

The radical student movement has its own limitations

By JULES LESTER

(This article is reprinted from The Guardian, an independent radical weekly newspaper published in New York City).

A student movement has its own built-in limitations, both in terms of how much it can do and how much it can understand. In some ways, a student movement tends to be artificial, because the student lives in an artificial environment—the university. Thus, it is natural that a student movement generally concerns itself with issues that the majority of society has hardly any time at all to be concerned about. This is good to a point. Without the student demonstrations against the war, there would've been no anti-war movement. Without student consciousness of racism, blacks would be even more isolated and vulnerable to attack.

A student movement evolves to an inevitable point where it realizes that wars and racism are the manifestations of an unhuman system and if wars and racism are going to be stopped, the system itself must be stopped and another created. And it is at this point that a student movement reaches the boundaries of its inherent limitations. When this juncture is reached, the student movement finds its members becoming increasingly frustrated and the movement seeks to relieve that frustration through activism and/or by turning its attention to changing the students' immediate environment, the university.

A student movement which concerns itself with bringing about changes within the university is engaging in an act which can have all the appearances of being important, while being, in essence, quite unimportant. Regardless of how unending one's stay in a university may seem, the fact yet remains that after four years of serving time, the student leaves. The university is a temporary society for most who live within its confines and as such, any radical activity aimed at it is of limited value.

Because the university is a temporary society, any movement coming from it is in danger of being temporary. The next student generation may have more traditional interests than the one which kept the campus in an uproar during the preceding four years. And while student movements are characterized by a great willingness to confront the reigning social authority, there is nothing inherent in a student movement that will insure its evolution into a radical movement once the students leave the university.

Perhaps the greatest liability of a student movement is that it is only able to speak to other students. While this is of limited value, the fact still remains that there is perhaps no group more powerless than students. Not only are students without power, the instruments of power

are not even part of their world. If all students went on strike, it wouldn't cause the society to pause in its step. The most that a student movement can do is to disrupt. The power to disrupt, however, cannot be equated with the power to make a revolution. A student movement is only a revolutionary force when it can act as an adjunct with other forces in society. It is needless to say that such a situation does not presently exist.

When student radicals leave the campus, they can avoid coming into direct contact with other forces in the society by creating their own little worlds where they continue to live with each other, talk only to each other and remain unconcerned about the concrete problems which most people have to face. The student radical is never heard talking about a rise in the price of milk, new taxes, real wages or doctor bills. The student radical creates his own society in which money is not an overriding problem and because it isn't, the student radical thinks that revolution is all about love, because he has time to think about love. Everybody else in thinking about survival.

No matter how radical a student may be, his radicalism remains virgin until he has had to face the basic problems which everyone in the society has to face—paying the rent every month. It is easy to be radical when someone else is underwriting it. It is all too easy to belittle the Wallace-supporting factory worker when one does not know the constant economic insecurity and fear under which that factory worker lives.

While the goal of revolution is the creation of the new man, people turn to revolution when that becomes the only means of satisfying their material needs. They do not become revolutionaries because of any ideas about the new man.

The student radical has to become an everyday radical before he can be totally trusted. He must know the concrete problems which face the everyday person. And while such issues as the war in Viet Nam, the repression of Mexican students and the invasion of Czechoslovakia are important, revolution is made from the three eternal issues—food, clothing and shelter. Our job is to show people that they are being robbed of their birthright for a mess of pottage and that that is not necessary.

As long as the movement is dominated by students, the movement will carry within it the seeds of its own death. As long as the student, upon graduation, carries his radicalism to an apartment three blocks away from the campus or to the nation's East Villages where a thousand others just like him reside, his radicalism will remain theoretically correct and pragmatically irrelevant, except as a gadfly forcing the system to make minimal reforms.

It seems to me absurd that . . .

The Editor,

I was shocked on attending the debate in SUB on Friday noon to hear the unfortunate racist attitude of the engineering representative on students' council. One can only concur with Jon Bordo that this is a 'pre-civil rights' position, and one which is sadly incongruous in a supposedly 'educated' person in 1968.

I came to Alberta from New Zealand in August, 1967 and have recently been pondering the views of students here whom I have come into contact with, through The Gateway, through teaching undergraduate seminars and through talking to fellow grad students.

My impression is that public opinion in the University of Alberta is about 10 years behind that of most universities in the world. Could one anywhere else, have a serious debate on the issue

of whether Indians are lazy, drunken or stupid? (A view I encountered frequently amongst undergrads). In other words, the opinion of the engineering rep may be representative one in the university.

It may be that my sampling of student opinion has been a missed one. Certainly there are encouraging signs such as the existence of groups such as the SDU. At the same time it seems to me absurd that groups and individuals which question the basic structure and institutions of the university and society should be the exception rather than the rule in a modern university.

It's time the University of Alberta woke up and began to consider the basic question of what the purpose of a university is, instead of seeing the university as another part of the consumed.

Anne Smith
grad studies

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You know, when you really come down to it, there is a sickness in our society, although it is not the illness of conformity. The very essential ingredient of the sickness is the inability of those who proclaim their dissatisfaction with it to establish objectives. There continues the contradictory process of abusing freedom to the point that it will begin to erode.

It is unwise to forget that Hitler and Mussolini came preaching morality and service to the state.

Some of the more revolutionary groups in our country are saying they spit on freedom and the state. This was a common saying in Germany—after it became Hitler's Reich.

And so it goes—the pro and the con and the student movement involved in both. Jules Lester, who writes out of New York, looks at the students and their aims and possible objectives and comes to a not too astonishing conclusion.

It was a reprinted article, more for your information than anything else because it is the duty of the newspaper to print such information.

Send contributions to The Editor, The Gateway.

—The Editor

I regret that the happy . . .

The Editor,

I am pleased that your commentator, Peter Boothroyd, was able to make his way through to the chiefest point of my letter of Oct. 25. I regret that the happy little hints, clues and openings gaily given in the spirit of revolution appear to him only as cracks in my facade and not in that of the institution. From his exegesis of The Universities Act, I suspect Mr. Boothroyd is becoming institutionalized himself.

May I try again? We should keep in mind that the Board of Governors is at least two steps removed from "ultimate control of the finances". By its very inability to function directly in the important activities of the university, i.e., what staff and students do, the board is becoming obsolete in its present terms. A marked revision in function for it will be forthcoming, and with that a revised administrative arrangement for the university.

One can foresee the board taking over and vastly extending the present function of the University Senate, as the university's bridge to the public, as well as acting with dispatch and fearlessness to transmit the needs of the university to the Universities Commission and the government. The board cannot establish the priorities of the university because it has little experience of them or their bases, but it can appreciate them and work for them. Through its connection with people and government the board could become an equal partner in forming a university, and the vanguard of its growth and defence. I also dare say it can be reasoned into enlightenment before it can be bludgeoned there. The only people that can do that are the faculty, and they only by the force of success of their operations. Of course, the faculty is only successful if the students are successful. Now here is where we need some cool criteria.

More and more, decision and policy makers of the administration will turn again to the faculty and students, as an Antean flock, resuscitating. Publicly, this return

is owing to student agitation, but it leads back ten years and more to faculty initiatives. In a university, the administration sits awkwardly between two forces, board and faculty, and swings between the two.

During the last decade, the university has been subjected to accelerating growth, accelerating responsibilities, and accelerating knowledge. As the university grew, responsibility for the handling of this growth went to the administration, as the responsibility for the handling of knowledge went to the faculty. Neither had proper time to keep up with the other. The administration accreted regulations which have led it to an inflated position of power. The administration has powers that look real and formidable but they are powers of sufferance. They are not real if they are not acceptable.

The power of the administration can come either from a Board of Governors, whose own strength lies only in its power of disbursement, or from the faculty, which lives with students and from whose ranks it grows (do you recognize the continuum that exists between faculty and students, and which is somewhat extended but not much altered by enlarging faculty committees to include students?).

If money is stronger than ideas, then the Board of Governors is the boss. Conversely, we can get it when we want it, but it requires ideas that are stronger than money. I think we are learning to handle our expansions in different directions, which means that we can begin to take time to regulate ourselves a little better.

Think positively Peter! Who is it that considers students and most faculty guests in the university community? I hope not you. The successful student is a transient, but although transient he is in his time a distinctive part of the university. I think of myself as one of the most important people here and I assume that other faculty and students do the same for themselves. You be a guest if you want, but I live here man.

J. R. Nursall,
Department of Zoology

I am going to buy a poppy . . .

The Editor,

I am going to buy a poppy and wear it with pride and it's going to take a lot more than poor old John Miller's warped mind to make me change my mind. Let me ask him just what right he has to spit forth—even to think such garbage as he spouted in the Nov. 8 edition of The Gateway? Let him go to any place where disabled veterans hang out, and if he has any stomach left, then let him talk about such frivolous things as drinking. Sure the veterans drink, but don't try to tell me that my friend does not, and the veterans are a great deal more deserving.

How can one say that the soldiers can be linked in blame with the politicians? I would ask how a young person from "Pumphandle, Sask." is to blame for the political maneuvering in Europe. Let me remind him that Canada was brought into the war by Britain. Also, these Canadian boys, and indeed boys from all over the world showed a great deal more courage and national pride than anyone who would even consider writing such garbage. That's no reason to condemn a man, so please stop trying to be sensational until you learn some manners. You owe them a great deal more than they owe you.

It takes a pretty nearsighted person to actually claim to believe this crap about brainwashing. Allied soldiers were fighting to stop the murder of whole families while they lay in bed. If that's brainwashing, then I'm all for it. After all, there is something to the idea of preserving right and eliminating wrong.

Another thing is this junk about "war orientation". Nobody can seriously say or believe that we live in a war psychology and economy. Canada has one of the smallest war budgets in the world, and we don't have any characteristics of a war-like state, such as compulsory induction.

Finally, what kind of editor would print such crap? It makes it quite clear that there is a search for editorial policy, and the editor is merely groping in the dark. The trouble is that he is using a powerful lever as The Gateway for a personal experiment, while he decides on paper policy. The danger is that an outside observer may think that these empty-headed slants, called commentary, are the views of the student body.

Andy Hermanson
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EDITOR'S NOTE—Goddam it. For the umpteenth time, we repeat—all opinions expressed are not those of the newspaper (unless specifically marked 'editorial') Students have a right to speak their minds, just as Andy Hermanson has. And no editor tells a columnist what to write or tosses out material because it doesn't agree with editorial policy. As a matter of fact, we do not agree with John Miller. But that doesn't mean we won't run his copy. If we accepted only certain viewpoints, there would be accusations of facism, communist and we would be called "Little Pravada".

Boothroyd's column
this Friday