

# the changing U and society



DR. CHRISTIAN BAY

. . . a man at the mike, the wolf at the door

rationalized. The sub-skills of cramming and spotting are developed in response to the challenge of exams. Those too bored or lazy to develop these particular skills develop another set categorized, by the teachers, as cheating.

Finally, as the culmination of their training, students learn how to sinecurize the university. Some of those who are best at it take it up as a permanent non-occupation and become known as professional students.

High schools and universities—like civil service—are perfectly suited for sinecurization. Since the student is treated like an in-out filing system, he has little motivation or opportunity to act otherwise.

The student treated as an object is being prepared—and is preparing himself—for his future as an employee who will be told what to do. The hopelessness of his position is increased by the illusion of status within the university. For there, while the liberal arts courses in fact have an inferior status, they appear to have the opposite.

## THE FRESHMEN'S DREAM

It is the liberal arts and humanities courses that are the curricula basis for the universities' mystique of truth. It is to this type of education that presidents allude in their public addresses; it is this type of education that is part of every freshman's dream.

The half-awareness that liberal arts students have of their situation has deep effects upon their life at the university. Some try to change their second-class status by becoming graduate students. Some become cynical. But most sinecurize and try not to think about it too much.

The prevalent attitude—like that in society in general—is one of empty optimism. Empty optimism has become the universal panacea of Western society. The summers explode in race riots, most of the world is at war, but we are assured that everything will be all right.

We read in the paper that 'steps are being taken,' that Ford Motor

cars are being sold in Vietnam and that momentous gains are just around the corner.

In succumbing to the panacea, students gain the rewards of safety and risklessness. All questions are mellowed by a bland assurance that good-will must prevail. And that, finally, is the ideology that the university transmits. And it is this ideology that the second-class student most often takes on as his own. The university is divided into those who are most necessary for the functioning of the society and those who are important only in the mass. The difference is one of degree but it is an important and applicable one. It can be seen in the different capacity that different departments have of obtaining research money. It can be seen in the different teacher-students ratios in different subjects areas. It can be seen in the different mobilities that the different faculties have. Even the distribution of graduate fellowships provides a good indicator.

## WHERE IT'S REALLY AT

In all cases, the advantage is gained by the technological arts and sciences.

This is the background of the formation of the liberal arts colleges. These institutions were supported to avoid the problems of the multiversity and reincarnate the universities' original rhetoric of truth.

Such small colleges are far less impersonal and rigid than the multiversities. But the price of this reward is the loss of the ability to engage in the key question remaining to the university: the question of what is knowledge. With the liberal arts being clearly distinguished from the social and natural sciences, the definition of knowledge becomes narrowed to one dimension: knowledge is the answers to socially relevant questions. But what is the criterion of social relevancy? Relevant questions are those that address themselves to the problems of maintaining the rationalized society.

The first great revolution within the universities took place when they were transformed into insti-

tutions for servicing production. In the process of this transformation, the universities became corporate structures integrated into the larger complex of social institutions.

The symptoms of that change—the bureaucratization of academe and the growth of the multiversity are the issues of the new university power struggles.

## THE POWER OUTSIDE

The revolts at Berkeley and the diminutive repetitions elsewhere seem to indicate that students are making some sort of gains. But the signs of power are nothing but symbols of unrest and this unrest in turn stems from the very deep powerlessness of the students. No student revolt can meet the student's needs because the university is incapable of it; it is institutionally incapable of it because the conflicts involved arise outside it and can only be resolved outside it.

Ironically, just as the battle for power within the corporation begins, a new and greater transformation commences. The universities of tomorrow will not be instruments of production, but of leisure.

Universal accessibility will be achieved not because of the triumph of the ethics of democracy, but because of the structure of the labour market.

Earlier, the phenomenon of sinecurization was discussed. But that type of relationship exists not only between person and object, but between person and person.

The prime function of the educational system is to socialize—that is, to channel energy and talents into acceptable outlets. But the young don't find it easy to accommodate themselves to the various rules thrown at them. After all, these rules are designed more to sustain the game than the participants.

## THE RULES ARE DEEP

Some rules, such as those against liquor and drugs, are not taken at all seriously and are broken freely. Others are less explicit and less easily broken. Many such rules are really patterns of be-

haviour, deeply ingrained and not always consciously known. Everyone is somehow aware, without being told, that it is unthinkable to shout at a teacher or fart in church.

Most people think that while they act towards authority as they have been taught to—that is, they con those in power—they are relatively free in relation to their peers and their own desires. But this feeling of freedom is, often as not, an illusion.

Just as the hostile environment of the school system leads to sinecurization which in turn makes it hard to be able to want to do anything, the habit of conning some relationships makes it easy to attain the kind of false independence which finally precludes real contact. And those who know no intimacy have a vague feeling that something is missing without knowing what it is.

The university—like the family, the rest of the educational system and all other social institutions governed by the law of hierarchy—is divided into the rulers and the ruled. The second-class students are those who are destined to become the privileged ruled. So the roots of student powerlessness lie not in the university, but in the deep social acceptance of the need for rigid authority.

## RADICAL TODAY—STANDARD TOMORROW

In the past few years, it has become fashionable and acceptable to advocate various reforms within the university. These reforms fall into two main groups. The first is the redistribution of power. The second is made up of pedagogical reforms—changes in the grading system, more student-professor contact, less specialization, etc.

It seems likely that as the university becomes more and more an

institution, these reforms will be incorporated and that what is considered radical today will become standard practice in the future.

Certainly these changes will make the university a much more pleasant and painless place for students and faculty. But it will not be basically changed; all that will have changed is the style of socialization that is functionally desirable.

The university, in its present form, was designed primarily to teach the first-class students to manage and develop the new technology. The rules of the teaching system—the emphasis on testing—were designed for these students and then applied to everyone. But as that technology nears its fruition the preponderance of students in the university has shifted towards the liberal arts faculties. But the universities' oncoming transformation into an institution of leisure and sophisticated socialization will not give the students any more real freedom than they have under the present system.

The computerized dimension of the university will not disappear but will become dominant. The student will be prepared to become a member of a mass consumer society—and, as befits such a future, the university will become more of a pseudo-intellectual cafeteria offering a choice of any number of packaged, pre-digested areas of 'knowledge.'

The advocate of university reform is, then, in the comfortable position of being in the vanguard and he can be assured that the future is on his side. But such assurance can mean nothing when it is seen that the problem of the university lies in its integration with the social purposes of a mass society which is itself antithetical to human freedom.

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