

Against the critical university

The goal of the "pluralist university" once admitted if not praised by everyone, is now being replaced by the "critical university" at the behest of the self proclaimed leaders of the "student revolution".

"Critical" is a fine slogan indeed. It has a ring at the same time less technical than the worn and weary "pluralist", and less cliched than, say, "thoughtful". It is not politically tainted like "progressive", nor does it carry such educational implications as "free". So excellent is it as a slogan, that its peculiar charms were noted by the various quarrelsome revolutionary splinters of 19th century Russia and were used with varying effect. It has now been revived or re-invented. What does it mean?

Despite copious articles by ardent advocates, no one is quite clear. Each article forces us to revise our judgement in some particulars. The next article cancels the revision. Nevertheless, two distinct if amorphous types of meaning do emerge.

The first "critical university" is the one in which "genuine questioning of social values" can take place. The university must not be an ivory tower separated from society. Nor must it merely reflect society's values. It has a duty to provide the milieu for changes to be formulated as well as for the status quo to be defended. This is very good-but no one except a die-hard reactionary of an increasingly rare breed can be opposed to it. It is in fact a rechristened "pluralist" idea. One can urge a greater emphasis on analysis of values and a softpedalling of the "technique" now far too important in such subjects as law, economics, and political science.

However, this desired shift of emphasis is not sufficient to be used as a revolutionary slogan. If it is the goal of the critical university, then by and large everyone is in agreement with it, including the administration. Though crucial questions remain to be worked out, and the militant student movement certainly has a *raison d'être*, the present university structure can without a doubt be retained. Surely those calling for "total war" must be concerned with something else!

We now come to the other "critical" university, one with a slightly-chilling undercurrent, and certainly without the "motherhood" virtues of the first. The critical university

has been proposed as an institution dedicated to changing society in a particular way, with room for disagreement in only a limited sphere, and with the teaching of humanities and social sciences exclusively under a single ideological angle. Comments such as: "No non-Marxist should be allowed to teach economics" and "Urban guerrilla warfare is more important than bourgeois political science" are authentic and characteristic expressions of this trend among campus super-activists.

It goes without saying that this is an explosive proposal, and that a vocal opposition exists.

The charge most frequently levelled at the proposal is "totalitarianism", another word everyone uses without defining. It explains nothing and only serves to cast implications

of "plots" and "subversiveness" on groups or ideas. In fact, the "critical university" when we consider certain basic assumptions its proponents make, is not at all as sinister as it sounds. It may be wrong, but nothing more.

The assumptions are:

1) That the present university serves exclusively as the organ of the governing classes to prepare efficient and brainless yes-men.

2) That in any case the university must serve as the instrument of one class or another, since "class-independent" learning, as Marx demonstrated, does not exist.

3) That the university can be taken away from its present masters by proper political action, even if a general change does not occur in society and perhaps that it can even bring about such change.

It seems clear that, if one accepts these assumptions, the "critical university" is far from being sinister. Indeed, it becomes a necessity. It is therefore on these assumptions that it must stand or fall, I think it fails.

The first assumption has some basis in fact. The Board of Governors is business-controlled and war research goes on in university laboratories. More significantly, the North American establishment has encouraged the growth of intellectual schools of the same pseudo-objectivity that Marx scathed over a century ago as being set up in order to avoid pertinent social criticism. Nevertheless, to deduce from this evidence that the university is run exclusively in the interest of the class in power is clearly to close one's eyes to all but fragments of reality.

In theory the university is not dedicated to the spreading of any ideology. We submit it carries its theory into practise even if it often has a slant. The question of slant varies, of course, from university to university. It is obvious that some universities on this continent are reactionary. However, it is equally obvious that many are not. Universities are what spawned the protest against the war, the McCarthy movement, and indeed most of the progressive ideas of our times. This year, Walt Rostow, one of Johnson's chief henchmen, and a noted (capitalist) economist was having trouble finding a suitable university post because of his unsavoury connections. The image of the university totally subservient to the state and the Pentagon quickly crumbles.

Nor can we prove intellectual subservience. The university does not prevent schools other than the pseudo-objective from expressing themselves.

Since many of today's scholars regrettably belong to that school, some departments have a conservative, or, worse, a hypocritically liberal bent. On the other hand, many departments and entire faculties are extremely radical. During the past eight years, schools of historians have emerged demonstrating that the U.S. and not Russia was responsible for the Cold War, and U.S. history was not as rosy in its marvellous consensus as has been depicted. Marcuse's ideas have gained prominence. A minor Marxist revival got under way. All this happened in universities, the same ones described by many students as the mindless perpetrators of the status quo.

Reflection shows us that if anywhere in North American society radical ideas other than "whitey-baiting" can find champions, it is on campuses, and that until they disrupt university life they are at least tolerated if not encouraged on them.

The second superactivist premise is very poor philosophy. Marx showed that the type of art, philosophy even science that an epoch produces is directly "caused" by economic factors, by the class structure. But is that all there is to them? Is that all that is worth studying? Marx would certainly never say so.

The advocates of the view that this is all must be referred to that bourgeois philosopher Aristotle. They will find the notion of "cause" susceptible of far more than the one definition they see for it.

What Marx proved was that the "efficient causes" and some of the "final causes" of all learning are economic. This means that major trends in art, for example, are the expressions of particular classes and serve their ideological ends. Nevertheless, there still exist to be considered, firstly, the individuality of an artist, and secondly the "material" and "formal" causes-the techniques, presentation, equipment and similar matters. And in science, class analysis may show us why certain things developed when they did-but does this justify us in concluding that a content to be learned apart from ideology does not exist? No doubt, nothing is ever completely divorced from the political and social reality. At the same time, nothing is ever completely reducible to those things, and the attempt to reduce all knowledge to Marxist jargon is both un-Marxist and unjustifiable. With all deference to the excellent Soviet education System, the Soviet and Chinese approach to humanities shows up some of the more glaring disadvantages of this narrow attitude.

This aspect of the "critical university" becomes even more alarming when considered less abstractly, in terms of the limitations on academic freedom it would necessarily bring. Not all people are Marxists or fellow travellers and not all Marxists are in agreement. The witch-hunt that would follow the establishment of a university ideology would cause human suffering and humiliation that would effectively cancel out any benefit that could be derived from it. The world of Sen. Joe McCarthy of twenty years

ago would return in reverse. People would be fired, ridiculed, accused and threatened. It goes without saying, this would arrest all intellectual progress and set our society even further behind than it is.

In time, the one ideology would get rusty, both out of age (since it could not be safely revised) and for lack of challenge.

by julius grey

It is the third assumption of the advocates of a "critical university-that of the possibility of a "progressive" university in a hostile society-that deserves most to be scoffed at.

It is best described as "university Stalinism" - full socialism under encirclement. Such a thing is impossible, because society can always

defeat the university. If it were possible, it would not be desirable.

The university is now a large institution, fairly progressive by North American standards and able to exercise some influence. It is the only place leftists can get jobs without much trouble or dissimulation and where certain works can find publishers. The "critical university" would shrink and lose all its influence. The society would move to the right in reaction to it. Certain faculties (e.g. law, medicine, engineering) might separate and form "schools" of deeply conservative hue. Fewer jobs would be available. Less printing could be done. The university is not a country; it could not set itself up as the "breeding ground" for world-wide change. It is not sufficiently independent. Its decline would affect our whole civilization adversely by lessening the influence of intellectuals to the advantage of the technicians and bureaucrats. It would achieve nothing.

Thus the "critical university" fails. It is either a meaningless cliché or a badly thought out and dangerous idea. Its real danger lies not in itself-under present conditions it could never succeed. However, its presence as an idea could generate a violent reaction against the entire "left". The superactivists, through sheer stupidity, are handing those who are itching for it, the excuse to bring about the truth of their first assumption.

To find an acceptable ideal, we are forced to return to the "pluralist" university. This ideal is now shared by most people in universities, and this makes it useless to those who have to foam at the mouth to feel secure. Basically, it means freedom of academic thought, the coexistence of different and opposing ideas, university independence from any classes and their interests but university participation in society and an end to all political discrimination on campus. If we examine it, we find it undisputably, both in the short and in the long run, the noblest goal for a university.

The fact that most administrators, staff, and students alike share this ideal does not eliminate the need for a militant student movement. People mean different things by pluralism and it has certainly not been achieved. War research is still carried on-this goes beyond any concept of freedom. Some discrimination-both racial and political - subsists. Rusty conservatism glares from the teaching methods and "marking" fixations. Student rights and dignity are only beginning to be recognized. The old "ivory tower" though shaken, stands. Above all, the danger of a right-wing reaction blown in by winds from the south, is ever-present. Students must continue to press for changes to bring about the real "pluralist" university. They must fight for representation on university bodies, for only with all factors represented can pluralism be preserved securely. However, they must give up the ideology of the "critical university" which hinders them and threatens all their achievements to date. For good measure, the sterile, misleading and dangerous slogan should be thrown out too.