

# A very sad scene at California universities

Student activists at York who dream of turning the university into another Berkeley are wasting their time. So says York grad Richard Banigan, a first-hand witness of the '68-'69 California riots. Banigan, who is currently studying at Stanford University, predicts that the worst in student riots is yet to come, and that it will come soon.

by Richard Banigan

As a small (by American standards), suburban university whose student body is overwhelmingly white, straight and middle class, York is about as remote as can be from the current conditions for a riot. Compare the situation at York with the following conditions observed at San Francisco area universities and judge for yourself.

1. **Universities** such as Stanford and San Jose State, where the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) is by far the largest radical organization, have been the quietest. The SDS has consistently



been the weakest link in the triumvirate of student organizations, consisting of the SDS, the BSU (Black Students Union) and the TWLF (Third World Liberation Front), that have been involved in the recent riots. As a recent study of its membership revealed, the SDS apparently represents the interests of the white, middle class students. On the other hand, San Francisco State, where black, Mexican, Chinese and other non-white students make up a hefty 40% of the enrollment, has seen the worst year of disruption and violence in American university history.

But rather than blame minority groups for all the riots, it would be more relevant to look to the indifference of the white students as a major cause of dissatisfaction. At Stanford, the BSU operates independently, believing the SDS to be incapable of understanding the needs of black students. While the SDS seems to be concerned mainly with guilt over the Vietnam war and legalizing pot, the BSU wants a better deal for black students from the Admissions Office, and a program of Black Studies. Not only are the separate issues worlds apart, but it is obvious that the BSU has a complaint that is real and immediate, and capable of being solved with direct action.

2. The administration of San Francisco State has stubbornly refused reasonable student demands for the institution of a Department of Black Studies over the past two years with claims of inadequate funds, insufficient faculty and the general irrelevance of black studies in the modern world. The University of California offers courses in such obscure languages as Urdu and Esperanto, some sixty languages in all, but Swahili, the "Lingua Franca" of modern Africa, was not to be taught at S.F. State. This was opposition for the sake of opposition. It has been hinted that if the students had not been so vigorous in their demands, much of what they had been asking for would have been initiated as a matter of course.

The only comparable situation at York would be if students demanded a program of French Canadian Studies and were refused by the administration. The York administration has usually led the way, however, and has been responsive to student needs or even well ahead of them.

3. **Giving** credence to Governor Reagan's claims of "outside agitation", is the fact that usually over half of the arrestees after a day's rioting at Berkeley or S.F. State turn out to be non-students, non-workers, and frequently temporary or non-residents of the state. This is one of the problems unique to the San Francisco area as centre of the universe to the Hippie subculture. Berkeley is just a stone's throw (pun not intended) from the infamous Telegraph Avenue, haven for assorted pushers, freaks, part-time musicians and hangers-on, known collectively as the "street people". And S.F. State is mere blocks from the Haight-Ashbury, where a kid can buy a joint in about five minutes, or anything else to blow his mind or soul, if he is not mugged first. Hippies flock to these districts from all over, and traditionally find support for themselves by selling dope to students and tourists. Hippies are usually found hanging around the universities in great numbers, and delight in regular riots as an outlet for pent-up anti-social hostility feelings. A recent editor in the Berkeley student newspaper complained that these street people were taking over "their riots".

But more to the point, psychotic behaviour is running high amongst the Hippie/addicts as a result of a price war in the marijuana trade, and a subsequent mass conversion to the notorious drug, speed. Last summer enormous illicit marijuana crops were discovered in Mexico and destroyed, driving up the price of the weed in San Francisco. Speed, being easily manufactured from commercial product known as Chicken Crank (used to make hens lay faster by speeding up their metabolic rate), soon undercut the price of marijuana and captured a large, ready-made market. Since then, speed freaks have initiated a wave of murders, rapes, torturings, and other terror and violence, and have composed a hard core of "street fighters" that threaten the local campuses.

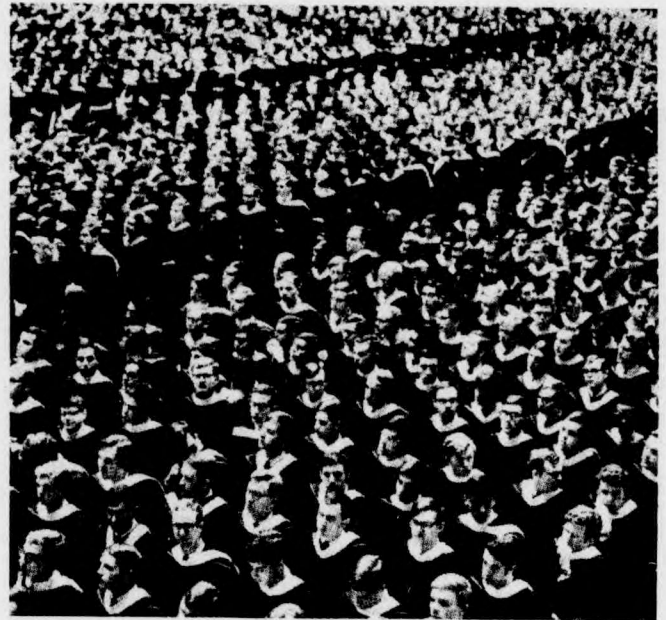
These desperadoes would make the most hard-bitten habitues of Yorkville, near the University of Toronto, seem like saints, not to mention outnumbering them fifty or sixty to one. It is doubtful that Yorkville could form such a commando group for several reasons. It is certainly too far from York, and may be even too far from the U of T. The mobility of a large, spontaneous mob is extremely limited, and as yet there is no particular reason why it should move onto a campus. Since an estimated 80% of Berkeley students are regular pot and drug users, there is obviously greater interdependence and identification with the local Hippie colonies.

4. **The** alienation of California students from their governor is extreme and irreconcilable. Reagan has made wholesale cuts in the University of California budget, blocked the hiring and re-hiring of professors and lecturers who do not toe the establishment line (Herbert Marcuse, Eldridge Cleaver, etc.), and has inspired a mass exodus of scholars to more stable positions in the East. But what is worst of all is Reagan's habit of over-reacting to what is essentially the right of students to strike. His declaration of a state of "extreme emergency" immediately created one, in the view of the Berkeley student newspaper. One of the greatest contributions to the polarization of student opinion at Berkeley was the Reagan-ordered invasion of the campus with hundreds of Highway Patrolmen and National Guardsmen equipped with all of the latest

riot control gadgets.

Such a situation is virtually inconceivable in Canada. Imagine a provincial premier who was essentially opposed to education, believing it to be a privilege rather than a right, and who would call out the army at the slightest hint of dissatisfaction! One of Reagan's problems, admittedly, is the total inadequacy of local police.

5. **There is** a tense, hysterical atmosphere in America that is apparently heightened by the intensely competitive press most of my letters home are to explain that things are not really so bad as



they seem from newspapers and TV reports.

I personally witnessed what was reported as a "riot" one day at Berkeley. It consisted of exactly thirteen pickets at the main gate for about twenty minutes at noontime, and a bunch of people standing around watching. A block away two cops leaned on their patrol car and yawned. This was two days before Reagan called in the National Guard, and the governor admits that he was angered by what he saw on television. I had to console a friend of mine in England, who heard of a "riot" at Stanford, with the news that all that happened was a five minute raid on the bookstore, in which some books were flung on the floor. That such an item would be newsworthy as far away as Britain is slightly incredible.

Because universities purport to be the origin of enlightened opinion, they are natural focal points of national neuroses. Compounding usual student pressures here is the threat of the Draft. Also, the problems of graduate students are generally more severe than those of undergraduates, and Berkeley and Stanford, at least, are composed of 60 graduates. The suicide rate at Stanford is about six per year, although the school is only slightly larger than York. Feelings predictably run higher around exam time, and is often greatly inspired by the news of riots at other universities. The rash of disturbances last spring, in which some twenty American universities were forced to temporarily shut down, occurred at a time when Canadian students were already enjoying their summer vacations.

Last May Stanford students seized the administration building, forced the resignation of the president, and burned the Naval ROTC building to the ground. While this was going on, another student campaigned for President of the ASSU (Associated Students of Stanford University) dressed only in her glorious skin.

What will happen this year? Whatever it is, it is almost as safe to predict that nothing will happen at York.