INTELLECTUALS, THE UNIVERSITY, AND THE MOVEMENT

STAUGHTON LYND

I ask that we consider carefully whether the American university is realistically likely to become, in the words of the conference call, a place where 'we may freely express the radical content of our lives' and a 'base' which will export 'humane values' to other institutions in the society. Asking that question also means not accepting unthinkingly the equation of radical intellectual and fulltime academic. Even in America this equation is inaccurate: surely we have had as much to learn from Paul Sweezy, who was thrown out of the academic world, and Herbert Aptheker, who was never permitted to enter it, and Isaac Deutscher, who first taught at a university the last year of his life, as from, say, C. Wright Mills and William Appleman Williams. What is far more striking is that of the principal luminaries of the intellectual tradition to which most of us in some degree are drawn, namely Marxism, not one -- not Marx, not Engels, not Plekhanov, not Lenin, not Trotsky, not Bukharin, not Rosa Luxemburg (who had a particular contempt for professors), not Antonio Gramsci, not Mao Tse-tung -- put bread on his table by university teaching. Please observe that I am not quoting the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. I am not arguing (for the moment) that we should act rather than think. My point is that without exception the most significant contributions to Marxist thought have come from men and women who were not academics, who passed through the university but did not remain there.

An exceedingly modest inference from that momentous fact is that whatever else it means to be a radical intellectual in America today, one thing requisite is an experimental attitude with respect to life-styles. Conferences all over the country this past year have explored the possibilities of radical vocations and radicalism in the professions. Just as some of us in years past chose to teach in Southern Negro colleges, so now adventurous souls are seeking out junior colleges and public high schools in white working-class neighborhoods. Are they not also radical intellectuals who are sweating out inner-city teaching, or researching police brutality and local power structures, or attempting to clarify current tactical dilemmas in the Movement, or painstakingly documenting trends in American imperialism at some local equivalent of the British Museum? If we believe in what Marx called 'praxis', or practical, critical activity, and in a future society in which the barriers between manual and intellectual labor will be broken down, we should at least not permit our present society narrowly to define what the life of the mind, or better, the use of the mind, must mean.

We ought to take very seriously the fact that the university corrupts radicals more often than it destroys them. Whatever our social origins, the university is a marvellously effective instrument for making us middle-class men. First it sets us in competition one with another. As undergraduate, graduate, and very often as professor, we are not working together on a common task, not - like children in a Soviet kindergarten - rolling a ball too large for any one of us to roll alone. We are competing in the performance of tasks little significant in themselves to see which ones of us will be permitted to realize the upwardly-mobile fantasies which the university requires us to entertain. You cannot work at a university as a factory worker labors at the bench. In the university it is up or out; hence, simultaneously scornful of tenure and attracted to it, we are unable matter-of-factly to conceive of the university as a source of livelihood, a kind of work in which (like baseball umpiring) 'you can't beat the hours'; no, we become emotionally engaged in the upward scramble and, whatever our rhetoric, in fact let the university become the emotional center of our lives. Neither the first nor the second halves of the academic career curve - the frenzied struggle for position, the economic assurance which follows - seem exactly the contents from which radicalism may be expected to emerge. It is a very peculiar sort of radicalism which permits one only to be arrested in summertime, or obliges one to hurry home from Hanoi to be on time for a seminar. But that is the kind of radical one has to be so long as one's first commitment is to university life. If it is symbolic, one-shot, moral-gesture radicalism, that may be not so much because of our ideological orientation as because of the academic schedule. The point is that whatever we may think, or think we think, university life requires us to act as if our radicalism were episodic and of secondary importance. The conference call says: "We are committed to the struggle for a democratic university." We are unlikely to do much in the direction even of that objective, let along make an American revolution, so long as we are not prepared to be fired at any moment. The most hopeful recent happening in American intellectual life is that last fall so many graduate students and professors were arrested along with undergraduates in demonstrations against Dow.

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But what is required to stand up against the blandishments and threats of academia is not merely courage, but clarity. If I am not mistaken, most of us simultaneously half-believe in two contradictory images of the univer-

sity and the teacher. On the one hand, we are inclined to conceive the university as an oasis of pure thought where Veblenian intellectuals set their idle curiosities to work. Together with this image goes the notion of the university as a privileged corporation, governed by laws different from those applicable to society at large, immune from kinds of harassment which the off-campus citizen must expect. On the other hand, however, we are attracted to the vision of the university as a power house for social transformation, a counter-society dedicated to the Aufhebung of its institutional environment. The first projection leads to socialist scholars conferences which seem to wish to convey the implicit message: We too have panels with speakers and discussants; we too meet in expensive downtown hotels; we too, whatever the content of our papers, are scholars. The second projection finds Martin Duberman writing In White America, Staughton Lynd directing freedom schools, Howard Zinn freeing pilots in Hanoi, Noam Chomsky arrested at the Pentagon.

From such intellectual confusion springs tactical inconsistency. Which of us objected when SNCC as the 'institutional client', when intense young men in blue jeans walked onto college campuses, scorned debate as bullshitting, and recruited students for illegal activities in the larger society? Is it not the case that before we sought to get the military off the campus we did our darndest to get the civil rights movement on it? It would seem that, intellectuals though we may be, we change our definition of the university every year or two just as we change our attitudes toward decentralization or the Supreme Court. We should be able to do better than that. We need to recognize, if we cannot resolve, the tension between the rhetoric of truth-seeking and the rhetoric of ethical commitment.

Consider the position of the American Association of University Professors toward obstructive demonstrations on campus. The Association states: "Action by individuals or groups to prevent speakers invited to the campus from speaking, to disrupt the operations of the institution in the course of demonstrations or to obstruct and restrain other members of the academic community and campus visitors by physical force is destructive of the pursuit of learning and of a free society." This is not an illogical position if the university is conceptualized as an oasis of freedom in a hostile environment, a conception we often espouse. However, the position of many Dow demonstrators was that they were obstructing that portion of the Dow Chemical Company's activity most accessible to them. They obstructed Dow not because it invaded the campus sanctuary but because its off-campus activities are nefarious. Dow does not cleanse itself, in the eyes of these demonstrators, if, while on campus, it observes academic decorum and agrees to debate its views. Were it in the power of these demonstrators, they would put Dow out of business.

This too is a stance many of us have adopted. But where does it leave us when right-wing demonstrators seek by non-violent obstructive means to interfere with projects ethical in our eyes but nefarious in theirs?

The tension between the rhetoric of truth-seeking and the rhetoric of ethical commitment was exhibited during the recent contretemps between myself and the Board of Governors of Chicago State College. Among the professors who formed an ad hoc defense committee there were three positions. One was that a teacher necessarily teaches the whole of what he thinks and is, and therefore should have the right to say anything he wishes in the classroom.

A second position held that whatever considerations of academic appropriateness might apply to on-campus utterances, off-campus a teacher should be free to advocate like any other citizen.

My own attitude was different from both the foregoing. In contrast to the first position, it seemed to me there was a difference between the low-keyed presentation of intellectual alternatives and the attempt to kindle in an audience an awareness of some indignity. Both seemed to me important things for the man of intellect to do; yet they are different; and my instinct was to accept the proposition that a classroom is a place where one's purpose should not be persuasion, but an opening-up of possible new ways of seeing things.

In contrast to the second position, I felt that a teacher should be free not only to talk as he wishes outside the classroom but to act as he wishes. It seemed and seems to me that when and if a teacher is arrested, prosecuted, convicted, sentenced, and put in jail, he will be unable to meet his classes, and at that point his academic employer may with some justice put him on leave or, if uncharitably inclined, dismiss him. Until that point is reached, I believe, a teacher should not be penalized, nor obliged to answer questions concerning his public life. Like any other citizen he should be considered innocent until proven guilty. Academic employers should eschew appointing themselves as judges and convicting a man before the courts have acted.

Perhaps many of you experience moments when such questions seem real. One characteristic answer to which we turn in such moments is: 'Yes, but I am less a scholar than a teacher. The college has shown itself an instrument not only of bourgeoisifying those who stay there permanently, but of radicalizing those who pass through it for four years. As a radical faculty member I can at least protect, perhaps in part produce, radical students. I too am in one sense an organizer, dealing with a constituency, less concerned with paper than with the eager, frightened young human beings whom the campus, like the factory as Marx described it, brings together and subjects to common experience.'

The fundamental problem for the full-time teacher is that he sends his students forth to confront problems which he himself has not encountered. Whether as drop-out or graduate, the student leaves the campus but the teacher does not. The teacher's life does not speak to the problem of how to 'make it' as a radical off the campus. I

suspect our students learn this lesson well. We may imagine that we are contributing to the revolution by teaching Marxism or socialism or radicalism to a new generation of activists. We may overlook the possibility that those whom we thus indoctrinate will become teachers in their turn, justifying their existences as radicals with the argument that they are readying for action a new generation of radicals - namely their students - who, however, are all too likely also to become teachers, speaking, just as we do, of the splendid young people to whom they lecture who need only a solid intellectual grounding -- and so on.

The fact that we ourselves as full-time academics cannot provide models of off-campus radical vocation is the more frustrating this spring because the draft has forced so many of our students, as we have not been forced, to say Yes or No to the demands of the larger society.

After all these distressingly negative and essentially preliminary words, let me briefly attempt to answer the questions: What is a university? And what is a radical intellectual? The purpose of the foregoing has been to insist that, as radicals, we should take neither the institution nor the role for granted but attempt to approach them with fresh eyes. The way to do that, I think, is to begin with the reality of the Movement and observe how an intellectual function crystallizes out from its activity; or alternatively, how in the midst of the Movement's so-called mindless activism, obviously necessary intellectual tasks fail to be performed.

By now we have a certain stock of experience. SNCC, for instance, established an educational institute in Waveland, Mississippi, in the fall of 1964. The Free University of New York has existed almost three years. SDS attempted last summer to run three schools for campus organizers in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco. Teach-ins, educational conferences, at least two new national newspapers and three nationally-circulated periodicals, all testify to the seriousness with which the Movement, charges of mindless activism notwithstanding, has tackled the function of internal education.

Different observers will assess this experience differently. Some feel that what is lacking is a systematic body of general theory. My own conclusion, perhaps predictably, is about the reverse. Having been personally involved in several of these experiments, my impression is that their characteristic weakness has been remoteness from action. This expresses itself in two different ways. At Waveland, for example, the most educational experience for the SNCC staff people assembled there was to travel into a New Orleans courtroom where, I believe, the precedent-establishing Bombrowski case was being argued, and then return to Waveland to discuss its implications with the lawyer, Arthur Kinoy; almost everything else in the program presented at Waveland by distinguished guest speakers passed the students by, because not linked to their immediate experience. Similarly, the Free University of New York struck me as different from the usual bull sessions of campus radicals mainly in locale. Those who talked together were not acting together. What was exhilerating about Vietnam teach-ins, it seems to me, was that students and teachers together addressed a problem in relation to which all were amateurs. Although action was not always explicitly projected, in the atmosphere of such occasions was a serious search for means of protest. Subsequent teach-ins at which this element was lacking, as at Ann Arbor last September, appear to me to have been sterile by comparison.

Remoteness from action in such educational ventures reflects the fact that those commonly called in as teachers, namely ourselves, are ourselves thus remote. There is no getting away from the fact that universities combining theory and practice, like the University of Havana whose students work together in the cane fields, or the University of Yenan where students grew their own food, wove their own clothes, and graduated together to fight the Japanese, can only be created by individuals who combine theory and practice personally. I have been at too many embarrassing occasions when full-time activists and full-time intellectuals were brought together in the naive hope, on the part of the activists, that the intellectuals could give them a magical something which they somehow lacked. A more hopeful model in my own experience was the Mississippi Freedom Schools. There Northern white college students and Southern black teen-agers had first to encounter one another as whole human beings, to establish trust. This happened in the process of finding a church basement together, deciding on a curriculum together, improvising materials together, that is, in a context of common work; and it matured in that context, too, as those who talked together in the morning registered voters together in the afternoon. Please note I am not advocating a narrow pragmatism. What was read together in the mornings was often James Joyce, what was talked about may have been French or algebra as well as Negro history. But I must simply testify that the context of shared experience (which meant, too, that teachers characteristically boarded in their students' homes) made all the difference.

Do I mean, then, that in the protesting words of the rector of Charles University in Prague, the social sciences must become a 'mere tool of propaganda and agitation'? No. My point is that if we take Marx, or Freud, or Veblen, seriously we must understand that a man's view of the world grows out of - I did not say 'reflects' - his socially-conditioned experience. You and I as intellectuals do not merely observe this phenomenon. It is exhibited in our lives, too. Many intellectuals will not and should not become activists. The intellectual's first responsibility is, as Noam Chomsky says, 'to insist upon the truth', 'to speak the truth and to expose lies'. But what truth we discover will be affected by the lives we lead. There is no such thing as 'working-class truth' or 'bourgeois truth' or 'the truth of the anal personality'. Yet that portion of the truth to which we are led, the truth which seems to us significant, is not independent of our experience as whole human beings. Moreover, to hope that we can understandingly interpret matters of which we have no first-hand knowledge, things utterly unproved upon the pulses - to hope, for instance, that upper-middle class white professors can

have much illumination to shed upon black power - is intellectual hubris. Another way to phrase what I am saying is the following. It is easy for us to see that the factory does more than oppress the worker, it also assimilates him to its hectic pace, its system of material rewards, its hierarchical decision-making. Similarly we are not merely oppressed by the university but conditioned, too. The grotesquerie of this university (University of Chicago), elucidating Aquinas with the left hand while with the right hand it uproots poor Negro families in Hyde Park and Woodlawn, is too much the grotesquerie of our own lives as well.

Again, it is easy for us to see that liberal intellectuals tacitly assume a division of labor between themselves and democratic politicians. They can restrict themselves to cloistered thought because, in their view of things, somewhere out there in the world of action is a democratic political process which in the long run will assimilate their thinking and be guided by it. But does it not affect us that, as Professor Morgenthau wrote last fall in The New Republic, 'the great national decisions of life and death are rendered by technological elites, and both the Congress and the people at large retain little more than the illusion of making the decisions which the theory of democracy supposes them to make'? Do we not also justify our intellectual labors by assuming the existence of a political deus ex machina, whether that be the Party, or the proletariat, or the youth? I think the times no longer permit this indulgence, and ask us, at the very least, to venture into the arena where political parties, and working-men, and young people do their things, seeking to clarify that experience which becomes ours as well, speaking truth to power from the vantage-point of that process of struggle.

To do this, we ourselves must have a foot solidly off the campus. More of us, like Joe Tuchinsky at Roosevelt, should teach part-time and supervise the training of draft counselors with the remainder; or like Sid Peck and Bob Greenblatt of the National Mobilization Committee, alternate years of full-time intellectual work with years of full-time work for the Movement. The economic problems in living thus more adventurously are not insuperable. Nothing in the Communist Manifesto, or for that matter the New Testament, asssures us that at age thirty-five or forty we should expect to achieve economic security for the rest of our lives. Disgorge the bait of tenure, and the problem of making a living can solve itself year-by-year. Face the problem of livelihood as husband and wife, accepting the possibility that sometimes one of you, sometimes the other, will be the main breadwinner, and you will have taken a long step toward solution of the so-called woman question. Face the problem of livelihood together with your friends in the Movement, recognizing that at some times you may support them, at others they you, and that you can all take greater risks because of this assurance, and you will have taken a long step toward the overcoming of alienation. The great hindrance is not in the objective world but in our heads. The hindrance is the notion that real intellectuals - unlike Thucydides, Machiavelli, Milton, Locke, Hamilton, Jefferson, Trotsky, Lenin, and unlike what Marx would have been if he could - do nothing but think. The first constituency we need to radicalize is ourselves. Our path of honor is to live so as to be able to tell the truth about the hopes and sufferings of mankind in our generation.

Who Will Write a Left History of Art while We are all Putting Our Balls on the Line?

Jesse Lemisch

There is a consensus in the conference that the movement needs some of the information which intellectuals - both inside and outside of the university - can provide. I share that consensus, know how important that need is, and have tried in the classroom - within the limits of what is permissible without trampling on the rights of non-left students - to interest students in doing some of that research. I have done some of it myself. Clearly there is a tremendous need for that kind of information.

My question is this: What is going to be your attitude towards intellectuals who call themselves Left but whose work has no immediate or even apparent long-term usefulness to the movement? Louis Kampf tells me that a man doing research on 12th century trade patterns would better use his time in contemporary activism. The idea that historians should meet as a group to ask each other what it means to be a radical historian was put down as 'chit-chat' and alien to the spirit of the conference, one of whose aims, I have been told repeatedly, is to break down the lines between the disciplines. Here in the land of Robert Hutchins, I don't believe that breaking down the lines between the disciplines is necessarily a radical idea; I am prepared to argue that it is the reverse of radical. We have heard much talk, to use the current male chauvinist term, of putting 'our balls on the line'. We have been told that where it's at, baby, is not in the ivory tower but in slashing professors' tires, which seems to include all professors who do not adjust their research to the needs of the movement. Now I have plenty of reason myself to dislike professors, and I think that most of the work that they are currently doing in all fields is trivial. But I do not dislike scholarship. I think that the idea of finding out how things actually work and have worked is an extremely radical idea. I do not share Staughton's disdain for truth-seeking. Thus I think that if we have a Left historian who wants to work on 12th century trade patterns we should not be telling him to research the local power structure.

I wonder who is going to write a Marxist history of art in America? What if the movement is wrong? As Staughton pointed out, it has been wrong many times. It is dead wrong about women; here, in its most noticeable blind spot, it simply shares the larger society's disdain for humanity and human rights. If the movement is wrong on this and on other matters, will the movement's intellectuals have served it well by responding to its 'needs' or would they have served it better by saying, with Tom Paine, that it is possible to master the world through reason, that disciplined thought is an indispensable part of making a better world? And what kind of an enduring Left will we have in this country if Left intellectuals feel that they have to apologize for leaving the picket line to go back to the ivory tower to write a Marxist history of art?

Staughton asks, What has scholarship contributed to activism and social change? Another historian has asked another very tough question: What has activism contributed to social change recently? I don't know the answer to either question. Neither does Staughton. To ask the question, What has scholarship contributed to social change?, is not to answer it. As long as we keep telling our scholars that scholarship is not where it's at, baby, we will never have an answer to Staughton's question.

Staughton Lynd, an historian and long active in the movement north and south, delivered the foregoing as a speech to the founding conference of New University Conference in spring 1968. Jesse Lemisch's reply was written and distributed at the conference. Both Staughton and Jesse (also an historian) have been fired (and not hired) at various academic institutions.

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