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Virginia Association of Colleges
February 25, 1966
Arlington, Virginia
Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

THE NEW LEFT ON THE CAMPUS

The year 1965 was an eventful one. No one yet knows what historians will regard as the most significant events, and yet - viewing the American scene alone - there is a wide range of possibilities. This was the year of the Great Society, the Voting Rights Bill, Medicare, and the largest peacetime budget in history.

1965 witnessed undreamed of progress toward interplanetary flight. It also witnessed an escalation of the Vietnam war - with fateful consequences no one can foresee. 1965 represented the all-time pinnacle of economic prosperity, and yet it was marred by a spiraling crime rate, by riots and disorders, and by a notable deterioration of respect for law and due process.

1965 was also the year of the emergence of the New Left on campus. This is my subject today, and I approach it with full awareness that it is controversial.

It is hardly necessary to say that it is too early to view the campus leftist movement in perspective

or to formulate final judgments. Rather, my purpose will be to review the situation in broad terms, and share with you certain speculation as to the nature and meaning of this disturbing phenomenon. I will also comment on the indications of Communist infiltration of the movement.

My own special interest derives in part from being a college trustee but primarily from my concern for the preservation of the fundamentals which have sustained and nourished our free society. In the forefront of these are respect for law and due process and respect for free and open discussion.

One could devote an entire speech to the semantics of this new movement. It is variously termed the "revolt on the campus", the "campus revolution", "new radicalism on the campus", "contemporary student radicalism" and so on. Some simply, and I think, aptly describe this as the "New Left" or "radical left" on the campus. But whatever its name, what I am talking about is the student and faculty leftist movement which dramatically emerged on the American

scene in 1965, and which is quite alien to traditional "Liberal" ideals.*

The roots of the movement ante-date 1965, and much of it has still not reached the surface. But enough is now visible to chill the hearts of college administrators as well as of thoughtful citizens everywhere.

Few took the movement seriously until the Berkeley rebellion of last winter. Much has been written about this extraordinary revolt - one which gravely wounded a great university.** The facts are well known as to the sit-ins, disorders and vicious tactics of the leaders. It is also known, most disquietingly, that there was significant faculty encouragement and participation.

*The "newness" of this movement should be emphasized. There has always been a wide spectrum of thought on the American campus, with liberal and progressive views often attracting considerable attention. The term "New Left" is not used herein to include the traditional liberal and progressive elements on our campuses, many of which are disturbed by the totalitarian tactics of the New Left.

**For comment see, among many others: Marguerite Higgins, Column in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Sept. 23, 1965; Evans and Novak, The Agony of Berkeley, N.Y. Herald Tribune, Sept. 30, 1965; Lipset and Wolin, The Berkeley Revolt, 1965.

But no one knew at the time, or indeed now knows, what the underlying causes really were. When demands were met by a timid and vacillating administration, new demands were immediately made. Professing initially to be a movement for unfettered free speech, it ultimately deteriorated into a movement for "filthy speech".

The irony of it all is that few, if any, campuses afforded greater freedom of discussion. Testimony before a Congressional Subcommittee indicated that the so-called "free speech movement" actually had "little or nothing to do with free speech". Professor Peterson stated that the University already tolerated free discussion of "every variety of radical politics"; that student meetings - openly held - advocated everything from "imbibing of marijuana" to "selling contraceptives in the student union".*

*See hearings, Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate, 89th Cong., Part I, page 17, et seq.; U.S. Government Printing Office, May 17, 1965. See also statement of Dr. Max Rafferty, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, reported in U.S. News & World Report, May 17, 1965, p. 70.

Whatever the issue may have been, the Berkeley experience is a frightening example of what massive "civil disobedience" techniques can do to a college. The fundamentals involved were perceptively stated by two University of California professors as follows:

"The startling incomprehension or indifference shown by some of the best students in the country to the values of due process. . . . challenges the very foundations of our democratic order. . . . A whole generation may learn that ends justify any means."*

Although no other campus has suffered the indignities of Berkeley, the new left has been active in various ways at other institutions. An embarrassing example occurred last May at Columbia where certain student groups employed civil disobedience tactics to block - and to force cancellation of - the annual award ceremony for the Naval Reserve Training Unit. It hardly need be said that this conduct was not legitimate protest. It was hard-nosed coercion. It was in fact a blatant attempt to deny free speech to others.**

*Look Magazine, Feb. 23, 1965, p. 30, 42.

**The groups reported to be associated with the Columbia demonstrations included Youth Against War and Fascism and the Progressive Labor Movement. See N.Y. Times, May 8, 1965.

Serious difficulties, leftist inspired, threatened Brooklyn College, but strong and courageous leadership by President Harry Gideonse prevented these from becoming another Berkeley.*

Other colleges and universities have experienced in varying forms and degrees the thrusts and harrassment of the New Left. Indeed, no responsible educator now denies that this movement - zealously led and surprisingly well financed - is gaining momentum on the American campus.

President Nathan M. Pusey, of Harvard, has said that the demonstrations of 1965 "were no mere spring larks". Although he thought that the majority of incidents were "earnest protests about very serious and important matters," President Pusey recognized that the others were the "crudest displays of force . . . clearly intended to be no less than revolutionary struggles for power".**

*See Testimony of President Gideonse, Hearings before Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Part II, p. _____, May 17, 1965.

**Nathan M. Pusey, "Student Protest and Commitment", School and Society, Dec. 11, 1965, p. 471, 472.

If the New Left is engaged essentially in a struggle for "power", the question of "what kind of power" or "power for what purpose" becomes of considerable importance. The movement does have certain common denominators, especially its coercive techniques and its rallying cries.

Presently there are common "causes" such as - civil rights, control of the poverty program, peace, recognizing Red China and, above all, American policy in Vietnam. These subjects are among the vital issues of today and merit serious and open discussion. It is not always the particular position of the New Left on these issues that causes concern. It is rather the extremism of certain demands and the irresponsibility of the methods used.

The posture of the New Left is also perplexing because the selection of the causes appears to be tactical.*

*"Civil rights" has now been subordinated to Vietnam, and even this "cause" may be tactical in the thinking of some of the more extreme leaders. It is said that "they don't particularly care about peace in Vietnam, because it would leave them without a cause in their struggle to organize all the opposition to the government into a solid front." Jerry LeBlanc, North American Newspaper Alliance, Inc., Times Dispatch, Oct. 24, 1965. Nevertheless, an effort is being made and applauded by the Communists, to depict Vietnam as a "racist war", and thereby to coalesce certain elements of the civil rights movement with the Vietnam peace movement. See William S. White, Richmond Times Dispatch, Jan. 10, 1966.

Indeed, some appear to be "causes of opportunity" - rather than fundamental or strategic long range goals. Are there, in fact, any such goals and any likelihood of a coherent coordinated program to attain them?

Opinions vary widely as to the answer to this question. Some think the movement is spontaneous and uncoordinated, a natural reflection of the restless spirit of our times, and will soon fade away.

Another view, suggested in a recent issue of Saturday Review, is that the goals relate primarily to education rather than social or political change. The real objective of the young radicals, according to these authors, is to participate with trustees, administrators and faculties in determining the curricula of and in operating our colleges and universities.*

But these, it seems to me, are superficial views.

If one reads the literature and reviews the record, it is

*Joseph Katz and Nevitt Sanford, "Causes of the Student Revolution", Saturday Review, Dec. 18, 1965, pp. 64,76. These authors think that the student movement is following the precedent of the labor movement, and will become a "partner" in formulating educational policy, just as labor now influences many management policies and decisions.

evident that the ferment goes far deeper than natural student restlessness or a desire to participate in educational decisions. Whatever ultimate goals may emerge, we have - as Dr. Pusey suggests - the ingredients in some of the leftist organizations of a "revolutionary struggle for power". The paradox is that this bitter discontent comes at a time of maximum freedom and prosperity, minimum unemployment, undreamed of progress in removing racial barriers and a national administration committed wholeheartedly to the welfare state.

Indeed, it may be that the relative unanimity of our political parties on the key issues confronting our society is a contributing factor in the rise of the New Left.

Yet within this very context of consensus, freedom and affluence - when, indeed western civilization may have reached its fullest flower here in our country - we are witnessing nothing less than a revolt against the American system. The "enemy" is said to be our system of

representative democracy and constitutional government, and especially the "bureaucracy" which runs it. American "society and all of its institutions" are attacked as "rotten". Hatred of the "system" and its "power structure" is deliberately fomented.

The goal of the most extreme segments of the movement is to substitute, by coercive means if necessary, a "participatory democracy". This would be a "communitarian" system, modeled much after the theory (but obviously contrary to the practice) of Castro's Cuba and Mao's China, that the peoples' will should be expressed directly (e.g. in mass meetings and demonstrations) rather than by elected representatives.*

In a perceptive, though uncritical, article in Commonweal, Father Walsh of Wayne State University has described Staughton Lynd as the "foremost intellectual" of the new activism. In quoting from and commenting upon Lynd's views, Father Walsh said:**

*See Irving Kristol, "What Bugging the Students", Atlantic Monthly, Nov. 1965, p. 108, 110, 111.

**Father Joseph L. Walsh, "What the Students Want", Commonweal Magazine, Nov. 19, 1965, p. 206, 207.

"Writing in Liberation, Staughton Lynd, often described as the foremost intellectual of the new activism, says: 'We have moved into a twilight zone between democratically delegated authority and something accurately called "fascism!"". For Lynd the answer is participatory (as distinct, it seems, from representative) democracy, which means 'ordinary people, making decisions for themselves . . . a new politics which forces the representative back to his people, and politics back to life.' To bring about this change he admits is revolutionary; it may mean students chaining 'themselves to the Capitol this summer in wave after wave of massive civil disobedience; it could mean people organized from all over the country setting up their own "Continental Congress," defying their elected representatives, sending emissaries to make direct contact with the people of other countries.' Lynd admits this kind of revolution makes sense 'only if our situation is desperate.' But he adds, 'I think it is desperate. . . .'"

The call for "participatory democracy", in an organized sense, originated in 1962 with the formation of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The manifesto then adopted, described as the "basic intellectual doctrine of the New Left", demands "participatory democracy" in all economic, political and human relationships.*

*Jack Newfield, "Idealism and Action", The Nation, Nov. 8, 1965, p. 330, 331. Another militant organization said to favor "participatory democracy" is the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Jack Newfield, "The Question of SNCC", The Nation, July 19, 1965, p. 38, 39.

One of the questions most frequently asked is whether the New Left is Communist led. If this were answered in the affirmative, little doubt would remain as to true goals. But there certainly is no single answer to this question.

The New Left is not a monolithic movement. It is actually a conglomeration of organizations, groups and individuals, and generalizations cannot be applied (and are not intended to be applied) indiscriminately to all concerned.

A mere listing of some of the organizations is instructive. In addition to SDS,* they include the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America,** Student Non-Violent Coordinating

*Described as the "strongest group on the New Left", and under investigation by the Department of Justice for alleged "aiding and abetting of draft evasion", it now has more than 100 chapters on college campuses. See Newfield, supra, pp. 330,332. SDS is recently reported to have up to 10,000 members, including 300 professors. See N.Y. Times, Oct. 19, 1965 and Oct. 20, 1965.

**Described in 1965 Annual Report of the FBI as "another major weapon which the Communist Party is directing against the young people". It is said to have 35 chapters, mostly on college campuses. FBI Annual Report, fiscal year 1965, p. 24. See also Hearings, Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Part I, May 17, 1965, p. 31.

Committee (SNCC), Progressive Labor Party*, Vietnam Day Committee, May 2nd Movement,** Student Peace League, Youth Against War and Fascism, Spartacists, and the Young Socialist Alliance. There has been coordination among many of these, especially on anti-Vietnam protests, and there will certainly be increasing effort to fuse or merge the major groups into a "united front" of the New Left.*** Success in such an effort would create a formidable force. It would undoubtedly be followed by divisive political action, either through a new party or by attempting to engraft a radical wing on the Democratic party. There would also be an intensification of civil disobedience tactics.

*Said to have been implicated in the Harlem riots of 1964. See N.Y. Times, Dec. 21, 1965.

**Said to be "actively sympathetic to the National Liberation Front which seeks to overthrow the South Vietnam government," to have "sent first aid supplies to the Vietcong", and to contend that the struggle in Vietnam is between American "imperialists" and a "freedom movement of oppressed people". N.Y. Times, Oct. 18, 1965.

***See N.Y. Times article entitled "Vietnam Protesters Plan Drive to Avoid the Draft," Oct. 18, 1965; Evans and Novak, Column in N.Y. Herald Tribune, Jan. 7, 1966; Jerry LeBlanc, Series syndicated by North American Newspaper Alliance, Inc., Richmond Times Dispatch, October 24, 26, 1965.

But these organizations range widely across the left side of the ideological spectrum and may be difficult to coalesce. Membership and support fluctuate from time to time and may vary with the immediate issue. Many who have demonstrated belong to no organization. Indeed in the end anarchy may be the key to this movement as it was in the extreme left in Russia during the later Nineteenth Century.

We can be sure that a great majority of the participating students and faculty members are neither Communist in fact nor in basic sympathy.

But we can be equally sure that some of the leadership of certain organizations is Communist or Communist oriented. Certainly much of the New Left's criticism of the American system and some of its "causes" are straight Communist Party (CP) line. This is a matter of genuine concern to college administrators as well as to our government, especially at this critical time in our history when the worldwide confrontation between

Democracy and Communism has reached the stage of open warfare in Vietnam.*

A prime target of Communist effort throughout the world, and with increasing emphasis in the United States, is the college student and indeed the college professor. Communist strategists are far too clever to do much direct recruiting. Indeed, they have astutely concentrated on indirect methods, on propaganda and infiltration, and on fronts of various kinds. Some of the organizations of the New Left are made to order for Communist exploitation.

Even when acknowledged party members, such as Gus Hall, appear on college campuses, they now follow a soft and conciliatory line - one deceptively geared to appeal to the idealism of American youth.

The CPUSA is relying, with notable success, on the popular concensus that no citizen should be discriminated

* Reasonable minds may differ sharply as to whether it was wise to fight in Vietnam and as to future policy there. But responsible citizens do not carry these differences to the extremes of urging draft evasion, obstructing troop trains, raising funds for the Vietcong, and denouncing their own country as the "aggressor".

against. Why, therefore (it is argued) should CP members be excluded from organizations of the New Left or denied full privileges of campus and media platforms?*

In commenting on CPUSA activity on the campus, the Annual Report of the FBI said:

"The 1964-65 school year was a busy time for communist leaders in all areas of the country as the Party intensified its efforts to attract young people through public appearance on college and university campuses. Party leaders, encouraged by earlier successes, spoke to more than 37,000 students in 56 appearances during this period. This concentration on college campuses was aimed at gaining acceptance for the Party as a legitimate political activity, creating an aura of respectability and understanding for the Party and spreading Communist propaganda. Communist Party leaders also appeared as guests on numerous radio and television programs."**

For many years the most consistent Communist propaganda line has been "peace". Despite its own record of aggression, brutality and tyranny - a record without

*See Newfield, supra, The Nation, Nov. 8, 1965, pp. 330, 333: "Largely due to SDS's stand against exclusionism . . . organizations like the ACLU and several peace groups are beginning to reconsider their denial of membership to Communists.... SDS describes itself (as) 'a-Communist'".
**FBI Annual Report, fiscal year 1965, p. 24.

parallel in the Christian era - the Communist movement has had notable success in associating itself with peace.*

This has been an incredible triumph of propaganda and psychological warfare - not merely with the semi-literate masses in the underprivileged nations but, to a remarkable extent, with otherwise sophisticated persons in the western world. A significant measure of success has been attained among intellectuals, many of whom see no inconsistency in attacking alleged American "aggression" while rationalizing or denying Communism's long record of tyranny and aggression.**

*Perhaps the most persistent "myth" of our times is that the Soviet Union genuinely desires "peace" in the same sense Americans use this term. The guillible innocents who have "bought" this line should ponder the recent Communist strategy conference in Havana, attended by 743 delegates from 82 countries. The chief Soviet delegate, a top man in the Kremlin, said: "The Soviet delegation came to this conference to promote in every conceivable way the unity of anti-imperialist forces, . . . so as to unfold in still greater scale our common struggle, . . . The Soviet people support people's wars". See Roscoe Drummond's column, "The Soviets Don't Want Peace", Richmond Times Dispatch, Feb. 5, 1966.

**Prof. John Roche, a former national chairman of the ADA, has been quoted as saying: "Fine liberals who would storm Congress to aid a beleagued Israel, suddenly shift gears when Asia is involved and start talking about 'the inevitability of Chinese domination' and the 'immorality' of bombing North Vietnam." See Staff Study, Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States Senate, the Anti-Vietnam Agitation and the Teach-in Movement, with introduction by Senator Thomas J. Dodd, U.S. Government Printing Office, Oct. 13, 1965, pp. vii and viii.

The extent to which the leftist organizations on American campuses have in fact been infiltrated by Communists is not known. It is certain that a considerable effort is being made, and it is also certain that some success has been attained. Much of the thrust of the protest movement has been against the foreign policy of the United States. This has been particularly virulent against our stand in South Vietnam.

A subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, under the Chairmanship of Senator Dodd, has released a Staff Study on the extent of "Communist Infiltration and Exploitation" of the anti-Vietnam policy movement. In summarizing the conclusions of this study, Senator Dodd said:

"The control of the anti-Vietnam movement has clearly passed from the hands of the moderate elements who may have controlled it at one time, into the hands of Communists and extremist elements who are openly sympathetic to the Vietcong and openly hostile to the United States, and who call for massive civil disobedience, including the burning of draft cards and the stopping of troop trains."*

*See Staff Study cited supra, p. xiv, xv.

The tragic fact is that many sincere and well-intentioned citizens, perhaps overzealous in their desire for peace, have unwittingly contributed to a Communist line movement which may well prolong and possibly escalate the war.*

But it is essentially the tactics of the New Left, rather than its immediately professed goals that make it a potential threat to the freedom of discussion and the rule of law. The public is now generally familiar with the unruly demonstration, the sit-ins, the lie-downs and other forms of civil disobedience. Indeed a book has been published, with a foreword by Bayard Rustin, entitled "A Manual for Direct Action", which boldly outlines a blueprint of civil disobedience tactics.** There is less public

*The evidence is overwhelming that the world Communist apparatus--in the United States, in Moscow, in Peiping, in Hanoi, in Havana, and elsewhere--have been able to exploit the anti-Vietnam agitation and the teach-in movement for the purpose of confusing their own people, for the purpose of fostering the impression that the majority of the American people are opposed to the administration's policy in Vietnam, and for the purpose of attacking the morale of American servicemen in Vietnam." See Staff Study, supra, p. xv.

**Oppenheimer and Lakey, A Manual for Direct Action, Strategy and Tactics for Civil Rights and All Other Nonviolent Protest Movements, published by Quadrangle Books, 1965. This enlightening piece of literature recommends that the lessons learned in the civil rights movement now be applied to the "peace movement".

understanding of the extent to which New Leftists deliberately inhibit and destroy free and honest debate. The publicized mistreatment of Ambassador Harriman at Cornell, where he was subjected to "insults and epithets", was not an isolated occurrence.

Many of the teach-ins were responsibly led and conducted, and were not a part of the New Leftist movement. But at others it was standard practice to submerge administration spokesmen under waves of booing, hissing and cat-calling. The truth is that extremist audiences, whether of the far right or far left, will rarely permit a fair presentation of both sides of any issue.

* * * * *

Now, a few concluding observations. I have endeavored to give you a profile - obviously a sketchy one - of the New Left. It is essential, especially for leaders in education to view the movement dispassionately. We must avoid exaggeration of its meaning. At the same time we must draw the line carefully between traditional

tolerance of open debate and surrender to coercive tactics by extremists.

It is true that the New Left at the campus level is presently a small minority; they are neither typical nor representative of the great majority of American students;* and the attention they have received in the news media around the world - like the commotion which they have created - is wholly out of proportion to their importance or their numbers.

Yet, having said this, I caution against taking this movement lightly. History demonstrates the capacity for evil of fanatical minorities. We also know that Communists wish to penetrate and lead the New Left.** Certainly the Communist enemies of freedom, and of our country, are already deriving aid and comfort from the movement.

*No one knows for sure the size of the movement, but it has been estimated to consist of some 150,000 students, plus some faculty support, out of a total of more than five million students. See Newfield, supra, The Nation, Nov. 8, 1965, p. 333.

**Mr. Hoover has recently warned that the strategy of CPUSA is "to win the New Left". Hoover, FBI Bulletin Vol. 35, No. 2, February 1966.

The "New Left" is new primarily because it does not accept American institutions. This, indeed, is a movement which vehemently denounces contemporary American society and its institutions, and which bitterly distrusts its leaders. This is a revolutionary movement, both in its objective of substituting its vague concept of participatory democracy for our form of representative government, and also in its open contempt for effecting change by due process and orderly means.

The threat of this type of movement is no less against our universities than against our country. Traditionally, our universities and colleges have been citadels of free inquiry, devoted to the proposition that rational discussion is the surest way to truth and to a resolution of honest differences. The activist leaders of the New Left have no respect for tradition and no tolerance of differing views. Moreover, in true Marxist spirit, many of them appear to believe that their "ends" justify almost any means.

But in our concern to guard against the excesses of the New Left, special care must be exercised to differentiate the students and faculty members who honestly protest injustice and inequities, and who desire to improve and perfect the American system. Those who seek change within the framework of accepted American institutions are not to be condemned - whether or not we agree with their views on particular issues. A cherished hallmark of our free society is that honest dissent and non-conformity, whether on the right or the left, are tolerated and respected.

My message to this distinguished body of educators is, therefore, a sobering one. Those of you responsible for the leadership of our colleges and universities face an unprecedented and difficult period. There are, moreover, no certain guideposts for trustees, administrators and faculties.

We would all agree that it would be unwise to lash out indiscriminately against the ^{New} /leftists. Certainly, we do not wish to make martyrs of them. It is said that

the entire sophomore class at Harvard was expelled in the year 1834, with repercussions which lasted for half a century. We can, at least, avoid blunders of that magnitude.

On the other hand, I would hope that we in Virginia would never be as supine and as prone to practice appeasement as were those in authority at the University of California.

The New Left, with its irresponsible and divisive leadership, is not within the liberal tradition of the American college campus. Responsible administrators and faculties must recognize this, and have the courage to draw the line between license and liberty.

Those of us who believe in academic freedom have had some occasion in recent years to defend it against the extreme right. There is solid reason to think that the greater threat today, far better organized and more militantly led, now comes from the New Left. But from whence it may come and in whatever form, any threat to genuine academic freedom must be resolutely resisted.

In short, the task of all of us concerned with higher education, admittedly a delicate and difficult one, is to preserve the traditional atmosphere of the American campus which encourages free and full debate, tolerates vigorous dissent, and yet maintains due process and respect for orderly means.