enforcement of a certain action on him. There is the requirement imposed on him to study certain subjects and texts, and, perhaps most important, one of the purposes of examinations is to provide people with qualifications that can be recognised by the outside world; and by outside world we mean prospective employers, those arch incarnations of the capitalist system itself: “. . . it becomes evident that colleges are in existence to provide a reliable elite of middle managers for a given industrial system; it is precisely this system and ways of subverting it which increasingly preoccupies us” (David Widgery, “Universities: home of revolution,” *Daily Telegraph Magazine*, June 28 1968).

The far left has adopted a vision of the world, seen the whole business as a massive conspiracy, and now goes on to see everything that occurs through the perspective of this strange world view. It is this metaphysical base that renders the far left closed to discussion. It probably also explains why they are impervious to arguments that universities are, on the whole, remarkably liberal institutions, and that if one works for their destruction one will have made society less, not

more, decent and tolerant. To them the universities are part of a system which has already been tried and condemned within the writings of Karl Marx and others. It is therefore impossible for such institutions to be truly liberal; their liberalism must be a mask, and, like the Metropolitan Police, they must be provoked until they wrench off their masks and their "real" fascist nature is laid bare.

However, this does not mean that the far left cannot produce some genuine criticisms of the world; their vision is not so remote from reality to render it useless. Thus one agrees that students should play a part in university government, and that the claim of staff to superior experience is relative. But can this be said completely to invalidate the superiority of experience and professional application? Of course subjects at university level cannot be entirely taught as though all assumption were unchallengeable. But can this be said to brush aside the great value to a subject of a body of more or less accepted knowledge and teachable fact? Can the questioning of an untrained mind claim to usurp a major part in academic activity? Although it is a good scientific maxim that everything is potentially challengeable, this is not the same as saying that everything should be perennially challenged. It is perhaps this point more than any other that marks the main weakness of the far left, both in their approach to academic life and in their political position. It is the desire to make a total criticism of everything the whole time.

The result of this is that although they may sometimes identify real problems, they insist on taking these criticisms to such lengths and turning them into articles of faith. Thus one can agree that distinctions between subjects can become constricting and artificial, but does that mean one must take a philosophical stand against the concept of subject divisions, or see a malicious vested interest behind every attempt to develop a specialism?

But it is only extreme and ideologised

philosophies that can claim passionate and idealistic allegiance, and it for their passion and idealism that we are all expected to doff our caps to the new revolutionaries. One would have hoped that by now we would have produced a generation of young politically active people who realised that the passionate idealist is often but a tyrant without power. But it does not appear to be the case. The support given to the far left is not as tiny as many people pretend, at least not in the more "political" universities. They may be a minority in relation to the great mass of politically uninterested students, but in relation to the mass political groups of every shade of red and blue are minorities.

The case for student representation, as opposed to mass involvement, is not exciting; its appeal is to the head rather than the heart. It therefore seems that if a system of student representation is to be successfully implemented in several British universities over the next few years, it will have to surmount two formidable obstacles: the prevailing philosophy of academic life and the host of vested interests that support it, and the philosophy of the far left, whose vested interest in total commitment and hostility will prevent it welcoming any practical reforms that are within the bounds of possibility.

# 5. participation in practice

## Jack Straw

Competition is stimulation. In the last few years there has almost been a league table of student unions' success in gaining representation on university committees. This month it is Leeds at the top, with two more places on the parks and gardens committee; next month Belfast with three more on the military instruction committee. All good progress in the fight for democratisation of universities.

Not quite. The league table mentality highlights the fact that far too often student unions' claims have been based on a desire to increase indiscriminately the student membership of university committees without appreciating beforehand the realities of university government. Too often then these realities are experienced too late.

It is not that I have any objection to increasing student membership of university bodies. In fact I would like to see student (and non-professorial staff) membership greatly increased. Nor am I saying that in attempting radically to change the system of university government one should ignore the present system, and work towards one's goal from outside it. This is quite impractical. What I am saying is that the realities of university government are slightly different from their window dressing, and that before engaging in any exercise of increasing student participation in university government it is necessary to identify where the power lies and how it works.

The present situation, of notching up gains, even if the committee to which one has gained access is entirely pointless, has led unions into many pitfalls, some of which have seriously compromised their later position when trying to effect real gains. My example of the parks and gardens committee is not as far fetched as it sounds (fictitious though it may be). It seems to me to be no accident that the first committees on which students gained membership were ones such as the parks and gardens, the university sermons, or worse, the university court. By some coincidence, most of them achieved this honour at the beginning of the 1960s. Look in the calendar of the university

and you will find that the "court shall be the governing body of the university". If you look a little harder you will also discover that you will be on court with about 150-200 other representatives from multifarious local authorities, voluntary organisations, and the National Coal Board. A bit later on you will discover that the court meets twice a year, for half an hour and a cup of tea. What you will have to wait to find out is that many years ago the court delegated its powers in nearly all important matters to the university council, on which up to very recently, no student at any university had membership (university councils usually consist of lay members, plus a few senior academic staff).

This situation enabled some Vice-Chancellors to claim that they had made advances in student representation whilst in reality all that occurred was that the student union executive was drawn into the university governmental structure, thus restricting its freedom of action, without in any way facilitating their influence on university decisions. Once one does have membership of committees within the university governmental structure, however pointless those committees may be, there exists the obligation of using the constitutional framework, even if the part to which you have access invariably leads you up a blind alley. And confidentiality rules, in force in most universities (although very few of the issues themselves are of a confidential nature), further restrict union officials from making public use of information they probably would have heard about sooner or later over the university "grapevine". It is responsibility without power.

## pernicious consultation

More pernicious even than membership of existing university committees has been the establishment of consultative committees as devices to avoid student membership of the main committees and governing bodies. These committees take a number of names, the most popular ones being "the liaison committee" or



“joint committee”. They probably meet fairly often, and discuss some of the important and pressing problems facing staff and students alike. However, their weakness lies in the fact that they have no power to take decisions, that their recommendations are taken to bodies where there are no student representatives to argue the case point by point, and most importantly, because they are not a direct part of the decision making machinery, but merely an appendage to it, they are in no position to know what decisions need to be taken or are about to be taken, except where the university representatives consider it necessary to consult the committee. And so the committees is very often either talking in a vacuum, or after the decision has been taken elsewhere, with no hope of influencing it. The examples of this are many. I will quote one. Where, at one university, the joint liaison committee on the library was not consulted and did not even know of a decision of the main body to raise the library fines, and extend the loan period (in this particular case it would have been beneficial for the university to have consulted student opinion: the students supported the increase in fines and opposed the extension of the loan period because they wanted to maintain a high circulation of books.)

The examples above have been concerned with the central university bodies and committees, and usually over non-academic issues (such as catering, student accommodation, student health) which have most concerned student unions in the past. It is only now that unions are developing an interest in participation in the central processes of the university—the academic side—and one can confidently expect that the efforts of the senior academics—within whose absolute province academic decisions have lain—to divert the calls for student representation will be very manifest. Many academic departments will have, or will be about to establish, formal staff/student committees. But how many of these will have any real power, with integration into the academic decisions making processes of the university? Very few. Most of them will be no more than con-

sultative committees, and some may have constitutions, similar to one very recently approved at a university, where the head of department had an absolute right to decide what should and what should not be discussed.

Vice-Chancellors, I suppose, may have their own league tables. And as I mentioned above, they may use the existing student membership of obscure, or consultative committees to claim that the situation in their university is a progressive one. One Vice-Chancellor did just this, although the students only sat on six committees altogether. The argument at the time was over catering—and sure enough the students sat on a catering committee. But they did not sit on the catering management committee which fixed prices, nor on the college catering committees which controlled food quality.

Although the amount of formal participation has expanded a great deal, if one is cynical—and one can be about the way in which many universities have been run—one can say that this situation is part of a quite deliberate attempt to “fob off” the student union executives. In many universities I think the situation has come about not through cynical and premeditated manoeuvring by the authorities, but by a general paternalistic attitude which considers that the concessions which it is making are real concessions, and by a lack of clear policy, and enough foresight, by the student union executives. Either way the situation is a poor one, and the eventual effect is going to be quite the opposite from that intended by these less progressive administrators.

For the lack of real success by student union executives through the existing machinery in which they participate has led to two things: Firstly, because of the failure “to deliver the goods” a feeling of discontent amongst many sections of the union membership about the way in which the existing machinery operates, and consequently a realisation, in many cases unconscious, by the union executives that unless they do change the situation and make some real gains their

own position—and that of constitutional student unions in general—will be severely weakened. The student action committees, many of which sprung up at the end of last term, and led direct action campaigns either against the will of the official student union, or ignoring them, were a direct result of the lack of confidence which members had in the union system. Part of this lack of confidence can be blamed on the union executives themselves, for failing clearly to appreciate the real structure of universities, and for failing to work out their objectives. But much of the blame must rest with the university authorities for so weakening the position of the student unions. This has always struck me as being incredibly shortsighted, for surely any enlightened authority, progressive or not, but merely enlightened about its own self interest, must consider it far better to deal with the constitutional student union than a self appointed action committee. But the choice is theirs.

## labyrinth of committees

There are many problems in trying to work within the existing structure of university government. Perhaps the worst is trying through an enormous labyrinth of committee and sub-committees to identify where the power lies, where the decisions are actually taken. I have already mentioned that some university bodies have formally delegated their powers to a body below them. Most common is where the university court delegates its power to the university council. But no one should be blind enough to think that it is the council who now actually make the decisions, although they may participate in taking them. The same will be true on the academic side—that the senate (the senior academic body) will not necessarily be taking the decisions at all. Perhaps it would be utterly unrealistic to assume that bodies of 50-100, as most university councils and senates are now, are able to initiate decisions. And it is true that in any such system most of the decisions would at least be initiated at committee or sub-committee level. But it is also true that the nature of the system

facilitates the centralisation of power within a university into the hands of a dozen or so men. Many university presidents could name the men, who, if they are agreed on a matter could ensure that it became university policy with or without further discussion. For a student union president, working within a university governmental system can be an unnerving experience; the nearer one thinks one is getting to the centre of power, on this committee or that, the farther away in reality it goes. Until the basis of university government is changed cynical administrators can continue to make numerous token concessions to students without losing anything. They will merely take the decisions elsewhere.

Even on details a university committee is very different from a union committee. The key man is the chairman; he will generally be very much of an executive chairman proposing decisions, rather than someone to arbitrate between debaters. Votes will rarely if ever be taken; in my experience at the University of Leeds votes were only ever taken on two issues, and both were fairly minor. The committees do not have published standing orders, and the whole of the debate is geared towards obtaining a consensus decision. Like all consensi, sometimes the decision may be a good one; but often it will represent the lowest common denominator of agreement, and by attempting to please everybody will please no one. A problem which requires resolution will simply not be solved.

All this is very frustrating to the individual student. But the fundamental difference between the government of a students' union and the government of a university, is that the latter are non-democratic in structure and contain no machinery whereby those making decisions can be held accountable for them to the university population at large. In this context democracy and accountability should be distinguished.

Having been established by royal charter universities become self appointing and self perpetuating institutions. Under the charter the court will probably

appoint most members of the council, and *vice versa*. The senate will effectively appoint itself, for it is largely senate members who form the membership of chair committees, and a chair invariably means a seat on senate. Nowhere do the rest of the staff, the other ninety per cent, or the students, feature in this scheme of things. It is not a democratic situation.

## democratising universities

It can, however, be argued that universities are not suitable institutions for a totally democratic structure. Certainly I would accept that the "one man one vote" concept behind student union constitutions is quite inapplicable to a university. The problem with talking about "democratising universities" is that the arguments invariably get bogged down in discussions on "student power", and other inexplicit and meaningless phrases. What most of us who have objections to the present system of university government wish to see is not a totally democratic structure of the "one man one vote" scheme, but a system where there is (a) representation of all the sections in the university (though accepting that this representation will be weighted in favour of certain section of the university, i.e., the senior staff; and (b) and most importantly, a system where those who are taking decisions (and this includes individuals as well as committees) are accountable for those decisions to the university community.

At present there is no accountability to the general university community, because those not directly involved in the system are not involved at all. It may be argued that the interests of those not involved (the 90 per cent academic staff who are not professors, the students, and the non-academic staff) are always taken into account by those who are involved. This argument is paternalistic at best; in practice not even this much occurs. And when the universities do consciously try to take other interests into account some bizarre results can follow.

An interesting example occurred at Leeds

recently over the merits of two alternative superannuation schemes: a university committee, established to work out the university's policy on these schemes, decided, after pressure from the Association of University Teachers, to put the matter to a referendum of all the academic staff. The AUT offered to run the referendum but the university authorities decided to get the registrar's department to run it. In the event the staff voted two to one in favour of the old scheme. About 40 per cent of those entitled to vote did so. Once the result was announced most staff considered that that was the end of the matter. The university, having officially sponsored the referendum, must have done so with some purpose, presumably so that they could take staff opinion into account when recommending a decision to the senate. Two weeks later the committee met and decided to recommend the university to adopt the new scheme. In the circular to staff explaining the decision they noted the result of the referendum, but stated that slight changes in the new scheme now made it the preferable one. It also noted that only 40 per cent of the staff voted in the referendum. And there was simply nothing that the non-professorial staff could effectively do to prevent the decision going through.

I believe that in any institution those who are affected by decisions should be able, to some degree, to participate in their making, and that those who make decisions should be accountable for them. I also believe that it is quite possible to devise a system of university government where both these criteria can be satisfied without necessarily, or at all, being forced into a "one man one vote" situation. This is why I have attempted to differentiate between "democracy" and "accountability", because the latter concept avoids so many rather pointless but divisive and diversionary arguments of the former.

Two benefits would flow from such a system. One would be a feeling of participation in the community, and a getting away from the present feeling of alienation which is all too prevalent in

universities and colleges. Many of the "sit ins" of the past year have been concerned, in the end, not so much with the question of participation itself, but with accountability. The "sit in" at Leeds over the issue of an independent inquiry into the activities of the university Security Advisor, turned on the question of how far the university authorities and the Vice-Chancellor in particular, were to be responsible to the rest of the university community for their actions.

The second is that the quality of decisions would actually increase. I mentioned above that, all other things being equal, the university system of government encouraged the centralisation of power in a few hands; this was and is a direct result of the non-accountability of the system: that they hold the information and are not answerable for the decisions to the university community. A participatory system would involve a greater openness of debate, a willingness, or rather obligation, to take account of what others thought, and consequently decisions being taken in less of an "ivory tower" atmosphere than at present. It will always make you think twice if you know you are going to have actually to explain your decisions. (It is a safe bet that the quality of financial decisions will increase now that the Comptroller and Auditor-General is examining the universities' books.) On this point the Government would have saved itself many thousands of pounds if students had had some real say in the student accommodation policies of the early 60s.

My criticisms of the present system, and of some of the illusory gains of students' unions, do not lead me to suggest that we should opt out of the present system altogether, or that we should work towards some quite unattainable Utopia. But what it does lead me to make is a plea that those who are trying to change the present system of university government should do so with their eyes open.

# 6. the political challenge

Peter Scott

He stares at you from the dustjacket of his book on the Cuban revolutionary War in the window of the university book shop, placed there no doubt by some enterprising capitalist with a quick eye for a growing market. The red banner proclaims the free university or some other slogan, an incongruous dash of colour in the grey concrete world of the new university. The students discuss endlessly and turgidly theories of revolution, academic reform, alliance with the workers, examinations and authority, democracy and socialism with absolute seriousness. They plan their tactics as if they were hidden in some Andean "campo" instead of a new purpose built seminar room.

These trivia of a student revolt are more important than they seem. For it is a revolt in which attitudes and ideology and a vision of the future come before a programme of reform and the immediate demands of the students. You learn just as much about the causes and nature of this new radicalism among students by observing the red flags, and noting the interest in Cuban revolutionaries, and trying to capture the atmosphere of revolt, as by analysing demands for representation and the reform of examinations.

"Student power means the ability of the students' bloc to inflict, if necessary, sanctions of sufficient economic, social and political magnitude to force its opinions to be heeded." This definition of the aims of the new radical left among students is given by David Adelstein, a former president of the students' union at the LSE, in a pamphlet *Teach yourself student power*", published earlier this year. If it is an accurate description, student power is already a reality in some countries. In America the campaign of Senator Eugene McCarthy for the democratic nomination and the Presidency owed a lot in its early stages to the enthusiasm of students. In Europe too students are important; they are listened to, especially when they demonstrate in the streets, or occupy their universities. In France in May it was the widespread revulsion against the brutal way in which

the police broke up student demonstrations that triggered off the general strike that almost destroyed the Fifth Republic. The most stable regime that France had enjoyed since 1940, at least on the surface, was brought to the brink of the precipice by the protests of these student radicals dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism and bourgeois society. In the end bourgeois France survived, but the government is committed to a policy of reform of the universities.

In West Germany the SDS had not managed to extort concessions, but no one can ignore their existence after the demonstrations in West Berlin at Easter. The only result may be that the Social Democrats will be weakened and that the right-wing parties, especially the NPD will grow in strength. But it is still student power or a sort, even if its influence is almost entirely negative.

On the face of it what happens in Europe may seem irrelevant to student unrest in Britain. I do not believe it is so. There is more than a trace of emulation in what student radicals are saying and doing in this country. Perhaps student revolt here is a little synthetic, culled from newspapers and television. It is certainly doubtful whether students would have been so active and so confident in pressing their cause if they did not have the example of France and Germany constantly before their eyes.

Certainly Vice-Chancellors have been quick to appear conciliatory. The spectre of more serious violence has suddenly made some of them acutely aware of all those shortcomings in our universities that they never seemed to notice before. Backed by the threat of the growth of student radicalism, the campaign of the NUS for university reforms met with immediate success. Only two days after they launched their campaign, the Vice-Chancellors' committee meeting at Newcastle agreed to meet the NUS and discuss their proposals. Student power had gained its first modest but significant victory. One summer of student demonstrations in half a dozen universities has achieved more than many years of patient negoti-

ations at national and local level between university authorities and student representatives.

The reactions to this new militancy among students has been very mixed. Some, like Sir Edward Boyle, have seen it as the revolt of an idealistic generation against the empty empiricism and pragmatism of their parents; others, like Lord Alport, a former Tory Minister and a member of the court of Essex University, are less understanding and look on student revolt more in terms of a conspiracy, the work of small highly disciplined and politically motivated men. Others again, like some university Vice-Chancellors, are just conciliatory, even if they do not always realise exactly what the student want.

## political frustration

But to look as student revolt purely within the context of universities and colleges is to distort its true nature. Student power is not about education; it is about politics. It was born as much out of political as academic frustration. Many of today's radicals might have been trudging the streets canvassing for Harold Wilson four years ago. The seeds of student radicalism have sprung up in the fertile ground of disillusionment with what they consider the opportunism of the Labour Government. The intellectual development of many radicals was very similar; ardent supporters of the Labour club when they went to university in October, 1964, they soon became disillusioned and probably led those who split off from the Labour club and formed a left wing group of socialists that came more and more to disassociate itself from the Labour Party. It was out of these left wing groups that the Radical Student Alliance grew.

These radicals do not hide their concern for politics, and would almost certainly reject a view of student revolt that diagnosed it as a form of student trade unionism. In a pamphlet published by the Radical Student Alliance, *Education or examination*, Tom Fawthrop, a student

at Hull, writes: "No serious attack upon our education system could be satisfactory without mentioning Vietnam". It is a very revealing remark. To most of us the two problems are quite separate. He also writes: "In order to understand the present examination system one must comprehend its relationship to the education system as a whole, and beyond that to the total culture and society within which it functions". In a sentence, student power is not only about academic reform, but about social revolution as well.

The ideology of student power is not original. It is much easier to say what the radicals are against than what they are for. Their ideological position is still unformed. Of course there are a few students who have read the early works of Marx and all the books of Marcuse, especially social science students, who seem to figure prominently among the leaders of revolt. But just as significant is the veneration of Che Guevara and the Cuban revolution, however irrelevant the experiences and lessons of Latin America may seem in the industrial countries of Western Europe. To most of us the connection between the struggle of revolutionaries in Bolivia against the military regime of President Barrientos and the legitimate academic grievances of students in British universities is not at all clear. Perhaps there is an element of wishful thinking among the radicals; how much simpler the conflict would be if Dr. Christopherson, the Vice-Chancellor of Durham University and Chairman of the Vice-Chancellors' committee, really were an academic Barrientos, and the Metropolitan Police a British CRS.

## alienation

Perhaps the key word of any description of radical students is alienation. Partly this is a genuine feeling that our present society is depressingly materialistic and unjust, that conventionality and mediocrity and hypocrisy are hidden under the cloak of free speech and freedom; partly this is a pose. It is very doubtful how many people in Britain

today can wholeheartedly desire a revolution and the inevitable human suffering that this would involve; probably students, however addicted to revolution as a theoretical concept, are not among them. Beneath the determinist language and the Marxist phrases the student revolutionary is sometimes a romantic at heart. It is not revolution with all its hardship that is their true goal; what they seek is the alienation of the revolutionary who has rejected society and its hypocrisy.

There are some people who believe that the only thing that is wrong with students today is that they appear too often in the newspapers and on television; the result is that the irresponsible activities of a small minority are made to look like a genuine movement of protest. They agree with Lord Alport's analysis of student power, that it is all the work of a few students, without perhaps going quite as far and claiming that it is all a Communist plot. This is perhaps the view that some Vice-Chancellors take; students are excited by all this talk of revolution, but for most of them it is only a cult that will die naturally. All the authorities have to do is to keep their heads, be tolerant and let common sense prevail.

I believe that this view is mistaken. It is true that only a small minority of students genuinely believe in the need for revolution and have read the early works of Marx. But they are the leaders. Why? The reason is that many more students feel alienated from the world of their parents. In a speech at Enfield earlier in the summer Sir Edward Boyle remarked how in the 1930s young people had supported causes that many older people also supported with enthusiasm, like Spain or opposition to appeasement, but that now the causes of youth were only rarely supported by anyone else. It is a simplification, of course, but there is some truth in it. The typical rally to oppose American policy in Vietnam is made up mostly of young people, while the Back Britain campaign has managed to excite even less enthusiasm among the young than their more cynical parents.

There is also a feeling that the middle ground in politics has been ploughed over so much that it can produce no new crops. There is a widespread disillusionment with consensus politics, and it is clear that the Labour Party has lost many of its most enthusiastic supporters among the young. The present climate of politics cannot be ignored in a discussion of student revolt. As they never tire of telling us, the radicals are asking not only why cannot our universities correspond more closely to the ideal academic community, but also how can the ideals of political democracy be reconciled with the power politics of Vietnam?

Of course their academic grievances need to be considered. This is the form of the immediate debate even if their ideal is a basic re-ordering of society. Only a minority of students have ever involved themselves in politics, and the signs are that apathy with politics is growing as well as a drift towards extremism; for every student driven by frustration with consensus politics to take up the cause of revolution, there are probably five who simply lose their interest in politics altogether. Every revolt has its particular as well as its general causes.

## the art colleges

Art colleges are a good example. The grievances of students, which are shared also by some members of staff, are substantial and precise. The buildings in which they have to work are overcrowded and badly equipped compared with universities, and they feel that the local authorities which control the colleges and pay for their upkeep are often not sympathetic or even interested in the colleges. Certainly the readiness with which some local authorities turned to security guards and Alsatian dogs to coerce students who were occupying their colleges, does not seem to indicate a very close or harmonious relationship. No Vice-Chancellor would have dared to go that far in dealing with a student revolt.

Art students have detailed complaints about their syllabuses as well. They

claim that the academic qualifications needed to get into an art college—four G levels—are pointless, and that largely irrelevant academic material, such as art history, is included in courses to make them academically respectable. Some also resent the distinction between the diploma in art and design courses and vocational courses and believe that students should be allowed to move more easily from the study of one form of art, say graphic design to others like fine art.

These demands are opposed with good reasons. Entry qualifications are necessary because it is reasonable to expect even an artist to have a good general education; the academic parts of courses are intended to help those students who go on to teach art, for the diploma in art and design is recognised as a degree equivalent precisely because it includes subjects like the history of art. The critics of the students point out with some force that most art students end up in industrial design, not in the Royal Academy, and that the interests of the majority cannot be wholly sacrificed to the needs of a highly gifted minority.

But art students, especially those at Hornsey and Guildford, who occupied their colleges, have at least focussed attention on their grievances and started a serious debate that, but for their sit ins and demonstrations, might have been muted and fruitless. The Government has now accepted the need for the reform of art education in Britain. Student power has gained a well deserved victory, where the debates and discussions of their teachers and the experts had achieved nothing.

## the universities

In universities the case of the student protestors is less clear cut. This is partly because those in authority are on the whole liberal men, who are genuine believers in the principle of free speech and are prepared to listen and consider most reasonable demands. The other reason is that the students themselves are less sure of what they want. Their de-

mands vary from university to university and many demonstrations so far have been triggered off by some particular action of the authorities that the students considered unreasonable or repressive. But students demands can be divided into two main groups: student representation and academic reform. In theory radical students may want more student representation and so power, but in practice they do not always want to be tied to attending long and boring committee meetings. The revolutionary and the bureaucrat are only very rarely combined in the same person.

On academic reforms there is similar ambivalence. The examination system is the main object of the radicals' attack; but the alternative, some form of continuous assessment, is not welcomed by many students, who argue, almost certainly correctly, that this would involve a greater regimentation of their work and personal discipline. The truth seems to be that most students can see very clearly the inadequacies of the present system of examinations and they deplore the distortions it produces in the life of a university. Many young people come up to the university expecting to find honest debate and a genuine search after truth; instead they too often find what they consider authoritarian teaching that calls for little genuine dialogue between students and teacher, and an examination rat race. Who can blame them for being disappointed? The way out is not easy to find, but this is no excuse. Most students dimly feel that their teachers are often on their side over this. No solution after all can be found within the university, only palliatives. The fault is society's; it is society that demands that students must be graded like eggs; it is society that thrives on competition between men and not on their co-operation. In this sense Tom Fawthrop is right when he says there can be no satisfactory discussion of education without mentioning Vietnam. What students are now demanding are not piecemeal reforms and improvements in the structure of higher education, but its overthrow and the overthrow of the society that has made it necessary. They are not likely to be



appeased by palliatives, by more research grants, by better student unions and more say in how the university spends its allocation from the UGC. Their objections are moral, not practical.

The question that many people are anxiously asking is: can what happened in West Berlin at Easter and in Paris in May ever happen here? The only answer that can be given must be a cautious one. Maybe, but probably not next summer or the summer after that. In Germany the violence of the student revolt is partly a reaction against the violence of the country's past and the failure of many older people honestly to reject this nationalist and military past. In France the state of higher education was bordering on a scandal from the point of view of students, and the lecture system with its lack of any real dialogue between student and teacher dominated teaching, which had to take place often in overcrowded and inadequate buildings. None of this applies in Britain yet.

## likely reforms

On the most practical level the position of students will never be quite the same after the events of this year. The Utopian dreams of student power's romantic revolutionaries with their visions of a great left wing alliance of workers and students sweeping aside the drab conventionality of bourgeois society will probably never be realised. But the NUS will no doubt see that some at least of their proposals for student representation will be accepted by the Vice-Chancellors; students will probably be given more say in the affairs of their universities, the case against seems to have gone by default; university teachers will be more cautious before ignoring their students to find time for their research; the examination system may even be reformed, and more freedom of choice allowed to student to choose their syllabuses. None of these achievements should be sneered at. As well as all this, student power will exist, in the sense that students will always be listened to now, even if what they say is sometimes rejected.

It would be a very bold man who tried to sum up the importance of student revolt. There is always a temptation to regard it merely as the fashionable cult of the times, blown up by television and the press out of all proportion. On the other hand many men have appeared foolish later for failing to discern the seeds of revolutions. One thing is plain, and it is that student power will not be forgotten quickly. They have upset the ideological equilibrium of the age. They are questioning far more seriously than ever before, the words of Galbraith "the conventional wisdom of society". Their perhaps naive analysis of society's problems may seem a little ridiculous to some, especially those who had the same dreams once. It is clear that a lot of what they so fiercely desire is not compatible with the preservation of the comforts of civilisation. They are threatening us, not with armies, but with being wrong; they are attacking not our cities and our wealth, but our easy assumption of moral superiority. In the end it may not be so ridiculous. When the most able and best educated of students openly reject the established values and beliefs of society, when the majority do not complain of this and give their tacit support, at least the question has to be asked: **Why?**

# 7. change in the universities

## Stephen Hatch

Students have a long and sometimes heroic record of political militancy. In Russia they provided a constant source of opposition during the later years of the Tsarist regime; in Budapest and Warsaw they played leading parts in the events of 1966; in France they were prominent in the campaign against the Algerian war, and in the United States they helped to topple Syngman Ree. The list could be extended indefinitely. Student protest is thus not a special or surprising phenomenon. Because they are relatively uninvolved in society and because they tend to see the world in terms of general principles and ideals students frequently adopt a radical position in politics.

Within a world wide context the current wave of protests among British students is not particularly remarkable, as students in many countries have a long history of political involvement. However, in the light of British history it does seem to represent a new departure, for in the past British students have been marked by a lack of militancy. Until recently student politics in Britain meant debates in the Oxford Union: it did not mean militant demonstrations either inside or outside the universities, for British students, in so far as they did have anything to say, were content to use the legitimate channels of communication, whether the Oxford Union or the NUS. This is not to say that they did not participate in radical movements, but there was no distinctive student political consciousness, no sense that students could or should act as a body; and violence, when it occurred in universities, was of the "legitimate" kind associated with rags and bump suppers.

Consequently in seeking explanations for the current ferment among British students it may be instructive to reverse the question and ask why student militancy has hitherto been absent in this country. What are the characteristics of British society and of our system of higher education that previously inhibited the growth of student political movements, and what are the changes that are

now making British students less unusual in this respect? Before attempting to answer this question attention should be directed to one other rather special feature of contemporary student unrest which British students share with those in other countries, notably the United States, France and Germany. The demand for student power is not altogether a new one: it was given full expression in the medieval university of Bologna, while in the present century there have been important movements for student participation in university government in, for example, Argentina and Colombia. However in Europe and North America student movements have in the past been concerned for the most part with national political issues. It is really only with the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley that the structure, functions and government of universities have themselves been brought into question. Hence a second question that needs to be asked is why the sudden preoccupation with student power.

There is no single answer to either of these questions. Complementary answers can be advanced at a number of different levels, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to go into the whole range of possible explanations that have been advanced by one person or another, from more permissive child-rearing practices to the growth of sociology or the conspiracy theory advanced by *The Times*. However, it is worth distinguishing two sorts of contributory factors—those that arise from changes in the nature of universities and those arising from developments in the wider society.

Among writers who have discussed the latter type of explanation, some have emphasised the influence of deep seated changes in society. There is now, it has been said (C. Jencks and D. Riesman, *The academic revolution*, Doubleday, 1968), a greater gap and hence more conflict between the generations. A somewhat different interpretation suggests that the younger generation are not so much in conflict with the older generation as trying to implement the ideals which their elders profess but do not practice:

in support of this hypothesis it has been shown in America that radical students tend to come from liberal, professional families and to be among the academically more successful. Alternatively one can stress the importance of contemporary political developments. In Britain these certainly include the diffusion of ideas and techniques from America. Conspicuous in this context is the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, which showed how effective the sit in could be, at any rate in a not illiberal university milieu. Also important in Britain, and with its parallel in other countries, is disillusionment with the Labour Party. Until 1966 the Labour Party and earlier the CND did seem to many radical students to provide the possibility of changing society. Their ineffectiveness has made the direct action approach derived via Berkeley from the civil rights movement particularly attractive.

## university developments

But explanations of this kind are in essence only partial ones; they do not readily show why it is students rather than say apprentices who are in a state of disaffection, or why the focus is on student power. Although political developments may suggest why student unrest comes to a peak in one year rather than another, and deep seated social changes may give rise to conditions conducive to unrest, universities remain the arena within which conflict takes place and these extraneous forces find their expression. Any attempt to understand the conflict, or equally to seek remedies for it, must attend to what has been happening to the universities.

In discussing recent developments in higher education one constantly recurring distinction is between pre-Robbins and post-Robbins, and it would be tempting to suggest that the Robbins Report constitutes a crucial watershed, the present discontents having their origin in the changes arising from the report. But this would be an over simple view, for the Robbins Report was in many respects a conservative document. Though recom-

mending, and indeed leading to, a rapid increase of student numbers, the report envisaged few drastic changes in the form of higher education. Thus it would be wrong to over estimate the importance of recent changes: numbers have risen and institutions are now generally much larger, but British universities retain their distinctive features—a uniquely generous staff-student ratio of 1:8, a high proportion of students in residence (35 per cent) with relatively few living at home (18 per cent), readily available maintenance grants with in effect free tuition, and a very low rate of wastage (under 15 per cent). The proportion of working class students entering the universities (about a quarter) is high by European standards, but has not altered since before the war. Thus British universities students suffer none of the appalling conditions of their French counterparts, and the theory of the proletarianisation of the student body cannot readily be applied to them: rather they are still in a highly privileged position, which lends a paradoxical nature to their discontents. If deteriorating material conditions do stimulate unrest, then for Britain the worst is probably still to come, since the pressures for changing the favoured situation of the British university student towards one where the resources devoted to higher education are more thinly spread over a larger number already exist and will grow stronger; but as yet, save for the recent reduction in the grant increase, they have not worked their way down to the student.

## the collegiate system

Evidently if British universities have changed it is in rather more subtle ways. To help understand these it may help to contrast two alternative models of the university. The first is the traditional collegiate system: though no longer, if ever, to be found at Oxford and Cambridge in the ideal form described here, this still represents a distinctive and influential idea of a university. One of its special features is the division of the university into a number of smaller units, the colleges, which involves a

marked decentralisation of decision making. The college is responsible for admitting students, teaching them, accommodating them, and in large measure for their welfare and discipline. The tutorial system of teaching ensures a considerable amount of personal contact between senior and junior members: what is more, those who teach, select, discipline and administer the student are very largely drawn from one small and cohesive group—the fellows of the college.

Recruitment of students is characteristically based on lengthy interviews and personal recommendations from headmasters whom the college aims to know well. Thus fundamental to the collegiate system is a network of personal relationships and close knowledge of individuals, which enable the college to respond to the needs of individuals and to reconcile the individual to the college. In the last resort the deviant is expelled, but before this happens he will probably have had a number of *tete-a-tete* interviews with the appropriate officers of the college, during which he is likely to find it difficult to maintain an intransigent stance. Moreover, members of the college are bound together by a corporate loyalty, which springs naturally from the small size and wide scope of the institution, and is strengthened by symbolic expression in tradition and ceremony.

Another characteristic of the traditional collegiate system is its relationship to the world of employment. The Oxbridge colleges are self consciously elite institutions, whose role has been to socialise students for the performance of elite roles in society—*vide* the young gentleman attended by college servants and the non-deferential articulateness fostered by tutorials. Hence there has not been a sense of discontinuity between, on the one hand, college life and the more formal aspects of the education provided, and on the other hand entry into the more prestigious professions or administrative posts in government or industry. The gentlemanly role has been appropriate to both. The short essay type examination system too has developed qualities appropriate to such occupations, and if

exams did ever seem to produce an unfair verdict, the student could always fall back upon the testimony of his tutors, who because of their close knowledge of the student, could make a full and convincing assessment of him.

## the modern university

Contrast all this with the alternative model of the modern university. Departments teach and generally admit the student to the university. Teaching is mostly by lecture and seminar, and the teaching system does little to promote close relationships between staff and students, except perhaps in the case of the more articulate students. Moreover the other aspects of the student's life which involve contact with the university authorities—discipline, welfare, accommodation, etc.—generally bring him into contact with a quite different set of people from those who teach him. The two groups of staff may not even know each other: indeed the former are likely to have a lower position in the university hierarchy than the latter. Outside the teaching situation much of his contact with the university will be through administrative functionaries, who are likely to deal with him in a routinised, bureaucratic way. In sum, the student is now more of a customer than a member of a community.

The modern university has in recent years made every effort to avoid being a 9 to 5 institution. Thus few students are integrated into the local community in the way they were when, as in the past they lived at home: though in Scotland where they still live at home there has been very little unrest. Attendance at the modern university involves the student very fully in the role of student: unlike most people who are involved at many points with society, through politics, sport, religion and a variety of other interests, the student's associations are almost entirely with other students—his role is a total one; yet at the same time he is only weakly integrated into the university itself.

And, except in the case of the techno-

logical universities, which have been little marked by student unrest, the university does not point very clearly towards the world of employment. The one thing into which it does socialise its students is the groves of academe: but this option is possible only for the academically more successful. The prime allegiance of the staff tends to be towards their discipline rather than the institution, for it is to proficiency in this (gained by research and writing) that they owe their livelihood and their status in society.

## burden of teaching

Likewise in orienting themselves towards the university and the wider society the point of reference of staff is tending more and more to be the fellow practitioners of their discipline. All this has important consequences for what is offered to students in the way of instruction. In so far as students are not regarded simply as a nuisance (*vide* the common phrase "burden of teaching"), the academic will want to initiate his students into his discipline. In consequence the content of the courses he provides will be determined by his idea of what is needed to gain mastery of the discipline. This in turn will be determined *sui generis* according to a self-sustaining internal logic, by the practitioners of the discipline. There is very little room in this scheme of things for responding to wider criteria derived from some concept of the needs of the student or the needs of society. Indeed the applied subjects which are more sensitive to such criteria are generally accorded a low status. These tendencies sharpen the discontinuity between the university and the world of employment. Only for future academics is this discontinuity absent, which is one reason why graduate study, the gateway to the groves of academe, is becoming so popular.

The one currency that work and the modern university have in common is the degree. But without the supplement of the kind of personal recommendation available in the collegiate system, degrees provide only a somewhat arbitrary

and unreliable assessment of the individual against essentially academic criteria. American evidence suggests that there is remarkably little correlation between university assessments and success in subsequent occupations, even when the university course has a vocational component (D. P. Hoyt, "The relationship between college grades and adult achievement; a review of the literature. ACE research report No. 7 Iowa City: American college testing programme, 1965). What British evidence there is supports the same conclusion. Hence the modern student is likely to be engaged in studies which have rather little direct relevance to what he is likely to do after leaving university. Little involved in the university as an entity or, through anticipatory socialisation in the wider society, he finds himself in a sort of limbo, detached from and critical of both.

But what, it may be objected, has all this to do with student unrest? There is nothing new about departmentally organised universities, and in any case there have been student protests at Oxford and Cambridge. How therefore can recent happenings be explained in terms of a distinction between the traditional collegiate and the modern university? *En passant* it is worth noting that the protests at Oxford and Cambridge followed from protests at other British universities rather than *vice versa*; they involved a relatively very small minority and tended anyway to take a traditional political form (of Suez for example): the one significant manifestation of the demand for student power was not against the college authorities, but against the proctors at Oxford, and the issue at stake was an anachronistic relegation no one was prepared to defend. But to answer the question properly a number of additional factors need to be brought into the equation. These concern the transition from an elite to a democratic form of higher education that affects Oxford and Cambridge as much as the newer universities.

One of these is the growing importance of the university as the avenue through which the student must pass in order to

enter the more desirable occupations. Although the universities have expanded rapidly the competition to enter them has become even more intense: a lower proportion of those with two A levels now enter university than ten years ago. Schools and parents are well aware of these general tendencies: hence the number of university entrants is one of the main criteria for judging a school's success. Throughout his secondary education the student will have been under considerable pressure to achieve university entrance, so that the university will have become to many a promised land, the repository of golden, if quite confused, expectations. On arrival many will find that these expectations are disappointed, and during their sojourn at university are likely to discover that the academic ladder up which they have so diligently plodded is leading them on to a lonely eminence from which there is no congenial way forward. In these ways the educational system is increasingly raising expectations without offering ready means of satisfying them. This is the classic recipe for revolution.

## academic professionalisation

A tendency of no less significance concerns the orientation of the staff towards the university. The increasing emphasis on professionalisation has already been touched on in characterising the modern university: it is something that has affected many occupations. Among university teachers it is compounded by strong American influences and the increasing size and competitiveness of departments: publications, for example, become steadily more important. Hence the academic is nowadays more likely to be a "cosmopolitan" rather than a "local". The local is a man deeply committed to his institution: the cosmopolitan has a more diverse and fragmented role, oriented first to his discipline, and involved less in his institution than in writing for the press, attending conferences, appearing on television, working for the government, advising industry and so on. For such a person the university tends to be little more than a

convenient base from which to carry on a variety of professional activities. The growth of this frame of reference has two significant consequences. The student is given rather a low rating, while cohesion and consensus among the staff are weakened. Hence it has contributed to the erosion of the traditional pattern of authority in the university.

In the past the typical department was small and had a single professor. Whether through affection, deference or fear the professor was in a position to exercise a fairly powerful control over the staff of his department, and the professors in a somewhat oligarchical manner ran the university. Nowadays many departments have several professors and are likely to have factional groupings within them. And although non-professorial staff are rather better represented in the decision making processes, these have become remote from the youngest staff, while the hold of the professors over young staff has weakened. There is a growing body of researchers not integrated at all with the academic structure. Hence the junior staff have been ready in many cases to side with the students, and in some protests their moral and intellectual support has been influential.

Loss of cohesion among staff is only one expression of a more profound alteration in the nature of the university. Twenty years ago Sir Walter Moberly, the then chairman of the UGC, wrote about how "the university should have a recognisable and conscious orientation. This should take the form of a common moral outlook or *Wletanschauung*, which sees the challenge of our time in personalist rather than technical terms, which, though not specifically Christian, is christianised . . ." (*Crisis in the university*, SCM Press, 1948). A transmogrified echo of this claim is today heard from some of the radical students, for example: "The 'Free University' . . . should be . . . committed to a set of values, those values which espouse the cause of human liberation from all forms of tyranny—political, economic and social values which serve to maximise the collective self determination of our lives, by the abolition

of all forms of class society" (T. Fawthrop, *Education of examination*. Radical Students' Alliance, 1968). But nowadays such assertions that the university should occupy a definite moral position tend to be heard only off stage. In fact the members of the university, whether staff or students, are not united in the pursuit of certain moral goals, and are held together by limited agreements on ends rather than means.

In the past it was widely accepted that the student should be initiated into a specific moral and cultural order, and this goal provided a legitimate basis for the conduct of the university's affairs. This is no longer possible for today's students are more diverse both in their backgrounds and in their post university destinations, while the activities of the staff and the functions of the university have become more varied and fragmented. Though universities in Britain have not yet reached the condition of Clark Kerr's "multi-university", the trend is clearly in that direction. Hence the student finds himself in a much more open institution, where he is left to work out his own preoccupations and interests in the company of his peers. This is in accord with the greater freedom and independence demanded by the younger generation, but it leaves unanswered questions about solidarity and cohesion that are of fundamental importance, not only to universities but to all plural societies which embrace a multitude of individuals with different and perhaps conflicting values and interests. What sorts of justification can be given for the organisation and functioning of the university? This question is raised in an acute form by the student unrest, and until a measure of consensus can be achieved about the right answers, the university will remain a centre of conflict. So far the protests have not done more than raise this question and score one or two limited victories; they have settled very little—generally speaking the issues at stake are now being considered by committees—and during the coming year new confrontations are bound to take place. Both radical students and university authorities have been defining their

positions and preparing for future conflict. Hence more demonstrations and protests can be expected before a new equilibrium is reached.

## a new equilibrium?

Can one say what such a new equilibrium will be like? The present situation is rich in latent possibilities. At one extreme the universities could be overwhelmed by a right wing "know nothing" backlash. The Conservative Party now contains politicians only too ready and capable of making demagogic capital out of the most sordid sentiments, Demands for withdrawing the grants of protesting students have already been heard, and these could be extended into a wider assault on academic freedom and intellectual values. Such a possibility should not be dismissed too lightly if a Conservative government comes to power. At the opposite extreme it is conceivable that the universities might subside into a formless disorder, palpitating continuously with incoherent histrionics, deciding nothing and achieving nothing. More probably and more hopefully the present discontents will lead to changes in the universities that will enhance their role in society.

In analysing the changes demanded by students it would be a mistake to become bemused by the simplistic appeal of the slogan "student power", for the unrest embodies certain quite specific criticisms of university practices. Universities are remarkably conservative institutions: unlike most large organisations they carry out very little evaluation of their own procedures, partly because it would be too difficult to agree on the criteria to be adopted. In the past there were few endogenous pressures for change: internally universities operated on the principle of *laissez faire*. In particular this has meant that the departments go their own way, as no one else in the university is accepted as competent to criticise them in their own field. Teaching methods, curricula and examinations have all too easily been taken for granted, and often seem to have a

large non-rational, ritual component. In future they will have to be justified to students, and this could have some most salutary consequences.

If these developments lead to the development of rationale of university courses and methods of assessing them more clearly related to the needs of the individual and of society, the universities will have gone some of the way towards establishing a new legitimacy for themselves.

The other direction in which a new legitimacy must be sought concerns the method of making decisions. In the past the university teacher's authority was of a paternal kind: though cemented in collegiate institutions by close personal relationships, its justification lay in morality and tradition rather than in the consent of those taught, or in any concept by the taught of their own interests. This paternal type of authority cannot be sustained in the modern university, and much of the present troubles owe their origin to the fact that the universities are in a stage of transition from one type of authority to another; to use a 17th century analogy, from "divine right" to "contract". The new type of authority will have to involve students in the making of decisions and in bearing some of the responsibility for them.

Neither the reform of course methods and content nor the involvement of students in decision making can be brought about in a day, for there is a considerable gap between enunciation of the principle and evolution of workable practice. Methods of evaluation, for instance, probably involve numerous technical issues. But both changes should be welcomed as more than simply solutions to university problems; the former because it could restore and revive the educational functions of the university, and the latter because it presents, in a context as favourable as any for finding solutions, the central modern problem of participation and involvement in an impersonal, bureaucratic society.

universities should develop a new legitimacy for themselves by paying more attention to the needs of the individual and of society be taken just as a demand for limited vocational courses, or as an assertion that there is nothing wrong with society, only with the universities, i.e. as a denial of the university's role as a critic of society. To say that a university education should be relevant to society is quite different from saying it should be uncritical. The point is that in lending excessive emphasis to narrowly academic goals the universities have been neglecting their educational functions: in so doing they have been failing to point towards a radical and creative role for the intelligentsia. The proper job of the universities is not to unfit their students for life in society, but to teach them how to change society.

Finally, let not the suggestion that the



# 8. reason and reaction in student politics

Trevor Fisk

"I scarcely had one single care in the world. I had no doubt about harmonious answers which could and would be given to every question. But suddenly this felt necessity of answering these questions for myself. So I shall go on where I started from—sudden complexity, self generated."

These are the words in which the young Russian communist, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, describes his growing doubts at the ideas taught him in his youth at "Zima Junction". They illustrate a common theme in the so called "student revolt" throughout the world. In both communist and western society the traditional role of education, both at school and college level, has been to produce students, in the words of Sir Eric Ashby: "ready to take responsibility for preserving a set of values which he felt no need to question; obedient to principles, constitutions, traditions."

But individual aspirations, awakened by improving mass school education and manpower requirements in technological society has fused to produce a new type of student—one, again in Ashby's words: "educated for insecurity, who can innovate, improvise, solve problems with no precedent. He must have expert knowledge . . . also the confidence which comes from community living".

The modern student, whether engaged in "general academic" subjects or more directly vocational training, realises that he is not preparing for later life in a community where the demands of his job, the values of his immediate society or, selfishly, his own status are certain and constant. He not only has a duty to absorb the current state of knowledge and expertise in his field. In his education "for insecurity" he must reason why. Otherwise he, and the community of which he will be a member, are doomed to be an intellectual light brigade charging to self destruction.

In our all embracing questioning of our academic courses, the way our colleges are run, or of wider social and political issues, we are not then being inherently

anti-social. Because society now requires this questioning we are in fact serving its best interests.

But equally "this felt necessity of answering these questions for myself" contains dangers. It is all too easy when faced with insecurity to seek refuge in simplistic "new answers" or in totalistic theories which dissolve insecurity in doctrinal faith. It is too easy for students to jump to ideas which, however different from the status quo, are not necessarily any better; and then to defend these new assumptions against further challenge. Trevelyan may have been right that "intellectual curiosity is the lifeblood of civilisation", but student arrogance could be its leukemia. Different solutions are not *per se* better ones. Substitution is not progress. "Changes fill the cup of alteration with divers liquors" but not all are health giving and some may actually be poisonous.

## romantic radicals and reactionary revolutionaries

For this reason it is essential to distinguish correctly between reason and reaction in student politics. The ideas put forward by bodies like the Radical Student Alliance and the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation are in fact reactionary. They attract instant glamour because they sound different, appear "romantic", resolve all doubt in the easy acceptance of a simple "faith", which once accepted renders complex educational and social questions capable of simple, dogmatic answers. Hence the ability of Tom Fawthrop, in the *RSA Examinations or education*, after an analysis which contains some valid points, to dismiss the whole question in the words: "It may seem a long way from the examination hall to the paddy fields of Vietnam", but both are in fact simply symptoms of "western monopoly capitalism".

Because the real problems confronting students and society are more complex, the real answers are similarly far more difficult to find than the romantics would assume. If, in outlining some of those

problems and showing the patent absurdity of the RSA/RSSF "solutions" this article appears largely negative, it is because ultimate answers cannot either be presented in so short a space of indeed emanate from one person. They must come rather from a total analysis within the student movement and our generation at large, must result from painstaking and exhaustive examination not only of the *status quo* inherited from previous generations, but of every apparently simple alternative we discover for ourselves. Before we destroy or confront anything we must be certain we have something better with which to replace it.

The change in the essential purpose of British higher education over recent decades described in Sir Eric Ashby's LSE oration quoted earlier, has not been matched by a correspondingly rapid change in the basic assumptions underlying either modern college courses or college administrative structure. There is a growing strain between actual social needs and the principles implicit in our educational system. The occasions when such disturbances are politically inspired apart, it is not surprising that this strain snaps at times into open dispute between student and teacher, student and teacher together against the college "system" or academic authorities against the state. The Hornsey College of Art affair and public demand for greater "accountability" by universities are both exemplary of a gradual change in the basic nature of education and its pattern of government.

## ten point plan

In the National Union of Students "ten point plan" of 13 June, top priority was given to finding new techniques of community based on the actual contemporary college situation, with its large numbers, budgetary complications and extended government structure. The discussions held over the summer of 1968 between the NUS and the committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, now being paralleled within individual institutions,

have shown just how complex is the business of finding new definitions of "community" within the framework of the modern college, to replace the dying concept prevalent in the former "small scale" institutions.

Those who style themselves "radical" and "revolutionary" once again resolve these complexities into their simplistic dogma. Since "college government" is part of the bureaucratic opposition it must be confronted. Progress can only come via a power struggle in which students emerge as the final victors in "control" of their colleges. In essence this view is truly reactionary in its belief that the age of "big" educational structures can only be "humanised" by a return to the semi-anarchistic informality of old. Rather than restoring the humane spirit of community within mass universities by testing new ideas, they wish to hark back to a lost, romantic notion of community. Their aim is not reform forwards but revolution backwards.

Just as there is strain between the reality of modern college life and the traditions of regulating it, so there is tension between the tasks demanded of higher education and its own traditional theories of learning.

The university tradition evolved in a feudal society from which it was set apart, autonomous, to advance knowledge independent of considerations of utility, and to instil in those training for the "old professions" established values and skills. Two ideas have survived from these origins to become embedded in modern academic thought—the assumption of the right to determine social values for society and the right to do so with no interference from society.

Hence the difficulties of the modern academic, working within this heritage, to reconcile himself to public interference in the university, to ensure that higher education serves society more directly rather than as its intellectual judge and jury.

This concept was reinforced, as recog-

nised by J. C. Dancy in his brilliant 1965 address to the British Association, by the effects in educational thinking of the "romantic reaction" to the "industrial revolution". It rejected any attempt to gear study to social and career needs, seeing all practical knowledge as anti intellectual, transient and debasing. At school level it sired the public school tradition, carried over into the grammar schools, of platonic mental and physical excellence. In higher education it produced the nonsense snobbery of arts versus science, pure science versus applied science, technological over technical skill.

The absurdity inherent in this theory was exposed by Bernard Shaw's 'Enry Straker: "Very nice sort of place, Oxford, for people that like that sort of place. They teach you to be gentlemen there. In the polytechnic they teach you to be an engineer". Seventy years later we still confuse which is really man, which is superman.

As students most of us judge our courses on two criteria: value to our later careers and opportunity for self development. The inherent theory of university education totally denies the first criterion, and where partially conceded asserts that "career value" is a matter for academic not social judgment. It accepts the second criterion but judges "development" opportunity from a "subject centred" rather than "student centred" viewpoint.

It should not be beyond our wits to seek new patterns of course beyond this artificial conflict between academic and vocational values. Similarly it ought to be possible to work out new relationships between "university" and "state" which neither gives the latter over centralised authority nor the former the pompous assumption of determining "academically" what society wants.

Here again the views of "radicals" and "revolutionaries" are depressingly conformist. Rather than facing up to the search for advances beyond these immediate conflicts they assert the need to opt

for one side or the other. They are for the old idea of anarchistic college community against the *status quo*, for, curiously academic against career values, for the "free university" against society. Rather than standing out for progress to new ideas, they embody the ultimate absurdities of the education theory inherent in our public grammar schools and higher education. If a harsh judgment, this is a justifiable one.

The romantic reaction referred to above produced the idea of "liberal", "intellectual", "non-technical" education, of a "new class" of intellectuals superior to its "practical" proletariat. It also, and this is directly relevant, fathered two great political movements—the "right wing" statism and "left wing" anarco-syndicalism". Both wings were Utopian in their search for progress outside rather than within technological advance. Both were "romantic" in their development of race, nation or class myths. Both were "reactionary" in their faith in the creation of "pure" community in which the chosen class, race or nation would dominate.

## dangerous dogma

The RSA and RSSF are in this tradition. They are Utopian in the sense of one recent press description of their stimulus: "One of the basic motivations of the adherents of student power is hostility towards contemporary technological society". Not to the evils of that society, a reformist position, but to that society as such. They are romantic in their identification of themselves as the new student class, a view easily, though somewhat mistakenly, confirmed by reading Herbert Marcuse. Students are a special political class because they are "the only adults not absorbed into the productive sphere". They alone can form "that enlightened elite" which can define "truth and falsehood" and decide for society "*who is to be tolerated*". They have the same right then to dictate to society as Hitler's master race and Marx's vanguard of the proletariat. The acceptance by any student of such totalistic dogma would be pathetic if it were not also dangerous.

They are "reactionary" in their demand to restore "liberal education", university freedom", and, in Dick Atkinson's (LSE) words "the *restoration* of control to visible groups".

These attitudes naturally spill over from the field of educational reform to wider social questions. The problems of breakdown in campus "community" is only a microcosm of greater problems in society at large. Every advanced society, whatever its political structure, tends as a factor of growth to bureaucratic and impersonalise functions, whether in politics, public administration, industry or communications. There is an obvious need, obvious despite the column inches devoted to proving it, to find techniques of "humanising" technological development. Shortly before his death, Robert Kennedy wrote: "Every generation has its central concern. Today's young people have chosen for theirs the dignity of the individual human being. They demand a political system which restores a sense of community among mankind."

If that is our central concern, it is a somewhat self centred one, seeing that outside our few technologically developed countries the old problems of race, poverty, disease are still "central". But, accepting the pre-occupation, we must, as on college problems, be intellectually honest in defining our aims and means. If we are to face the task of defining the boundaries of public investigation, manipulation and control of the individual, to find new techniques of individual participation in community, we cannot afford to enter the race shackled with any attitudes that are utopian or romantic.

The political reliance of the RSA and RSSF on a curious blend of marxism and anarcho-syndicalism, which Marx spent most of his time attacking, not supporting, is irrelevant to this next step forward. The social ills central to our concern are as much the product of marxism as of conservatism.

We must possibly take a fresh look at control of the mass media, of work place-

ment, of social attitudes to non-work in an age where technology will produce leisure, of individual participation in politics and industry, of local community facilities, of town planning, of legal redress against bureaucracy, of bringing the humane personal consideration into impersonally benevolent state welfare, of placing national problems in global context.

Emmett John Hughes' *America the visible* is no less prophetic for his own involvement in the eminently short sighted 1962-60 Eisenhower administration. In it he apologises to his son as if writing in 1976: "That earlier peril—the economic peril, the relatively simple crisis of want—we did discern and meet in time. The later peril—the political peril, the more ambiguous crisis of hope—proved too elusive. We did not know in truth where to proceed nor how to rally."

There is one sure way we will not rally and advance. That is if we intellectually polarise all issues into inevitable options: technological or human advance, the individualistic anarchy of the RSSF or monolithic centralism. We must learn to marry opposites not divorce them. The simplistic confrontation of college authorities, social encroachment on academic freedom, economic need on study freedom, technological advance, bureaucratic administration; each is like throwing the bath water out to save the baby before you've either seen how deep it is or whether the baby can swim. Political Luddism is the last resort of those who dislike systems because they cannot work them.

Equally this task of advance through conflicting ideas to new ones cannot be achieved in practical terms by the politics of confrontation, advanced by RSA and RSSF, be it peaceful or violent. Their "theory of confrontation" is a policy of war not treaty. We cannot rally in confrontation. Those who prefer to keep the best in both sides, whilst moving to new positions, must be reformers, not revolutionaries.

Nor can we rally in unreason. Tragically

it is too easy to despair of reason, of discussion, of negotiation, of marrying diverse ideas. But whether the apostles of unreason take the form of Enoch Powell, of Governor Wallace, of Dr Vorster, of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, or more domestically of rioting in Grosvenor Square or campus "confrontation", they are all essentially denying any real chance of rallying or finding where to proceed. Once we lose faith in rational argument and negotiation we are on the long road back to the jungle where our ancestors resolved all dispute by clubbing one another to death. Student politics must decide whether it is for reason or unreason, progress or decay. Above all, it needs the intellectual integrity to recognise which is which, to accept not deny the complexity of the issues involved.

If we too are motivated by Yevtushenko's "Sudden complexity self generated" perhaps we should have the honesty to think all problems through and follow the example he sets later in the same poem: "Uncle Volodya pushed his glass away. 'Nowadays,' he said, 'we all behave as if we were a sort of philosopher. It's the times we live in. People are thinking. Where, what and how—the answers don't come running. You live in Moscow; things are clearer there; tell me all about it, explain it to me'. And I think that I was right, my uncle all attention, as if the truth and I were personal friends, to answer peacefully: 'I'll tell you later'." Student radicals are just as much the product of the old ideas lingering in the contemporary world as are those they seek to oppose.

The student who really believes in reform must be prepared to look beyond the cliches of either group. We must support reason and negotiation. We must face the job of examining all educational and social ills without adopting elitist doctrinal and arrogant creeds that blind us to the real answers.



# young fabian group

The Young Fabian Group exists to give socialists not over 30 years of age an opportunity to carry out research, discussion and propaganda. It aims to help its members publish the results of their research, and so make a more effective contribution to the work of the Labour movement. It therefore welcomes all those who have a thoughtful and radical approach to political matters.

The group is autonomous, electing its own committee. It co-operates closely with the Fabian Society which gives financial and clerical help. But the group is responsible for its own policy and activity, subject to the constitutional rule that it can have no declared political policy beyond that implied by its commitment to democratic socialism.

The group publishes pamphlets written by its members, arranges fortnightly meetings in London, and holds day and weekend schools.

Enquiries about membership should be sent to the Secretary, Young Fabian Group, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1; telephone 01-930 3077.

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