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After Student Protest, What University Reforms?*

Student protest 1969-style is a major world-wide phenomenon of our time, one whose effects historians and other scholars will long ponder. The flappers of the 1920's, the campus radicals of the 1930's, the "beats" of the 1950's — all seemingly had slight influence and with few ripples were absorbed into the mainstream of society. They were rebels without a cause, or so it would appear. Yet James Dean in his time meant something to a segment of youth who watched on screen this prodigal son veering away from accepted mores and values, searching for answers in a troubled world he inherited but did not make. And the "beats" of all kinds meant something to another growing segment of young people who watched individualistic and bold prodigal sons and daughters do their thing, express their agonizing search in weird and contradictory ways: some in a return to simple folk music, others in wearing long hair and unkempt clothing, others in making raucous noise and engaging in agitated dancing, still others reading to each other way-out poetry, others rioting in bust-outs at vacation resorts, and still others seeking escape through LSD and other drug "trips." The guises were many, the subterfuges large, the escape alleys multitudinous. Every rebel has a cause, if he can only articulate it. The inarticulate ones thresh about, like Prometheus-bound, showing by their anti-social behavior what they cannot say in words. If one could speak, this is what I think he'd say to his parents, government and society:

> I loved you as a child and I love you now. But I have grown beyond you and you don't see me as I am or the world as it is. The tragedy is that I can't reach you and you can't reach me. We don't communicate and yet what I want to say is so simple, so simple and so bold that it hurts you to listen — and because it hurts you, you turn away. I don't want to live as you do in affluence while so many others live in poverty. I don't want to move about freely upward and onward, as you want me to do, while others are not free to move at all. I don't want to be a good and quiet and safe citizen while others are no citizens at all.

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*Following is the text of a lecture presented at The University of Calgary on July 28, 1969.

> I don't like this war in Vietnam and I don't like the draft which forces me to die in this war. I don't like our government throwing up this com munist-menace screen behind which open debate is not permitted and free choice is limited. I don't like this mask behind which the military get their way in money and power. I don't like this barricade of fear behind which our affluence grows. I don't like this excuse behind which minorities are kept down as a permanent underclass. Don't throw it up to me because rebels of previous generations did not find these concerns worth protesting against and their ideals worth fighting for. My generation is different. We are awake. We care. We are concerned. There are more of us now — some 23 million young Americans between ages 18 and 24. We are a powerful minority. And by 1975 we will become the majority. We of the younger generation want to extend to all the good life which our economy and our technology can achieve. We want to do "our thing" in changing the world. We know we can't do it everywhere or all at once, but we are starting where we are, here in colleges and universities, first for free speech, then for social involvement, then to limit university complicity in war research, and then in having a voice in university affairs. It is not the university we want to tear down when we have sit-ins and building take-overs; we want to be heard and heeded and we have learned that civil disobedience is the last resort of conscience against unjust acts and attitudes. It is not moral license we want when we ask for freer rules and less restricted dormitory access; we are more interested to weaken at its most stringent points the authoritarian hold universities have over our personal lives. We don't want to control our colleges when we ask for more relevant courses, less rigid teaching methods and examinations, and more contact with our brightest professors; we want our colleges to be better tuned to the world as it is and to our needs as they are.
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> We are told that we are the best prepared, best educated, most talented students ever produced in this country. Whether or not this is true, our generation is a generation that found itself. We are sensitized and we are radicalized. We have a cause and we are going to make a difference.

If this portrait of student radicalism seems too idealistic, altruistic, over-stated, and over-drawn, I refer you to several sources from which I took this composite picture, chiefly the special magazine issues of *Fortune,* January, 1969, and *The Atlantic,* of November, 1965. That many here can find fault with such a picture of the student protest movement, I have no doubt. Indeed, the reaction to student protest has mounted. The public has grown angry. Many believe that student radicalism has done more harm than good, that it has provoked stronger and more vocal conservative reaction, which is the very thing it has been against. Revolutions often run to excess and produce reaction. Student protest helped topple two powerful presidents — Charles DeGaulle of France and Lyndon B. Johnson in the United States. Their successors are no more liberal and the new United States administration is obviously more conservative. Student protest has helped to elect a growing number of reactionary politicians to city, state, and federal posts. Student protest caused the resignation of a significant number of generally considered competent college and university administrators, since succeeded by hard liners in some cases. There is also another looming reaction. College and university student protest has touched off less publicized discord among secondary school pupils, potentially more dangerous because they are more numerous, less mature, and more volatile.

Student action has evoked legislative reaction on the federal and state levels. The period of indecision and listening to students seems over. The backlash is aimed at stopping student protest excesses. Punitive measures, beyond cutting off loans and scholarship aid to student protestors, now involve criminal action. The host of new state laws, some still in debate and others recently passed, range from admonition to sharp severity. Oklahoma provides for up to 10 years in prison for inciting a campus riot. Other states will imprison for up to 5 years a convicted non-student agitator on campus. West Virginia has given its law officers sweeping power to quell campus riots anywhere by any means. Indiana's governor recently reminded the trustees of the state's university system that they might be replaced for non-compliance with existing anti-campus riot laws.[1]

As to faculty backlash, one of the best spokesmen is Sidney Hook, professor of philosophy at New York University. He views student protest as a serious threat to academic freedom. Hook's analysis[2] is as follows: Black militants demand dismissal of allegedly racist or unsympathetic professors. Black militants also want control of black studies as a separatist movement. By capitulation to these demands, universities like Cornell, UCLA, Harvard, and others have set a dangerous precedent for similar demands from white radical students. If this capitulation continues, no professor can feel safe from dismissal, academic disciplines can have no integrity, academic freedom will die, and universities will have become political footballs. Still worse, inroads from the radical right, leading to intolerable civil war and forcing the states or the federal government to intervene.

This trend bodes ill for the future of higher education. The real power to curb student violence lies more with the faculty, Hook says, than it does with the administration or the police. Faculties which should have backed legal action against lawbreaking students and non-students have instead run scared, have temporized and have mistakenly bought peace by capitulation. Because of this softness they will inevitably be pressed harder by unreasonable radicals whose appetities are whetted by a weak and permissive response. Hook charges that Harvard's capitulation was the Munich of American higher education; Cornell was its Pearl Harbor.

Faculty apologists are wrong, Hook says, in contending that if adults were aroused over social injustice then students would not be. Government concern over injustices, he points out, has never been greater than it has been during the present period of student unrest. His answer to H. Rap Brown's contention that "violence is as American as cherry pie" is that the Boston Tea Party is over, the Revolutionary

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[1]*Time,* June 13, 1969.

[2]Interview with Sidney Hook, "The Real Crisis on the Campus," *U.S. News and World Report,* LXVI, No. 20 (May 19, 1969), pp. 40-44.

War is won, and we have since developed ballot procedures to settle grievances and to effect change. Those who condone student violence simply because radical students are "concerned" had better not forget that "concerned" Nazi students in the 1930's harassed and ousted Jewish and liberal professors. Nor does Hook accept New Left philosopher Herbert Marcuse's contention that authority in today's society can only be changed by overthrowing it. Hook's reply is that Marcuse is a Prussian type who believes in absolute truth and that his particular absolute is that people should be forced to be free. Hook prefers democratic debate and compromise which may bring change at a slower and more continuous pace but is surer of acceptance because of its wider support.

Of course, says Hook, we must listen to students who are trying to say something, but not out of the barrel of a gun. Their demonstrated might does not guarantee that they are right. Nor is it true that students have an excess of virtue while their elders are all intellectually dishonest. To expect instant transformation of all social ills is juvenile. The same dissidents would have objected to the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, and to every other advance on the ground that they did not go far enough. The fact is that changes are occurring in the direction which concerned students and faculty want. Reasonable debate can hurry these reforms. Disruptive confrontation can only provoke conservative reaction. Citing Lewis Feuer's book, *The Conflict of Generations,*[3] Hook points out that most world student movements have in fact aided the forces of reaction.

The battle can yet be won, says Hook, if faculties will stop running scared and will rationalize the debate so as to find a middle ground between irrational student destruction and repressive public reaction.

While Hook speaks for those academics bent on curbing excessive student activism, Harold Taylor, former president of Sarah Lawrence College in New York, has raised his voice in favor of student radicalism. A free-lance teacher, lecturer, and consultant, he has been on many compuses across the country, has talked with many students, and has been as close to the cutting edge of the student protest movement as anyone who is over 30 can be. Taylor's analysis[4] goes something like this: For decades colleges and universities have so pursued money, power, research, public influence, expansion, and organization that they have neglected their chief clientele, the students, and have forgotten their chief concern, to help solve human problems. They have become educationally bankrupt, says Taylor, and concerned students, finding themselves without teachers to whom to turn, have turned to each other

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[3]Lewis Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations; The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).

[4]Harold Taylor, *Students without Teachers: The Crisis in the University* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1969).

over issues of war, peace, race, and poverty. The crisis of the university, writes Taylor, is one of neglect, a failure to realize that students are the living energy through which the university is joined to society and that it is through students' understanding and active involvement that society's problems are examined and solved.

Taylor believes that the silent generation of the 1950's was not silent among themselves. The most sensitive read the avant-garde literature of protest then available. They noted the anti-communist posture of the cold war, watched McCarthyism at work, saw Robert Oppenheimer crucified, became sensitive to poverty and prejudice, and found no hope in Clark Kerr's concept of the multiversity where senior faculty busied themselves with research-related war work, and where undergraduate teaching was left to harried graduate teaching assistants. While the universities were pursuing prestige, power, and money; while they were busy supporting the establishment; while they were continuing to admit the haves and to screen out the have-nots — concerned young people broke off their irrelevant studies to sit in at segregated lunch counters in North Carolina, join freedom rides to Alabama, help register Negro voters in Mississippi, teach in freedom schools in Georgia, go on peace rallies to Washington, tutor ghetto children, enter the Peace Corps, participate in VISTA, and work in Community Action Programs. Concern over poverty and empathy with the Negro protest movement sparked their social consciences. The Vietnam War and the draft ignited that spark to radical action. Sometime in the late 1960's as their numbers mounted to 30 million in high schools and 8 million in colleges and universities, a coalescence took place, a critical mass was reached, and they exploded into the first generation of American youth with a sense of identity in pursuit of common goals — anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-authoritarian, and anti-institutional. American foreign policy in Vietnam made many of them anti-American.

Once, in an earlier day, writes Taylor, the universities had social thrust and a self-reforming tendency tied to the engine of democracy, as when the land-grant colleges challenged and modified the elite exclusiveness of earlier higher education. But the modern university has become the supporting intellectual head of the established political, social, and economic power structure. It advises the government, does war research for the government, and provides the scientific and technical manpower for the government. It controls entry into the establishment through control of entrance requirements, control of the curriculum, control of the faculties, control of students, control of the professional schools, and control of research. It influences the high school and even the elementary school. The modern university is a self-perpetuating bureaucracy supporting a war-bent anti-communist doctrine and a world-wide imperialist industrial complex. Through its manufactured curriculum taught by hired and harried graduate teaching

assistants, it has lost its soul, neglected its students, and shut its eyes to social reform.

Taylor's proposed solution is for universities to return to their social concerns; to make the education system more responsive to the realities of contemporary needs; and to engage students, faculty, administration, and the community in an action curriculum oriented to international issues of war, peace, poverty, race, and discrimination. Taylor sees student protest as "the healthiest thing that could have happened" to shake up and reform higher education. He argues for a national system of student volunteer service to teach, enter community action programs, make use of the creative arts, and do social research — under faculty guidance and for academic credit — on the "fighting front" where local and world community problems exist, as well as in the classroom. He sounds the clarion call for a return to the experimental college idea he fostered at Sarah Lawrence, one with free electives and flexible planning, made *by* students and faculty, and *for* direct aid to people in need everywhere. He replies affirmatively to the George S. Counts' cry of 1932, "Dare the schools build a new social order?" Universities better dare, Taylor says, because now students who really care are on the march doing *their* thing.

My concern, as I approach the end of this survey, is reflected in the title of my paper, "After Student Protest, What University Reforms?" Beyond and despite the punitive backlash, the most sensitive segment of the academic community must ponder the reforms that can and should be made. The list of student demands is long: black studies, relevant courses, greater elective choices, more individualized degree programs, more undergraduate seminars, fewer graduate teaching assistants, more contact with leading professors, pass-fail grading, social involvement, urban studies, less war research, better classroom teaching, and above all student participation in university affairs: on curriculum committees, trustee decisions, administrative appointments, and faculty hiring and promotion. The trends in these directions it seems to me are as follows.

The student voice in university affairs is now an established fact. This point has been accepted in principle and is being tried in practice. I refer you to *University Affairs* for July, 1969, which lists senates and committees of major Canadian universities on which students are now permitted, indeed encouraged, to serve. The quality of student member contributions will hopefully improve as they gain experience and this cannot but sharpen their sense of responsibility and spread this sense of responsibility among their fellow students. It is in effect a fine educational experience, an academic apprenticeship, which is bound to raise insights and visions. It cannot but strengthen the universities' operations to have access to students' advice and concerns.

The students' push to win places on hiring and firing committees is another matter. This demand many believe will be resisted. A uni-

versity, like an army, needs all sorts of soldiers, all grades of officers, and all kinds of supporting services and personnel. Professional popularity with students is only one reed upon which to lean. How to pick the best man for the job and how to judge and reward his work might be more prudently left to other faculty members and the administration — with due regard to the opinions of students.

Demands for black studies, relevant courses, and flexible programs are curriculum matters. Separatism of any kind is to be avoided and some departmental control over courses and programs seems reasonable. What is needed is a streamlined procedure to incorporate desirable new courses and programs within a reasonable period — say a year — after receiving the original request. What is also needed is a streamlined procedure to prune old, tired, and worthless courses and programs. Let each department justify, say every five years, the relevancy and worth of its courses and degree programs. Such ongoing assessment and reassessment of programs should be standard procedure. The black studies demand has already been viewed in this light and its inclusion has been accepted as desirable in those selected institutions with competent staffs and libraries to cover the subject and with enough students interested in pursuing the subject.

The use of graduate teaching assistants can be improved by careful selection, adequate pay, thorough departmental orientation, careful supervision by senior faculty, and a balanced load between their teaching duties and their degree programs or research responsibilities. The key lies with the senior staff having continuous contact not only with graduate assistants but also with students in large undergraduate courses. The senior staff member must be the clinical supervisor between the practicing graduate assistant teacher and the individual student in large classes.

This student contact with senior staff and particularly with leading professors is crucial. A great deal can be gained in *ad hoc,* unofficial, spontaneous, small group discussions on any and all subjects — loosely organized and lightly administered. University presidents, deans, and department heads should find ways to encourage this sort of thing, in order to catch hold of the passing interest, to cater to the passing need, and to bring people together. Let the raw freshman and the sophisticated professor chat together over tea — at least a few times each term.

University involvement in direct-action social concerns — the real heart and thrust of the student protest movement — presents another dilemma. I tend to agree with Harvard sociologist David Riesman's recently stated opinion that those universities best situated, able, and interested should get involved in, for example, urban problems. Other universities whose location and talents lie elsewhere should follow their particular interest. What I would do would be to have a university Director of Student Activities keenly tuned to major social action pro-

grams and interests being carried on by nearby responsible organizations — say the Friends Service Committee, a Quaker social action organization — and to channel interested student energies and available departmental supervision into soundly organized local projects for which, after careful study and on request, I would consider giving some academic credit recognition and some university seed money. There is a place in the university for the ivory tower. There is also a place in the university for direct social involvement where it is needed, can be supervised, and can do some good. The university door should be open to community needs and a helping hand should be outstretched.

These are but some reforms which might follow the confrontation now so heavily upon us. Horace Mann called the school the great equalizer of the conditions of man — the balance wheel of the social machinery. The universities have shown that they can help put a man on the moon. Can they also lift up the burdened man mired in misery here on earth?

I believe, with the concerned student, that they can.