

THE MULTIVERSITY:

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CRUCIBLE OF THE

NEW WORKING CLASS



**long-range strategies for
student power movements**

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Long-range Strategies for Student Power Movements

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INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A REVOLUTIONARY PRAXIS

The student movement has come under criticism from both the right and the left for its lack of a coherent ideology and strategy for social change. While there is certainly a great deal of truth in this criticism, my sensibilities tell me that this lack may be more to our advantage than to our disadvantage. To my mind, the great strength of the New Left has been its unconscious adherence to Marx's favorite motto—doubt everything. The student movement is young and inexperienced; yet, it has shown great wisdom in maintaining the principle that political truth must come from political experience. Ideology is not something sucked out of thumbs, nor found in this or that set of political catechisms. Rather, political analysis and strategy is something that grows slowly out of years of political experience and struggle. It must find its beginnings and maintain its deepest roots in people's day-to-day life-activity, for it is social reality that we are trying to understand and change.

In deepening that understanding of social reality, we must always remember that "The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question."⁽¹⁾

Too often we are bogged down in theoretical disputes when the only way we can answer those questions is in practice, in political experimentation, in action. This is why we must remain open on many political questions. But this is not to say that we should only "do what the spirit say do." The concept of practical-critical activity (i.e. praxis) is three-sided: we must act, then reflect on the activity, and finally criticize the activity. The process of action, reflection, and criticism must be repeated again and again. The body of knowledge, ever changing and expanding, that grows from this process emerges as an ideology. Finally, the process is historical—it develops over a period of time.

It is for these reasons, as well as the fact that we are young and politically inexperienced, that we must emphasize an ongoing practical-critical activity over and above any allegiance to theoretical certitude. I hope that my following remarks on theory, strategy, and tactics will be taken in this context. All my assertions come from a limited experience; and, as such, are open to criticism, revision, and the acid-test (no pun intended) of political practice.

PART 1: THE PRESENT MALAISE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

"Happiness Is Student Power" was the most catching slogan emblazoned on the many banners and picket signs during the Berkeley Student Strike in December, 1966. But, as most college administrators know only too well, Berkeley and its rebellious student body is not an isolated phenomenon among the vast variety of American campuses. Far from being an exception, Berkeley has become the paradigm case of the educational malaise in the United States; and, in the last few years, that malaise has been transformed into a movement. Indeed, a spectre is haunting our universities—the spectre of a radical and militant nationally co-ordinated movement for student power.

Students began using the slogan "student power" soon after black people in the civil rights movement made the demand for "black power." Are students niggers? After studying the history of the Wobblies and labor syndicalism, students started thinking about

student syndicalism. Are students workers? Power for what? Just any old kind of power? The university is a clumsy and uncoordinated machine, engulfing and serving thousands of people. Do students want to be administrators?

Obviously the cry for "power" in and of itself is a vacuous demand. Student power is not so much something we are fighting for, as it is something we must have in order to gain specific objectives. Then what are the objectives? What is our program? There is much variety and dispute on these questions. But there is one thing that seems clear. However the specific forms of our immediate demands and programs may vary, the long-range goal and the daily drive that motivates and directs us is our intense longing for our liberation. In short, what the student power movement is about is freedom.

But aren't students free? Isn't America a democracy, even if it is a little manipulative? To answer those kinds of questions and many others that are more serious, it is important to look more closely and come to an understanding of the malaise motivating our movement.

What do American students think of the educational institutions in which they live an important part of their lives? The most significant fact is that most of them don't think about them. Such young men and women made up that apathetic majority we called the "silent generation" in the 1950's. While the last few years has shown a marked and dramatic growth of a new radicalism, we should not forget that the apathetic and the cynical among the student population are still in the majority. But this need not be discouraging. In fact, we should view that apparent apathy among the majority of students with a certain qualified optimism.

What makes people apathetic? My feeling is that apathy is the unconscious recognition students make of the fact that they are powerless. Despite all the machinations and rhetoric used by hot-shot student politicians within administration-sponsored student governments, people's experience tells them that nothing changes. Furthermore, if and when change does occur, students fully recognize that they were powerless to effect those changes in one way or another. If this is in fact the case, then why shouldn't students be apathetic? The administration rules, despite the facade of student governments, of dorm councils, and of student judicials. And when the give us ex-officio seats on their academic committees the result among most students is that deeper, more hardened kind of apathy—cynicism.

The apathetic students are correct as far as they go. They are powerless. The forms given us for our self-government are of the Mickey Mouse, sand-box variety. I would only be pessimistic if a majority of students really accepted the illusion that those institutions had meaning in their lives, or that they could significantly affect those institutions. But the opposite is the case. The apathy reflects the reality of their powerlessness. When that reality confronts the lie of the official rhetoric, the contradiction is driven home—and the apathetic become the cynical. What that contradiction—that daily living with a lie—all adds up to is a dynamic tension and alienation. And that, fellow organizers, is the necessary subjective condition for any revolution.

It is important to understand that students are alienated from much more than the social and extra-curricular aspect of their education. In fact, their deepest alienation is directed at the education process itself. The excerpts that follow are from a letter written to the New York Times by a young woman student:

I came to this school not thinking I could even keep up with the work. I was wrong. I can keep up. I can even come out on top. My daily schedule's

rough. I get up at 6:30....After dinner I work until midnight or 12:30. In the beginning, the first few weeks or so, I'm fine. Then I begin to wonder just what this is all about: am I educating myself? I have that one answered....I'm educating myself the way they want. So I convince myself the real reason I'm doing all this is to prepare myself meantime I'm wasting those years of preparation. I'm not learning what I want to learn...I don't care about the feudal system. I want to know about life. I want to think and read. When?.... My life is a whirlpool. I'm caught up in it, but I'm not conscious of it. I'm what you call living, but somehow I can't find life...So maybe I got an A...but when I get it back I find that A means nothing. It's a letter you use to keep me going... I wonder what I'm doing here. I feel phony; I don't belong... You wonder about juvenile delinquents. If I ever become one, I'll tell why it will be so. I feel cramped. I feel like I'm in a coffin and can't move or breathe....My life is worth nothing. It's enclosed in a few buildings on one campus; it goes no further. I've got to bust.(2)

Tell the truth. Every American student knows that's the way it is. Even our administrators recognize what is going on. In 1963, a year or so before the first Berkeley insurrection, Clark Kerr prophesized, "...the undergraduate students are restless. Recent changes in the American university have done them little good...There is an incipient revolt..."(3) Kerr is not only concerned about the students. He also casts a worried glance at the faculty. "Knowledge is now in so many bits and pieces and administration so distant that faculty members are increasingly figures in a 'lonely crowd,' intellectually and institutionally."(4) The academic division of labor and depersonalization among the faculty is more than apparent to the students. Incoming freshmen scratch their heads, trying to understand any possible relevance of many of the courses in the catalog, some of which they are required to take. Also, some of the best belly-laughs are had by reading the titles of master's and doctoral theses, like one granted a Ph.D. at Michigan State University: "An Evaluation of Thirteen Brands of Football Helmets on the Basis of Certain Impact Measures."(5) What's worse, even if a course seems like it might be relevant to our lives, like Psychology or Political Science, we are soon told by our prof that what we'll learn only has to do with the laboratory behavior of rats, and that "political science" has nothing to do with day-to-day politics. A student from Brandeis sums it up nicely, "By the time we graduate, we have been painstakingly trained in separating facts from their meaning...No wonder that our classes, with few exceptions, seem irrelevant to our lives. No wonder they're so boring. Boredom is the necessary condition of any education which teaches us to manipulate the facts and suppress their meaning."(6) Irrelevancy, meaninglessness, boredom, and fragmentation are the kinds of attributes that are becoming more and

...applicable to mass education in America. We are becoming a people required to know more and more about less and less. This is true not only for our students, but also for our teachers; not only in our universities, but also in our secondary and primary schools—private as well as public.

What should education be about in America? The official rhetoric seems to offer an answer: education should be the process of developing the free, autonomous, creative and responsible individual—the “citizen,” in the best sense of that word. Furthermore, higher education ought to encourage and enable the individual to turn his personal concerns into social issues, open to rational consideration and solution. C. Wright Mills put it clearly: “The aim of the college, for the individual student, is to eliminate the need in his life for the college; the task is to help him become a self-educating man. For only that will set him free.”(7)

But what is the reality of American education? Contrary to our commitment to individualism, we find that the day-to-day practice of our schools is authoritarian, conformist, and almost entirely status-oriented. We find the usual relationship between teacher and student to be a disciplined form of dominance and subordination. We are told of the egalitarianism inherent in our school system, where the classroom becomes the melting-pot for the classless society of America’s “people’s capitalism,” where everyone has the opportunity to climb to the top. Again, the opposite is the case. Our schools are more racially segregated now (1967) than ever before. There is a clear class bias contained both within and among our public schools—not even considering the clear class nature of our private schools and colleges. Within the secondary schools, students are quickly channelled—usually according to the class background of their parents—into vocational, commercial, or academic preparatory programs. Concerning the class differences among our public schools, James Conant remarks in Slums and Suburbs, “...one cannot imagine the possibility of a wealthy suburban district deliberately consolidating with other districts to achieve a truly comprehensive high school in which students of all abilities and socio-economic backgrounds will study together.”(8) Even if they did consolidate, the problem would only be rationalized, rather than solved. Who knows? Maybe the class struggle would break out on the playground.

Finally, what about that traditional American ideal that we were all taught to honor—the legend of the self-educated and self-educating man? It seems to me that rather than enabling an individual to initiate and engage himself in a continual and coherent life-long educational process, our public programs are the sort where an individual is merely subjected to a random series of isolated training situations.

From individual freedom to national service, from egalitarianism to class and racial hierarchical ossi-

fication, from self-reliance to institutional dependence—we have come to see education as the mechanistic process of homogeneous, uncritical absorption of “data” and development of job skills. But it is something more than that. The socialization and acculturation that goes on within American educational institutions is becoming increasingly central in the attempts to mold and shape American youth. This is mainly the result of the declining influence and, in some cases, the collapse of other traditional socializing institutions such as the church and the family. The schools, at all levels, end up with the job of maintaining, modifying, and transmitting the dominant themes of the national culture.

Quantitatively education has been rapidly increasing in the last few decades; but, as it grows in size, it decreases qualitatively. Rickover states in Education and Freedom: “We end up where we began a hundred years ago—with an elementary vocational education for the majority, and a poor college preparatory course for a minority of students.”(9) Conant, who is quite concerned with the plight of the 80-85% of urban non-college bound high school students who are “social dynamite,” places as a primary goal of education, giving these students “...the kind of zeal and dedication...to withstand the relentless pressures of communism.”(10)

What about our school teachers? How is the nation faring on that front? Over 30% of the students in U.S. colleges and universities are going into primary and secondary education. However, despite the quantity, Mortimer Smith remarks in The Diminished Mind, “...the teacher-training institutions...are providing us with teachers who are our most poorly educated citizens.”(11) While the job of teacher should command the highest respect in any society, many of us are well aware of the fact that in relation to other parts of the university, the college or school of education is considered to be the intellectual slum of the campus.

It seems clear that bourgeois education in the U.S. is in its historically most irrational and decadent state. Primary, secondary, and university systems are fusing together, thoroughly rationalizing and dehumanizing their internal order, and placing themselves in the service of the state, industry, and the military. Kerr is quite clear about this when he speaks of the “multiversity” making a common-law marriage with the federal government. John Hannah, president of Michigan State, was even more clear in a speech given in September, 1961, “Our colleges and universities must be regarded as bastions of our defense, as essential to the preservation of our country and our way of life as super-sonic bombers, nuclear-powered submarines and intercontinental ballistics missiles.”(12) The fact that none of the three weapons systems Hannah mentioned could have been designed, constructed, or operated without college-educated men proves that this is not just Fourth of July rhetoric. Hannah gives us an even better look at his idea.

of education in an article entitled, "The Schools' Responsibility in National Defense," where he comments: "I believe the primary and secondary schools can make education serve the individual and national interest by preparing youngsters for military service and life under conditions of stress as well as preparing them for college, or for a job or profession... I would not even shrink from putting the word 'indoctrination' to the kind of education I have in mind. If we do not hesitate to indoctrinate our children with a love of truth, a love of home, and a love of God, then I see no justification for balking at teaching them love of country and love of what this country means."(13)

Hannah's comment about "...life under conditions of stress..." is related to a remark made by Eric A. Walker, president of Pennsylvania State University, a few years ago. There had been a series of student suicides and attempted suicides within a relatively short period of time. Many students and faculty members started grumbling about the newly instituted "term" system—a kind of "speed-up"—relating the stress and strain of the new system to the student suicides. Dr. Walker's response to this unrest was to comment on how the increased pressure on the students was a good thing, since it enabled them to "...have their nervous breakdowns early," before they graduated and had jobs and families when having a nervous breakdown would cause them more difficulties.

Despite the crass attitudes of so many of our educators, or the dehumanization of the form and content of our educational institutions; it would be a mistake to think the problems are only within the educational system. While it is true that education has been stripped of any meaning it once had, and Dr. Conant is reduced to defining education as "...what goes on in schools and colleges,"(14) our system of schools and colleges are far from a point of collapse. In fact, they are thriving. The "knowledge industry," as Kerr calls it, accounts for 30% of the Gross National Product; and, it is expanding at twice the rate of any sector of the economy. School teachers make up the largest single occupational group of the labor force—some 3 million workers. Twenty-five years ago, the government and industry were hardly interested in education. But in 1960, the aggregate national outlay, public and private, amounted to 23.1 billions. As Kerr says, "...the university has become a prime instrument of national purpose. This is new. This is the essence of the transformation now engulfing our universities."(15) In short, our education institutions are becoming appendages to, and transformed by, U.S. corporate capitalism.

Education is not being done away with in favor of something called training. Rather, education is being transformed from a quasi-aristocratic classicism and petty-bourgeois romanticism into something quite new. These changes are apparant in ways other than the

quantitative statistics given above. For example, we can examine the social sciences and the humanities. The social and psychological "reality" that we are given to study is "objectified" to the point of sterility. The real world we are to understand "valuefree" and pragmatically bears little or no relation to the actual life-activity of men, classes, and nations. In one sense, we are separated from life. In another, we are being conditioned for life in a lifeless, stagnant, and sterile society.

For another example, there is more than a semantic connection between the academic division of labor and specialization we are all aware of, and the corresponding division of labor that has gone on in large-scale industry. But it is important to understand what that connection is. It does not follow that because technology becomes diversified and specialized, then academic knowledge and skills must follow suit. Andre Gorz makes the relevant comment, "It is completely untrue that modern technology demands specialization: quite the reverse. It demands a basic 'polyvalent' education, comprising not a fragmentary, pre-digested and specialized knowledge, but an initiation—or, put more precisely, a faculty of self-initiation—into methods of scientifico-technological research and discovery."(16) If it is not the new technological production that deems necessary the kind of isolated specialization we know so well, then what is responsible? Gorz spells it out again, "Capitalism actually needs shattered and atomized men..."(17) in order to maintain its system of centralized, bureaucratized and militarized hierarchies, so as "...to perpetuate its domination over men, not only as workers, but also as consumers and citizens."(18)

From this perspective, we can begin to understand that the educational malaise we as students and faculty have felt so personally and intensely is no aberration, but firmly rooted in the American political economy. In fact, the Organized System which Paul Goodman calls "compulsory mis-education" may mis-educate us, but it certainly serves the masters of that system, the U.S. ruling class, quite well. As Edgar Z. Friedenberg wrote: "Educational evils are attributed to defective schools. In fact, they are as likely to be the work of effective schools that are being directed toward evil ends by the society that supports and controls them."(19) Furthermore, he continues later in the same article, "Schools are a definite indication that a society is divisible into a dominant and a subordinate group, and that the dominant group want to teach the subordinate group something they could not be trusted to learn if left to themselves."(20) Clark Kerr would accept this, both for the society in general, which he divides into the "managers" and the "managed" and for the university. Kerr states: "The intellectuals (including university students) are a particularly volatile element...They are by nature irresponsible...They are, as a result, never fully trusted by anybody, including themselves."(21) But Kerr doesn't dismiss us. Even

if we are by nature irresponsible (perhaps because we can perceive the contradictions?) he considers us essential. "...It is important who best attracts or captures the intellectuals and who uses them most effectively, for they may be a tool as well as a source of danger." (22)

I think we can conclude that the American educational system is coherent, well-organized, and—to the extent that the rulers are still ruling—effective mechanism. However, it has turned our humanitarian values into their opposites and at the same time, given us the potential to understand and critically evaluate both ourselves and the system itself. To that extent the system is fraught with internal contradictions. Furthermore, the events comprising the student revolt in the last few years demonstrate the likelihood that those contradictions will continue to

manifest themselves in an open and protracted struggle. As Kerr predicted, we are a source of danger and incipient revolt. And the fact that Kerr was fired and the police used in the face of that revolt only goes to prove that those contradictions are irreconcilable within the structure of corporate capitalism. As Quintin Hoare remarked in *New Left Review* #32, "...a reform of the educational system involves a reform of the educators as well, and this is a political task, which immediately ricochets back to the question of transforming consciousness and ideology throughout society." (23) The central problem of radically transforming the educational system is that of the transformation of the teaching and learning body—the faculty and students. And this transformation, while it begins with the demands of the students' and teachers' work situation, cannot take place unless it occurs within and organically connected to the practice of a mass radical political movement.

PART II: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE MULTIVERSITY

THE KNOWLEDGE FACTORY

What sense does it make to refer to the university as a factory? Is it just a good analogy? Or is there more to it than that? According to Kerr, "The university and segments of industry are becoming more and more alike." (24) He also informs us that, "The university is being called upon to... merge its activities with industry as never before..." (25) Furthermore, in terms of control, the merger that Kerr speaks of seems to have been completed. According to a study by H.P. Beck, "Altogether the evidence of major university-business connections at high levels seems overwhelming. The numerous high positions of power in industry, commerce, and finance held by at least two-thirds of the governing boards of these 30 leading universities would appear to give a decisive majority more than ample grounds for identifying their personal interests with those of business." (26) Indeed, the boards of regents or trustees of almost every college and university in the country read off like corporation directories.

But it is not ample proof to call a university a factory merely because they are controlled by the same people who control industry. We must look deeper. Let us look at a relatively recent development within the U.S. political economy—the "innovation industry." This aspect of corporate capitalism, usually referred to as "R and D," Research and Development, has become a major industry. Since 1940 it has grown 27 times over; and, presently, accounts for approx-

imately 5% of the overall federal budget. (27) What is important for us to see is that 20% of the work and production of the innovation industry is done directly within the university. In fact, it is this phenomenon that, since World War II, has been transforming the academic landscape into what we now call the "multiversity." Entirely new areas of work have been created—research assistants and technicians, industrial consultants, research promoters, contracting officers, and research project managers.

What search and development can be seen only as an adjunct to the real business of the university—teaching—the position it occupies is much more strategic. "The men who teach in America's graduate schools determine for the rest of us not only what is true and what is false, but in a large measure what is 'done' and 'not done.' Since the graduate schools are usually a generation ahead of whatever segment of society they lead, their influence at any particular moment always looks modest. Over the years, however, they are perhaps the single most important source of innovation in society." (28) And those innovations are important in more ways than we might think. According to Mills, "Research for bureaucratic ends serves to make authority more effective and more efficient by providing information of use to authoritative planners." (29) In the end, the multiversity becomes the vanguard of the status quo, providing the know-how to gently usher in the New Order of 1984. The clearest manifestation of this trend can be seen in the sciences. Mills concludes: "Science—historically stated in the universities and