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THE UNIVERSITY AND THE COLD WAR

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by paul potter

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The complex of relations which exists between American Universities and the institutions, conceptions and modes of operation of the Cold War is so pervasive as to be elusive; and the notion of dealing cogently and productively with these problems is challenging almost to the point of being debilitating. I am increasingly impressed with the deficiencies of analysis which have plagued attempts to chart these relationships and feel that this paper might best be devoted to an effort to develop a more adequate conceptual framework from which to view the nature of the University's entrenchment in the Cold War.

During the last few years an impressive amount of documentation has begun to appear revealing the extent to which Universities are involved officially in Cold War efforts. The bald statistics are in themselves monumental documentation of the commitment of American higher education (one might add the elite of American higher education) to the Cold War. During the current fiscal year, the Federal government will pump \$1.2 billion of research and development money into American Universities and Colleges--a 450% increase since 1954. Of that money, 39.8% comes from the Department of Defense, 30.0% from the Public Health Service, 11.1% from the National Science Foundation, 8.0% from the Atomic Energy Commission, 6.0% from the Department of Agriculture, 3.6% from the National Aeronautics and Space Agency, and 2.0% from the Office of Education. The \$1.2 billion figure is twenty per cent more than the total raised by contributions of alumni, friends, foundations, corporations and religious denominations.

There has been a marked concentration of government funds among the top Universities in the country. In 1960 68% of the money went to 25 Universities, 82% to 50, and 94% to 100. M.I.T. leads the way with appropriations of \$80 million a year from the Defense Department, while its regular school budget is about one quarter that amount. The school has the dubious honor of ranking 41st among American corporations in their cut of the defense pie. In contrast, the 186 private liberal arts colleges and 55 state colleges participating in the program received 1.1% of the \$1.2 billion appropriation:

The effects of these increments is summed up in the mildest of language in a recent report by the National Student Association. They are:

First, there is a high degree of concentration in federal programs. This means that certain types of institutions face competitive disadvantages. Universities with doctoral facilities have great advantages in attracting federal funds and hence in attracting able young science professors. This in turn makes it all the more unlikely that smaller, independent, non-governmental science programs will emerge from the top hundred schools.

Second, because the government owns the research facilities in many cases, and holds close the purse strings in many other, the independence of the universities benefiting from federal aid is far from assured.

Third, government funds tend to go toward defense work, or work stemming directly from our military or Cold War commitments.

Fourth, the injection of federal funds continues the downgrading of the humanities in our society.

Fifth, federal funds contribute toward the current research over teaching preference of most science professors.

Sixth, there is increasing danger that the imbalance created by federal funds earmarked for science will make it less likely that competent

students will choose to go into the humanities...

Seventh, the federal programs by their nature tend to militate against the concept of full liberal, non-specialized education.¹

The most disturbing realities of the situation go beyond even these sobering comments. The plain fact of the matter is that the Pentagon has just bought up the nation's foremost institution of science and technology--and the sale was made with virtually no protest--indeed with virtually no public recognition of the fact that the sale was being made. It has also purchased sizeable chunks of the science faculties of the rest of our major Universities, bringing with it all the trappings of military security, team research, distortions of scientific priorities, and neglect of class-room responsibilities--not to mention the headless, unconscious nature of the entire program conception. And as Sidney Lens points out, the Universities seem to be trapped. One can make a reasonably plausible analogy between current federal support and classic examples of imperialism or neo-colonialism. The government has invested in underdeveloped, capital-starved institutions and imposed a pattern of growth and development upon them which if disrupted would lead to economic breakdown and political chaos.

Some of the critics of the current program have in fact urged a sort of colonial rebellion on the part of the Universities--enjoining them to throw off the yoke of federal domination, seize their destinities in their own hands regardless of consequences, and band together to assert their independent bargaining power. The realists in our midst on the other hand (such as the presidents of well-endowed private Universities) have contented themselves with repeated pleas for an understanding of the fact that a problem exists and grave warnings (never threats) of what will surely happen if recognition of that problem is not forthcoming. A much larger percentage of institutional spokesmen have devoted themselves quietly (occasionally vociferously) and assiduously to the difficult task of raking in the defense and research contracts.

Although I do not wish to underestimate the somber implications of the current federal program, I do wish to express my skepticism not only about the likelihood of disentangling the Defense Department from the Universities but, more importantly, about the imputed salutary effects such a divorce would have. True, the obvious evils outlined in the above paragraphs would be gone. But that is all. Our Universities would not turn into centers of agitation to find alternatives to the Cold War; our scientists would not automatically redirect their efforts toward peaceful utilization of their skills; the entrenchment of the Cold War in the American University would in fact still be ideologically intact although materially reduced; and of course the government would continue to staff its war research--most probably with scientists seduced away from institutions of higher education. In short, the implicit notion expressed in most critiques of defense spending in the Universities--that the current attitude of the federal government toward higher education is suppressing a natural effort to combat the Cold War--is in my opinion the purest of liberal mythology--a tendency on the part of some people to see a McCarthy under every bed.

The most appropriate question for our consideration at this time is not how to get rid of the defense minions in our Universities but rather to come to understand how they got to be there in the first place. In understanding that, we will understand the status quo which we might restore if they were to be ousted by some act of providential grace.

The most often-repeated and immediately plausible explanation is that the Universities accepted the Defense Department as a benefactor only because of des-

parate financial need engendered by increasing costs of higher education and rapidly rising enrollments. Although this explanation provides part of the answer, it fails to identify a more basic characteristic of the American University--one that should be immediately identifiable and easily comprehended. A most obvious manifestation of this characteristic is that there was not at the end of the Second World War and is not now any good reason why American Universities should have qualms about serving the interests of the United States through military and quasi-military research. Indeed, any dissent from such a role would raise the most cataclysmic kind of conflict between the organized University system and the government and the public in general. The notion that American Universities should be anything but elated about the opportunity of assisting this nation in its Cold War struggle is simply, plainly and demonstrably a notion totally alien to the American University tradition. It has in fact been the hallmark of the country's scholarly development to be responsive to new problem areas in the nation as a whole. Universities have considered it their responsibility to assist in whatever way possible in the solution of new problems. I would stress the word solution--not the examination of problems or the axioms or precepts which have engendered problems; there has been no suggestion that the problems themselves were somehow to be fundamentally questioned. From Ice Cream 102 at the University of Wisconsin to a 4000 man radiation laboratory at M.I.T., American Universities have been ready to assist this nation in the resolution of its felt needs.

This is not the point to launch into a discussion of the American University tradition or lack of it. Rather I wish only to make the simple and obvious observations that the Cold War is not perverting University traditions--it is simply underscoring and accentuating what has always been and bringing starkly to the fore the unconsidered nature of the relationship of the American University to American society. If this simple notion is to be of use to us in an analysis of Cold War problems it must be seen honestly in its stark contrast to the rhetoric of academic freedom, University autonomy, and University as critic and agent of change, which dominates our mythology about the relationship of institutions of higher education to the nation.

Nothing could make this point more clearly than our very academic discussions of academic freedom. We write tomes about the possible circumstances under which we might allow Communists to teach without ever coming to grips with the obvious need to expressed by partisans viewpoints which are given recognition and succor in countries representing almost half the people in the world. Such a notion is totally alien to our discussion of academic freedom because it is fundamentally in conflict with the accepted conception of the University which postulates academic freedom in the negative--as a method of protecting the rights of the majority by extending those rights to a minority--"no matter how abhorrent". Our idea of University autonomy reflects the same negative quality; autonomy in the American sense could be translated as "a little leeway to consider some problems in a slightly unorthodox fashion". We have no notion of a truly autonomous University system removed from the vagaries of nationalistic concerns, dedicated to the fundamental examination of the institutions of society rather than the truncated examination of the methods of manipulating existing institutions.

But enough. The point is clear. It should also be equally clear why it is not accepted. The ideology of liberal education prefers a notion of man as a rational being who examines ideas on the basis of their merits--mysteriously free from the inhibitions which his society has institutionally defined for him. It comforts us with the idea that we can somehow create autonomous man (free from the obvious external restraints that define his culture) who will act justly, prudently and at the same time aculously in the best interests of the United States.

Beyond this, the fact of the University as faithful servant of the establishment is rejected because of the equally obvious fact that our Universities (especially the best ones) do demand change of their students, do challenge them, do confront them with previously unperceived problems--do in short succeed in "liberalizing" and making different men out of the people who enter the Universities. But different in what sense? Different in the sense that our best Universities train substantial percentages of their students to participate in the secular enlightenment of the American establishment. Higher education is engaged in the difficult task of creating the men who will lead the existing system and draw from it all the considerable vitality, ingenuity and strength which is demanded from it. Such men must accept to a certain extent the absurdities and contradictions of that system if they are to be effective. Compromise is demanded of them--and its character is insignificantly affected by the wistful and forlorn lament of a handful who cry out that the compromise is unconscious.

This background places the problem of the Cold War and the Universities in greater relief. From this perspective flow two fundamental conclusions: First, we must come to recognize that those of us who accept as valid the basic elements in the above critique stand in a fundamentally different tradition from the vast majority of students and professors in the country; we recognize that we cannot accept their terms of analysis, that we demand a more fundamental, systematic and humane approach to the problems of mankind. We recognize that the Universities are currently concerned with the development of none of these approaches and are in fact because of their historic commitments to the nourishment of the existing system, a commitment intensified ultimately by the Cold War, in some sense in opposition to their development. And we recognize that the only course for us is to stand outside the existing traditions and on the basis of our own intellectual, economic, political and human resources develop alternatives to the system so compelling as to obtain basic concessions from it.

Second, we must determine criteria of effectiveness which are internally structured, which will allow us to act effectively without consciously making the same compromise which we have criticized our peers for reaching unconsciously. The point is simply that we should dare to be effective.

I would like to contrast these notions with those set forth more frequently by concerned liberals, radicals, and other reformers. Their analysis of the situation is much the same as my own; they have recognized the commitment of the University to the Cold War, its intransigence on questions of basic change, but at the same time the necessity of securing whatever change is possible if we are to escape war.

These groups have proposed many plans for altering the University's commitment to the Cold War which I will grossly compress here into three generalized proposals: (1) balance; (2) counter-balance; and (3) transcendence.

The balance theory suggests that if the University is to be engaged in war planning and research, there should be at least some balancing to insure that peace research is given competitive opportunities in the University.

The second approach, counter-balance, demands that the Universities oppose or at least constantly re-evaluate the commitments of the society and that in this respect all efforts should be directed toward an assault on the established defense policies of this country. Harold Taylor gives this idea forceful expression in saying, "The Universities and the intellectual community exist to chal-

lunge accepted truth and accepted values, to create new conceptions, to stand against the organized establishment as that part of the social organism which works as the brain and the conscience of the entire enterprise. Unless they are prepared to embrace this mission, they condemn themselves to a history of service to the establishment whatever the establishment may be."²

The third notion, that of transcendence, is much like the second with the exception that it views the perversion of the Universities' function as one that will continue unless scholars escape their crisis orientation to the Cold War and return to basic problems of science and the humanities--the partial solution of which may allow us to put at the service of society tools of analysis and control which will be adequate for the immense tasks that confront us. In short, they feel that our techniques of dealing with basic human problems are so crude that no possible reallocation of resources can bring about a peaceful world until there is a "breakthrough" in our understanding of man and his troubles.

All three of these approaches recommend themselves to us in certain ways. The first in that it points up the fact that there is a politically potent case to be made for expenditures for peace research in light of the infinitesimal fraction of our expenditures for war that this would represent.

The second notion of counter-balance is, as I think Taylor intends it, a goad to the conscience of those intellectuals who have forsaken their belief in a truly autonomous, intellectually and socially dedicated, University. It presses home the point that an autonomous University is not only a sound notion for a stable society but the only sane notion for a society trapped in crisis.

All this is well and good, but the critical weakness that all three systems share in common is that they are couched in terms of the established power of the society. But it is the established power that is systematically rooted in the Cold War, in illusory concepts of American beneficence and in ethnocentrically determined impressions of what is at stake in the current conflict and what is politically acceptable as a mode of resolution. A large percentage of those committed to more or less fundamental change in world relations is also committed to the mechanisms of a system which is demonstrably changeable only in superficial ways. Why the commitment? I have already reflected on some of the reasons. Paul Goodman, in his essay "The Ineffectuality of some Intelligent People", (to which this paper is greatly indebted) probes deeper.

There is a political pathology in the essence of contemporary social theory that makes revolutionary alternatives inconceivable to the social scientists. With the best will in the world they cannot see any source of power outside the established power, so there is no point in wishing or talking in other terms even though the established power has no other raison d'être than to wage the Cold War. The social scientists are balked by the narrowness of what they regard as admissible evidence. Contemporary social theory consists in analyzing the arrangement and possible rearrangement of units that are defined as entirely socialized to the system of society, or as deviant...

It is characteristic of our social scientists never to mention the function, the satisfaction (or danger), the process, the product or the utility. This leaves out everything in terms of which we could actively change anybody's "acceptance" or "rejection"...

Thus, neglecting history, animal and social nature, political philosophy,

poetry, the social scientists are left with a closed system of society in which nothing is possible but a better arrangement of the same forces.³

Now let us return to our three systems of attack on the Cold War. They are seen now as not only inadequate but also intellectually and politically debilitating.

The transcendence theory can only become viable when it not only escapes the crisis orientation of the Cold War but determines that it will also escape the limits of analysis imposed by the systems that produced the Cold War. It can only become effective when it accepts the principle that its new vision must in all probability find expression outside the current vision.

The counter-balance incentive can only become realizeable when it too dares to renounce its commitment to current institutional mechanisms which are ultimately committed and begins to create new patterns of thought and action which relate ideas to people as well as ideals.

The balance system only becomes operative when it too realizes that peace research can be as sterile and incapacitating as war research when the terms of conflict are not challenged along with the modes of conflict.

In summary, I have presented the point of view that American higher education through institutional inertia and bureaucratic agglutination, through political pressure and educational ideology is deeply, and under the pressures of the current world crisis, ultimately committed to the nourishment of a national and international system in which the Cold War is inextricably rooted. Implicit in all that I have said has been the view that the model for changing that system cannot be an adjustment model. Our problem is not that the system is not working well enough; it is rather that the current system is working entirely too well--that it is working us all into a final catastrophe.

My second major point is then that we must forsake the current adjustment model and begin to search for a revolutionary model which is dynamic enough to extricate us from the continually narrowing concentric circles which define the limits of change within the established political power structure. This does not mean that concessions should not be sought or cannot be gained. It does mean that those concessions in the vast majority of cases will be minor and will fail to provide the basis from which a revolutionary model can be developed. (Examples of "revolutionary" and "adjustment" models are appropriate here. The NAACP in attempting to bring about integration through court action and pressures upon traditional political channels is working on an adjustment model. The Southern Student Movement in employing non-violent direct action which works outside and frequently against established channels is working on a revolutionary model.)

My third point then is that in order to develop a revolutionary model, concerned faculty and students will for the most part have to move outside the University-defined spectrum of lectures, seminars and officially sanctioned research. And more importantly, that they will have to move outside the societally defined spectrum of what is relevant since relevance is defined today as that which is directed at adjusting the current power structure. It is because of this that priorities must be defined internally. Where and how this is done is the topic for another article concerning the counter-university (and perhaps the counter-politics which must accompany its construction). Suffice it to say here that throughout the country students are, in small groups to be sure, beginning to look to their own resources in attempts to redefine the issues of our time in a perspective that is intellectually more honest (if frequently less sophisticated).

than that of their Universities. These are an interesting strain of rebels (who was it that suggested that ideally education should be institutionalized, continuous, intellectual rebellion?); they have chosen, at least for the time being, in an important way to stand outside the organized system. They have chosen to be effective but they have shown the courage to define for themselves what is effective. But there is a grim analogue here. For in daring to be effective, in attempting to develop our own priorities independent of established priorities, in pressing to build our own institutions independent of existing institutions, we dare also to be ineffective. We risk our small influence on the existing structure in order to stand apart from it and build a new one, recognizing full well that basic changes may be impossible. It is on this point that American liberals and radicals have historically foundered--the only difference today is that civilization promises to founder with us.

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