

## Who Should Run the Universities?

Rebuttal by H. Bruce Fran     n

1-30-69

When I read Dr. Howard's paper, I received two surprises. First, it was totally not a liberal analysis. Second, because of this, he and I had some rather important areas of agreement. Perhaps one could say that although he was attacking liberalism from the right while I was attacking it from the left, we shared some of the same dissatisfaction with liberal premises and goals.

Dr. Howard cited a three-year survey of 7500 professors and administrators which had demonstrated that their number one objective was to "Protect the faculty's right to academic freedom." When I read this, I assumed that he was going to agree, and so I scribbled down an exposé of the fallacy behind that objective. Then I turned the page and found that he had already exposed one sham behind "the present orthodoxy" that the university's transcendent mission is the pure and disinterested "pursuit of truth." In his words:

Knowledge, of itself, has no value. It is only the use to which  
→ man puts his knowledge that gives it value. By treating the pursuit of knowledge as the noblest endeavor and a self-justifying endeavor and one which must never be confined, we have lost track of the meaning and the consequences of the educational process. (p.4)

Dr. Howard then argues that the university should teach values, that it should have as one of its main goals what he calls "character education." I would agree with this and go even further to assert that a university cannot help but teach values and provide some kind of character education. As he himself points out elsewhere, the faculty, because of its very pretense to ethical neutrality, effectively teaches one set of ethics: "If the highest priority of our educational system is to have every faculty member do his own thing without limits and without regard to the views or the interests of anyone else, we really shouldn't be surprised if the students, and particularly the brightest ones, get the message and decide to do their own thing without limits

and without regards to anyone else." (p.6) Unlike Dr. Howard, I would call this the very quintessence of the bourgeois ethic and the bourgeois concept of freedom. This is the freedom to exploit the workers without restraint, the freedom to privately own public property, the freedom to buy medical care, justice, and political office in the marketplace, the freedom to pollute the air and water, the freedom to use the world's resources to make and sell useless or deadly trash, the freedom to conscript an army to fight for an economic empire, or, on the other side, it is the freedom to sell your life's labor to the highest bidder and even to scab, the freedom to compete for grades and rank, and the freedom to protest against the draft while you are being dragged away. As I pointed out last week, the multiversity is permeated by the bourgeois ethic of competition, with each person in it pitted against his fellows. Or, in Dr. Howard's words: "To a significant degree, each man is in opposition to all the rest." (p.25)

I find my own experience instructive here. Before I became a communist, I had the values I was supposed to have in regard to my own professional publication. That is, I was eager to rush into print to be first with a discovery, to be "original"; I was anxious lest someone else should beat me to it. Now I always hope that many other people will reach the same conclusions that I have and get them into print so that I can perform other duties. It was interesting last week that some people thought they were annihilating my position by pointing out that they had heard similar ideas in the 1930's. I am not embarrassed but joyful to share the ideas of the greatest people of that era, ideas that are now shared by the overwhelming majority of the world's population that has considered these problems.

Dr. Howard concluded his paper with a quotation that affirmed what he called "the true purpose" of the university, which "exists to make a fellowship by means of which standards of civilization will be created and the progress of civilization will be enhanced." Nobody could possibly argue with this,

though we certainly will have some hot debates about its meaning and application. As Dr. Howard said in the discussion, "Everybody is for excellence, like brotherhood." (p.10). It seems to me that he interprets this in a formalist way. That is, he conceives of a fixed structure and then defines the internal relationships of that structure. (It is strikingly similar to the way New Criticism makes the students read a poem.) On top are the trustees; beneath them is the president, who is really the philosopher-king; then comes the faculty; on the bottom are the students. I think the important questions are not dealt with, for implicit in his concept of this structure is a commitment to the status quo. Would he be equally happy if his formula for university power were followed in China or the Soviet Union? Should their universities be run by powerful presidents carrying out the objectives prescribed by a governing board? You see, the important questions are: Who are the people in these various roles? and how do they relate to other groups in our own society and in the world?

Our question is not whether the university should teach values and build character. We agree on this, but disagree profoundly on whose values, what kind of character. I am arguing that the university should be building socialist and communist character, that is, that it should be teaching what is of value to poor and working people, not because this is abstractly "better" but because this comes from and meets the needs of the people. It should be teaching solidarity, communality, and brotherhood rather than competition and alienation; it should be helping to develop popular culture instead of forcing people to grovel before elitist culture or wallow in a culture of despair; it should be enriching the vulgar and eloquent language of the people rather than emasculating our expression with bourgeois rules of grammar and decadent formalism; it should be a means of liberating the classes on the bottom rather than enriching the one-time minority group in our society, the little group on top.

Whereas Dr. Howard sees our university and college system as thoroughly pluralistic, I think that it teaches the culture and ideology of only the bourgeoisie and previous ruling classes. At this point, Dr. Howard falls into the very liberalism he had earlier attacked, suggesting that each college and university do its own thing (although implicitly setting rather narrow limits on what kind of thing). As I indicated last week, the universities cannot do their own thing, because they use and produce vast resources of the society, they are essential sources and instruments of power, and they are irreversibly interpenetrating with the other main political and economic institutions of the society. The values they teach, that is, the values of the exploiting class, are now confronting other values, irreconcilably conflicting values, the values of the exploited classes. The ideology of almost every department of every American university and college is being met head-on by the ideology of the masses of the Third World, and every one of us will have to choose sides in this struggle.

Dr. Howard sees one main cause behind "the financial peril" of the university as well as its "other deep and grievous difficulties . . . the disruptions and take-overs and in-fighting"; all this he sees as "the result of a failure of presidential leadership to hold high before the academic community the purposes of its existence and insist upon action appropriate to these purposes." (p.32) I would be considerably more charitable to university presidents, for I think that Dr. Howard has reversed cause and effect. What he is describing is the breakdown of an ideology, and I would agree. But institutions do not break down because their leading spokesmen and administrators get ideologically confused. The process works the opposite way. An ideology breaks down when the system it is supposed to rationalize develops objective contradictions too extreme to handle. This explains why last week the ideologues for the system were unable to confront my argument directly, and why they lapsed



into peripheral quibbles and irrational ad hominem arguments, even going so far as to call me a Trotskyist and a revisionist. They could not come right out and say that the universities should be run by the rich and that the people should not run the universities. That ideology, once virtually unquestioned, has been made virtually unmentionable by the changing class relationships I described last week. Instead, they had to villify the working class without letting it appear that they did not believe in democracy, the rule of the people. The working class supports the Vietnam War, votes for Wallace, and uses bad grammar; therefore it is not necessary to take seriously the argument that they should run the universities. Now these gentlemen know as well as I do that it was not the working class that started the Vietnam War and lied the people into tolerating it, that only a tiny minority of them voted for Wallace, and that neither Shakespeare nor Melville wrote grammatically. My point here is not to insult the intelligence of those arguing with me; quite the reverse, I would like them to understand that it was the internal contradictions in their ideology that forced them into irrationality.

I believe a similar phenomenon can be seen in Dr. Howard's position, for it, like that of other presidents, is founded upon contradictions, contradictions coming directly from the objective world. The internal contradictions of bourgeois ideology can never be apparent to those who most passionately affirm it, because it rests on that primal exercise of brute power and violence, the expropriation for private use of the labor and resources of the entire population.

Each of the five rules Dr. Howard lays down for the governance of the university (pp. 13-14) papers over deep contradictions:

1. The first rule distinguishes between two kinds of free speech, that accorded to those acceptable to the power structure and a much less significant kind granted to others. "The university"—and this apparently means the president—"sees fit to invite" certain people to speak on campus. These chosen

the people on the campus are supposed to give them a respectful hearing, may ask questions unless these are "attempts to harass or embarrass" the speaker, but may not protest, even in a silent picket sign. There seems to be no provision at all for those who wish to speak and are not authorized to do so by the "university."

2. The second rule calls for "the rejection of emotionalism and sensation-ism" because they "are antithetical to the conduct of intellectual endeavor." The segregation of emotion and intellect is, of course, necessary to a system based on exploitation and inequality; we are supposed to understand such facts dispassionately, not respond to them with the appropriate emotions. This alienation is the essential act of dehumanization that prevents us from comprehending such an intellectual fact as the body count of Vietnamese peasants. That is why our political science departments and economics departments work so hard to construct abstract, ethically neutral models.

3. "The prohibition of the physical capture of university premises or university employees by college personnel." But the fact is that all the university premises and almost all the university employees have already been physically captured, and this is the central contradiction of the university, its embodiment of that primal bourgeois expropriation. Stanford University, for instance, comes directly from Leland Stanford's money which came directly from land stolen from the Indians and Mexicans and labor stolen from Chinese immigrants. It is fueled, as I showed last week, by the wealth of the Pacific Basin, which it is consciously and explicitly trying to turn into an economic empire. In the past few years at Stanford, one building housed an experimental college developed by the students and another, the Old Union, was the undergraduate dormitory universally acknowledged to be the most intellectually exciting student residence on campus. The administration, using its virtually unchallenged power, physically captured the experimental college building, thus destroying the experimental college, and turned it into the Placement Office, where inter-

parts of the war machine represented on the Board of Trustees. If the students who were evicted from that building were to sit in to protest, Dr. Howard, like the administration and most of the faculty at Stanford, would call this act, unlike the other, a "physical capture of university premises." When the administration decided to seize the Old Union and turn it into an office building for itself, there was a protest. My own department, for instance, submitted a petition signed by almost every faculty member pointing out that the administration was about to destroy a unique intellectual center, the most productive meeting-place on campus for faculty and students. The administration did not even deign to issue a formal reply. Then last year this building was the scene of the big sit-in protesting the high-handed suspension of seven students involved in a peaceful demonstration against CIA recruiting on campus. The participants in the sit-in very pointedly obstructed no one's entrance to the building, guaranteed the safety and functioning of all offices, and carefully kept the floors and washrooms clean. Yet this, unlike the earlier expropriation, was seen not only as a physical capture but as an act of violence and anarchy. The arguments were precisely those used by management in Flint, Michigan, in 1936, where the sit-in tactic was pioneered by the auto workers. Though it was the labor of the workers that had built the factories, the owners and managers, together with their press and their politicians, could see their own occupation of the factories as the only imaginable condition of an orderly and lawful society. <sup>2</sup> A factory or a university occupied and run by anybody but the bourgeoisie seems to them the epitome of anarchy.

Dr. Howard's other two rules concern "the university's general obligations in the present context of society":

1. " . . . in every aspect of the university, there shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, color or religion." Let us note the unspoken exceptions to this rule. Entrance requirements are to be such that very few members of racial minorities and the working class in general can qualify. Verbal

can read and write the language of the bourgeoisie. The knowledge to be taught is that which the bourgeoisie considers important: it is important to know Beethoven, Wordsworth, and T.S. Eliot, but not Leadbelly, Woodie Guthrie, and Bob Dylan; Plato, Darwin, and Paul Samuelson, but not Mao Tse-Tung; the operation of a laboratory distillation apparatus but not that of an automobile engine; the art of cathedral windows, but not that of political posters; the history of Europe, but not that of Africa. (This may sound to your ears anti-intellectual, whereas in fact it is merely anti-elitist.) Dr. Howard seems unconscious of what he is confessing when he boasts that once his college brought "70 of the world's foremost Negroes to our campus" for four or five days because "it was high time that somebody dramatized and rejoiced in the incredible contributions which Negroes had made to our society." (Discussion, p.6) One reason Black people are demanding autonomous Black studies departments is that people like Dr. Howard, no matter how earnest their motives, cannot comprehend their own unconscious racial discrimination. If this sounds harsh, examine his own institution. (In looking at Rockford's curriculum, I used a 1963/64 catalog, the latest available at Stanford; I'm sure that some improvements have since been made, largely because of what Dr. Howard calls those left-wing "Quixotic assaults upon the institutions of society." Dr. Howard says that "there shall be no discrimination on the basis of race [or] color" "in every aspect of the university." The curriculum of Rockford says in effect, "We don't discriminate on the basis of race or culture; it's just that other cultures aren't quite as good as ours and only our history is important." Every single history course deals with the history of Europe and the United States. The music department teaches the theory and history of white music only. In all the literature departments, there is only one course in non-white literature, a course in Asian literature "given when elections justify"; I understand from Dr. Howard's earlier remarks that there is now an interim course in literature of the Black revolution. The art department offers at least five courses in the history of

"Western" art, allowing only one stain to show through the whitewash, a course entitled "Primitive Art" and thus described in the catalog: "Survey of the arts of the African Negro, the Oceanic peoples and the North American Indians." What kind of thought but racist thought could classify the art of, say, the Ashanti civilization as "primitive"? This cultural racism perfectly illustrates what I referred to last week as the kind of knowledge useful only to the class that produced it; by making supposedly objective classifications it rationalizes white supremacy and teaches Black people that they are some kind of naked savage in disguise.

2. Dr. Howard's only other rule on "the university's general obligations in the present context of society" is: "A commitment on the part of the university to observe public law and to cooperate with public authorities in maintaining public law." Now the question, whether the university should support what is legal or what is just when the two conflict, is precisely the heart of the issue in much of the present moral protest and confrontation. But Dr. Howard is forced by the contradiction in his argument to deal with this parenthetically as follows: "(The whole question of the university's tolerance or encouragement of civil disobedience needs a thorough airing, but that is another speech.)"

The fact is that the neutrality of the university is a sham, just as the neutrality of bourgeois law and order is a sham. The university, as we all know, or at least as the Department of Defense knows, is an integral part of the war machine. Dr. Howard gives it all away when he names the first qualification of his ideal university president: "The enormous variety of federal programs for higher education, and the enormous volume of federal funds that flows to the campus, and the dependence of the university upon these funds make it desirable that the head of any major university have, as one of his principal qualifications, a wealth of contacts in Washington and a reputation which will earn him appointments to the Board of the National Science Foundation, Presidential Task Forces or other posts of distinction and visibility within the

government." (p.27) Howard sees a fundamental identity between the government and the people. When he says that the university must work "in harmony with the interests of the public or the government," he means that they are the same thing. But the majority of the world's population makes a clear distinction between the American people and the American government, which they look upon as their number one enemy.

The hidden contradiction becomes apparent when Dr. Howard deals with the substance of student dissent:

Students are demanding that the university abandon its neutrality, take sides and take action concerning the great moral issues of our times. Students have demanded that the universities withdraw from the Institute for Defense Analysis and prohibit recruiters from the military services and recruiters from the manufacturers of napalm and refuse to do business with commercial enterprises which support South Africa. (p.5)

Since Dr. Howard has just attacked the present university philosophy, according to which "the university may just as readily graduate an Adolph Hitler as an Albert Schweitzer" and since he says that these student demands are aimed precisely at this "neutrality," the logical conclusion to his argument would

be to say either that these students are right or that the university should aid in the manufacture of napalm, military recruiting, and apartheid. But he can not do this. Like those he criticizes, he takes an apparently neutral

position, which is effectively a position of support, on the university's

involvement with napalm, the Vietnam War, and apartheid. Then he characterizes the activist students as merely "leading Quixotic assaults upon the institutions

of society" and claims, quite contrary to fact, that on "the other end of the

south spectrum" are "the young people who are blazing trails in harmony with and as a part of society--the Peace Corpsmen, the tutors of underprivileged students,

and other dedicated social servants." (p.9) Everybody with any contact with large numbers of the radical activists knows that these are the very same people who did civil rights work in the rural south and the urban north, first stirred the conscience of the nation about Vietnam, and served in the Peace Corps and Vista. On the opposite end of the youth spectrum from these selfless heroes are the ambitious, the avaricious, the bloodthirsty, and the gung-ho.

Dr. Howard thinks that by banning "student organizations committed to the use of violence," the president can restore order. The only student organizations I know that are committed to violence are ROTC and the football team, neither of which I believe is to be found at Rockford. I suspect that he is really alluding to SDS, which is no more committed to violence than any non-pacifist political organization, including the Republican and Democratic parties. In order to restore order, it would be necessary to ban the causes of disorder, which are also the causes of revolutionary organizations, a label that before long will probably describe SDS accurately. As a revolutionary myself, I really don't care much one way or the other if SDS is banned. That would make practical organizing activity a little more inconvenient, but it would expedite revolutionary cadre formation. I would, however, welcome a successful ban on the main cause of disorder, because that would mean that the revolution has triumphed. For the greatest cause of disorder in the history of man is capitalism. This disorder is by no means entirely a bad thing, however, as I tried to indicate in my paper last week. In the words of the Communist Manifesto:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and removable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and

1  
last week angry shouts of protest greeted my assertion that Wallace's main support did not come from blue-collar workers, but rather was in general directly proportional to the income and education of the electorate in different neighborhoods; and I was challenged to produce evidence. I refer you to the New York Times, November 6, 1968, pp. 1, 23, and November 8, 1968, p. 27. One analyst for the Times was quite surprised to discover that the neighborhoods which were supposed to go heavily for Wallace, those where there were heavy concentrations of Irish, Polish, and Italian blue-collar workers, had given him negligible support. One example he cited was the closely-watched 2nd District of Buffalo's 7th Ward, which is almost completely made up of Polish blue-collar workers; they gave Wallace a grand total of 36 votes out of 588 cast (6%). The same article cites evidence that over 50% of the Wallace vote outside the South came from Republicans. The Times' statistical breakdown of the vote in New York City and its suburbs is very clear. The Wallace vote in New York City as a whole was a mere 4%, with Richmond, the middle-class suburban borough, giving by far the highest percentage (9%, compared to 3% in Manhattan, 5% in the Bronx, 1% in Brooklyn, and 6% in Queens). Nassau County gave Wallace 5%, Westchester County 6%, that is 50% higher than NYC, and Suffolk County gave him 9%, well more than double the New York City percentage. The area by

But even if the working class had voted more heavily for Wallace, what would that prove about who should run the universities? Wallace was the only highly-publicized candidate with a working-class background, and the only one attacking corporate power (although that, as with Hitler, was a hoax).

area breakdown is even more instructive. For instance, NYC's 60th Assembly District, heavily populated by Italian blue-collar workers (it includes "Little Italy"), gave Wallace 4%; this compares strikingly with the vote in the wealthy Long Island communities of Southampton (9%), Southold (9½%), and Riverhead (12½%).



The following quotations are from The New York Times, January 1, 1937:

~~... each one of these plants was shut down by the union against the wishes of a great majority of the employees, without any attempt by the union to bargain collectively, before the sit-down occurred.~~

Sit-downs are strikes. Such strikers are clearly trespassers and violators of the law of the land. We cannot have bona fide collective bargaining with sit-down strikers in illegal possession of plants.

Collective bargaining cannot be justified if one party, having seized the plant, holds a gun at the other party's head.

William S. Knudsen, Executive Vice-President of GM

It is unfortunate when a handful of strangers can meet in Washington and then in Detroit to determine courses of action and even create demands that result in idleness for thousands of contented workers and disrupt a happy community.

Harlow Curtice, President of Buick Motor Co.