

STUDENT REVOLT: THE NATURE

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STUDENT REVOLUTION, like reports of Black Death, is a concept that seems to strike terror into the hearts of otherwise strong men. The general public at large, pale before the image Professors, administrators of universities, and of blood revolt, poised and waiting for the slightest opportunity to leap upon them and destroy their world. Even the student body itself is not free of like paranoias, at witness the contemporary surge of right-wing student activism.

It is the word "revolution" that creates disorder in the minds of those that contemplate student activism, and in order to understand clearly what is involved in the recent disputes between the student body and their administration we must distinguish student revolution from political revolution. The two are not alike: they have different ends and differing means, and it is in the confusion to both types that meaningful consideration gives way to hysteria. We, therefore, cannot accept as valid the term "student revolution", but name it "student ACTIVISM."

To emphasize this point, let us at once make clear our thesis: student activism differs from political revolution not only in degree, as is commonly supposed, but also in kind. This difference in kind is great enough to invite a comparative discussion of both types.

THEIR WOMEN ARE THE BEASTS OF BURDEN

Political revolution, in its simplest aspect, involves two communities or classes of people: those who have and those who do not. The class of those who have, have EVERYTHING. They have the food, the clothes, the schools, the media: they hold the guns, the scourges: they are the ones who theorize, reflect, issue credit, print money, trade, and profit. The class of those who do not have, do not have anything. They are the ones who starve in times of peace, grow more ignorant where more schools are built: their backs are those that open under the lash, their women are the beasts of burden that replace those protected by the humane laws of the controlling class.

Therefore, the life-styles of the two communities are anti-thetical: their DESIRES, however are identical. The class that has, wants everything. The class that does not have, also wants everything, and with fervor — the fervor born of hatred and envy. Their way is quite clear. To have everything, the others must have nothing. Thus, their revolution involves a complete and utter reversal of roles: those that formerly had nothing, now have everything. The point is, that terms like "Mediation", and "compromise", "moderation", are meaningless within the context of political revolution, since nothing will satisfy the desires of the oppressed class except the complete and utter frustration of the desires of oppressing class. The oppressed (which we call the class that has nothing), wish to REMOVE, in the strict sense of that word, the oppressors — remove them from their schools, from their banks, from their homes, from their department stores. And they (the oppressed), are quite confident that they can perform the functions formerly done by the others, so much so, that they are willing to suffer any pains in order to grasp these functions in their own hands. Because the oppressors, most naturally, are not willing to "mediate", or "compromise" these functions, which they consider to be theirs in perpetuity, the oppressed have only one method of relief: complete reversal of role, accompanied by the action of taking EVERYTHING that they do not have from those who do.

TO EMULATE NOT TO DESTROY

This brings us to the first major difference between political revolution and student activism. As one can see from the above, the political revolutionary body is open-ended — there are no elements of the controlling power structure above which it cannot rise: conversely, there are no

elements in its constitution below which it cannot find anything useful for its own ends. The student body is limited both above and below by the very fact of its constitution below which it cannot find anything useful for its own ends. It does not care in the slightest to remove or overthrow those above it, for instance, the administrators of a university, because there are no people in the student body who wish to usurp, who look with envy upon, that specific function at the moment. Similarly, the frightened professor of Classics need not fear for his position simply because there is no student capable of teaching his subject. The student activist body is limited below because its boundaries do not extend beyond the university, and it stands or falls on the personalities of an elite — an elite which is spontaneously formed by those students interested enough to take action where they feel action is necessary. Right away, then, one can see outstanding differences between the two types of "revolution"... One attempts to overthrow; the other to infiltrate. The student body is interested in squeezing upwards into the mesh of professors and administrators as it matures, and at every present moment, it merely wants to broaden the points of contact. It seeks to emulate, not to destroy.

This motive for student activism is made clear when we compare the types of communities. The two classes described in political revolution are natural and evolve whenever certain principles of, let us say, colonialism, are applied. The classes involved in a university are extra-social and artificial: their desires are differing, but their life-styles are identical, in contrast to the political classes.

If the students wanted to destroy or replace the ideological and intellectual basis of the university they attend, then there might be cause for alarm among professors and administrators of that university. But even the "serious" opponents to the present system of universities do not mark such an attempt. Thus, in the supposedly anarchistic institution, the "free university", there is no attempt made to usurp the function of their "bourgeois" counterpart. For example, the courses offered last summer by the Free University of New York, namely revolutionary ideology, and "Ecclesiasticism" with lab, show the superficiality of its withdrawal. Whatever it is, the "free university" isn't a truly revolutionary university, and constitutes no threat to the established system. In the modern sense, it cannot even be called a university since it lacks the structure by which such institutions are now defined.

Let us take then, for example, what is viewed by many as the prime symptom of these so-called "revolutions" — student strikes. Seen as anarchic cancers gone malignant, they actually give implicit affirmation to the existence of the university's structure, since a strike is basically an attempt to confront a structure in order to modify, and not overthrow, that structure. If the students wanted to overthrow the ideological basis of the university completely, their means would be different. Instead of professing great desire to negotiate, and a strike in an attempt to force negotiation, students would simply refuse to operate within the framework of the system they recognize: that is, they would revolt in the political sense. But because of the relationships between the different bodies in a university, which we will now discuss, (the relationship between those who administer the corporate function of the university) such a revolution is impossible.

A PERPETUAL PHOENIX

To begin with, the university community does not split up neatly into such sharply defined groups as does the political community. There are certain clearly defined functions involved in running the university community, but as the student who also teaches and the professor who also administers illustrate, the groups that perform these functions intermingle and co-exist within the same context as the one in which they differ. In truth the structures of universities depends on this flow. The university's structure thus acts as a perpetual Phoenix, rekindling itself from instant to instant with its own elements. This is only possible because of its artificial nature. Since the university consists essentially of the same class of individuals, there is

not much resistance offered to those below from those above. However, there are natural attempts made by the groups performing the "higher" functions to maintain a certain rigidity. The students, on the other hand, would like to see those "higher" functions kept open as possible since they expect to be performing them themselves eventually.

What then do the students want when they become "active"? At Sir George Williams University for example, they want to buy books at their own bookstore without being victimized: They want to increase the areas of contact between themselves and the university structure; in a sense, they want to distribute more evenly the burden of running their university. This manifests itself in trivial fashion with demands for the right to be served alcohol beverages on university property and the placing of "observers" on faculty and administrative boards. But underlying all this, is the attempt to get deeply involved in the university, not merely to pass through as spectators.

EXPERIENCE, NOT SPECTATE

With a closer look at the situation, it becomes apparent that many students are not activists, do not want to become activists, and never will. The reason for this is that they feel no responsibility towards the function of the university. That is, they see the university as a place to go to and come away from daily, for a period of years, until they finally arrive at "graduation", a ceremony which grants them a diploma, a "thing" which covers, for them the purpose of a university. They do not see the university process as a "thing" also. This process is fundamentally as important as the total mass of knowledge it undertakes to impart to students, for two reasons. A little knowledge administered wisely is notoriously better than a great deal delivered by inefficient methods. But more important, the educational process made more meaningful, benefits not only the students presently experiencing it, but also the students who will experience it in the future. It is an environment which cannot be granted at the end of four years. It must be experienced moment by moment by students, and those who experience it as a motto or a statement of policy by the boards of governors remain outside the university. The activists know, if only intuitively, the importance of the educational process, so they demonstrate at the points where this process is most likely to break down. The vessel gives way at its weakest point.

So we see demonstrations occurring along the areas where administration and students, or faculty and students, meet. There are also areas where administration and faculty meet that give rise to disturbance. But faculty and administration have intimate committee and board rooms in which to confront each other. The students have only, in a sense, the streets. This is of course partly due to the relative numbers of students and faculty and administration. But it is mostly due to the fact that the faculty and administration see the students merely as ciphers in terms of running the university, where the activists see themselves as integral parts of the machinery. This blindness is shared, as was mentioned previously, by a large majority of the students themselves. Still, we are likely to see for instance, students protesting professional detachment in the classroom. This could be taken care of by the professors themselves, with or against the administration, as the case might be.

Student activism, depending for its impetus on events or conditions outside the university, we have omitted till now. However, we can regard this type of activism as part of the same process of education referred to above. We will now define process of education to be those steps which, when taken insure the continuation of traditional knowledge as it appears in the university, and 2nd bring the student in almost violent opposition to these traditions, in order that they may be improved upon, or discarded if necessary. There is also room for pure scholarship, since even discarded tradition, if not practical, retains its intellectual virtues. The definition given above may seem self-defeating, but it is not. It is clearly the means by which learning has been handed down, and mutated in the process, for better or worse, for generations. But never have improvements come from the merely passive. Thus learning in the university is of critical sort. We learn only within the context of society.