Academic Freedom and Political Liberty

Academic freedom requires discriminating limitations upon political activities on university campuses.

Albert Lepawsky

The present wave of political protest among university students poses a unique challenge for American scientists and scholars, who are traditionally devoted to academic freedom. Heretofore, protest at American universities has been a prerogative of professors and has been focused largely upon the protection of their professional privileges. Now, a profound discontent has arisen among their students, overflowing the campus and threatening to engulf the entire body politic. The current protest movement may turn out to be but another chapter in the struggle for academic freedom, somewhat enlarged for the protection of students as well as teachers. Or, by virtue of its unprecedented political character, the student movement may become a turning point in the development of the American university system, which is being increasingly pressured toward greater politization. The outcome will depend on a complex of forces now buffeting a society in political flux. But one of the determining factors is bound to be the American academician's own conception of the proper role of the university as an intellectual institution and his own style of behavior and professional conduct during the period which lies ahead.

Role of Professors in Student Protests

The causes of student discontent are now being probed to an increasing degree (*1*). Insofar as the professor's role and responsibility may be concerned, it is true that his scholarly researches and other professional commitments have curtailed his time in the classroom, interfered with his teaching functions, and limited his contributions as personal counselor to the student. However, there is no convincing evidence that the average American student today gets fewer hours of personal attention from his various teachers and other specialized counselors, or poorer pedagogical services in general, than he has gotten in the past at American universities, or than he could get elsewhere, Oxford and Cambridge tutorials notwithstanding. There is, in fact, evidence that students are proud of, and profit greatly from association with, teachers who devote much of their time to research and consultation. Paradoxically, too, the extent of student protest seems sometimes to be in inverse proportion to the educational effort expended. Thus the protest movement was most forceful in California where a modern university, with unusually favorable facilities for both undergraduates and graduates, has been amply financed by a responsive state government. And it is also anomalous that, at Berkeley, student protests were least in professional fields such as engineering and business administration, where the outside preoccupations of professors and the internal evidence of "bigness" were supposed to be highest (*2*).

It seems fruitless, therefore, to attribute student protests, with their predominant political overtones, to teacher neglect. The fact is that the most subtle support for the student movement comes from the professoriat itself. This support results from the faculty's political influence as well as from its educational impact upon students, both on the college campus and in relation to the civil community. Law professors Thomas Emerson and David Haber have described the faculty's role in the following terms (and their view would undoubtedly be widely supported within the teaching profession) (*3*): "Much of the educational value of the university takes place outside the classroom. Freedom in this area of university life is as essential to intellectual and ethical development as freedom in the classroom. Indeed, an atmosphere of excitement and ferment in the academic community at large may be more meaningful to the student than freedom of discussion within the confines of the class. Moreover, to the extent that students are affected by example, it is instructive for the academic to appear to them as a person who enjoys participation in the adventure of change and as a man of the world whose ideas can be taken seriously by those who are preparing to live in it."

Faculty Responsibility for Student Conduct

Realization of this ideal raises perplexing problems for the professor. To his embarrassment, he finds that political participation by students or colleagues does not always follow the rational style to which he is committed. His dilemma is illustrated by the diverse reactions, at this year's annual meeting of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), concerning the issues of student unrest and political freedom (*4, 5*).

On the one hand, the association's general secretary, who was acquainted with the views of individual members with whom he had corresponded and familiar with the details of episodes at various universities, cautioned the membership about participating in the "era of the ultimatum." He reported that "it is not only students who are taking unprecedented steps to gain recognition and concurrence for demands that often leave small ground for the kind of consultation and debate that academic people are accustomed to," but that "some faculty groups are also resorting to pressure tactics—threatened strikes or boycotts, publicity before demands have been examined or answered, refusal to use established faculty agencies, appeals to students for sympathetic support, and related efforts which often bring issues to the state of immediate crisis."

The author is professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley.

On the other hand, the AAUP Resolutions Committee report, adopted without debate at the plenary meeting, enumerated the popularly cited "causes" of "student unrest" without reference to the factor of faculty conduct. It did criticize "insulation of the community of scholars from the undergraduate student body" and "flight of many able faculty members from the task of teaching," but the resolution on "political freedom" which followed was directed against "capricious institutional discipline," and although it stated that universities "have the right to make and enforce reasonable regulations relating to the time, place and manner" of "political activities" by "members of the academic community," it ended with a plea against "abuse of administrative authority."

Apart from the possible implication that professors are not responsible for university "administrative authority," these resolutions gloss over the core question which professors will have to confront if they wish to play their full role in maintaining the university as a viable intellectual institution. This question, which the professorial resolutions have so far answered rather permissively (*6*), may be phrased as follows: Should students and faculty be permitted to engage on the premises of the university in the whole repertoire of political activities they are permitted to carry on in the society at large, being limited by the university only as to "time, place, and manner," and should they be completely free of university discipline with respect to off-campus political activities, regardless of whether such activities are held to be legal or illegal?

Long before this key issue, in its numerous ramifications, is clarified by courts of law, by university governing boards, or by state legislatures, or through more careful deliberation within the profession itself, individual professors will have to decide how they are going to conduct themselves and how they will advise their students to behave in the current circumstances.

Proper Limitations upon Political Activities

Activities, that global word which professors now use in their resolutions concerning political freedom, covers a multitude of acts. "Political activities," in particular, range all the way from political speech and advocacy to political organization and action. Indicative of some of the current pressures upon professors, who normally make exacting — sometimes hair-splitting — distinctions, is the fact that they are willing to adopt blanket resolutions endorsing such a wide scope of intricate human behavior at a university as is comprehended in the concept of political action, or in the term *political activities*, without requiring substantive limitations upon members of the academic community.

There is little doubt that the principles of both academic freedom and political liberty fully justify, on our university campuses, speech or advocacy that is unrestricted except possibly as to time, place and manner of expression (admittedly, substantive limitations may also be justified if nonregulation results in defamation or obscenity) (*3*). But to liberate political *activity* entirely from university discipline, except for possible regulation of the time, place, and manner in which it is carried out, is a more hazardous undertaking. For, unless there is some proviso to the contrary, the "political activities" thus sanctioned include not only the intellectual processes of political inquiry and expression, political learning and teaching, and political experience-getting and experiment-making but also the mounting and directing of political demonstrations, the managing and financing of political campaigns, and the organizing and conducting of political movements (*7*).

I do not wish to be understood as saying that the educational process should entirely preclude, at our universities, experience with political demonstrations, political campaigns, and political movements. On the contrary, I myself encourage students to participate in exactly this sort of thing and I do some share of it myself—but not necessarily on the premises of, or using the facilities of, the university.

A major reason for drawing some line of demarcation between allowable and disallowable political activities on campus is pedagogical. From an educational point of view, the preferable place for active political experience, as for "field work" for students generally, is usually within the political and social community off campus. Political experience is generally more realistic if acquired in an actual political constituency; it tends to be nonfunctional or artificial if acquired on campus—except, of course, in the case of student participation in student government. It should be added, too, that freedom of political expression on campus should properly include the right of students to participate, within their own clubs or their own branches of the political parties, in discussion and debate on off-campus political issues and the right to prepare themselves to participate in off-campus political activities.

By way of illustration, let us consider application of these detailed distinctions in the area of civil rights. There is no reason why students (and faculty) should be discouraged from mounting, managing, and organizing—even directing, financing, and conducting—at our universities, education, information, and training programs for disfranchised voters, or for themselves as participants in, or leaders of, civil rights activities. Nor is there any reason why they should be deterred from participating, off campus, in political demonstrations, campaigns, and movements.

At this point, one may rightfully ask, Are there not marginal cases in which it will be difficult to delineate and to enforce such fine distinctions as are here proposed between educationally legitimate forms of political advocacy or activity on the university campus and full-fledged political activity of a type more suitable off campus? The answer is that no significant distinction in the realms of political education or political behavior is easy to draw, but the difficulty of the task should not preclude professors from pursuing it on a case-to-case basis.

Indeed, the meat and bone of a meaningful university education, particularly in the behavioral, social, and political sciences, is the clarification of exactly such tough distinctions. This is the essence of the higher-education process—this very search for prudent and proper judgments and values about social conduct and political behavior exactly at the point where discourse and argument can take one no further and must give way to learning which leads to comprehension and sagacity. It is ironic that, today, some of those who have criticized the university most severely for failing to impart to students a sense of values now wish to restrain the university from saying what is right and what is wrong about carrying on various kinds of political activities on or off campus.

Societal Rights and Institutional Privileges

We still might ask ourselves, How does one go about discovering the boundaries between proper and improper political conduct on the part of students and faculty? Whatever the answer may be, are we to assume that members of a university have fewer political rights than other citizens?

One formula for answering this question is that contained in the 1965 AAUP resolution (*4*)—a formula permitting "political activities concomitant with the principles underlying the Bill of Rights." But this formula is insufficient, in itself, to solve the problem that confronts us. The guarantees contained in the Bill of Rights apply to individuals as citizens of the society at large, not necessarily to groups of individuals as members of social institutions. Members of society's substructures are continually denied rights within their respective institutions which they are free to exercise as members of society at large. In our pluralistic society, dissident or disruptive members of organizations, who persist in exercising rights denied by the organization which they possess as members of society in general, are always free—in fact are continually invited by their colleagues—to go out and "Hire a hall."

A church member, for example, who repudiates the church's doctrines and is denied the opportunity of conducting his own preach-in from the pulpit cannot plead in the courts of the land that he is thereby deprived of his freedom of speech. A member of the bar is constantly debarred from making certain kinds of public comments about pending cases—comments which are perfectly permissible for the citizenry at large. A member of the military cannot preach pacifism on the firing line or the rifle range, although he may possibly be permitted to do so at the corner pub when he is on furlough (*8*).

By the same token there would seem to be no constitutional barrier to relevant limitation of the exercise at a university of certain political rights possessed by its students and staff as members of society, especially when the rights so limited involve action rather than advocacy. If our courts were to hold otherwise, every college campus in the land could become the site of a full-scale factional arena or political party headquarters, and our universities might readily be converted from academic to political institutions. The very purpose of establishing separate societal organizations, such as the university, is to permit members to enjoy particular advantages they could not enjoy as nonmembers, at the cost of certain privileges they can otherwise continue to exercise in their capacity as citizens. Such a system of societal substructures, with special privileges and limitations, is justified because the net benefits accruing to society as a whole exceed those which would accrue if there were no separate organizations with unique opportunities and responsibilities for their members.

The university is merely one such constituent institution, albeit one of the most significant for a free society. It is a sanctuary established for the unhampered cultivation of the mind, for the benefit not merely of its own members but of society at large. The privilege of possessing such extraordinary freedom as the university provides is accompanied by special obligations, but the net amount of freedom resulting from such a limitation, both for the members of the university and for the rest of soicety, is greater than it otherwise would be.

Political Conduct on and off Campus

None of this discussion disposes of the more difficult question of whether university regulation can be applied to off-campus activities of members of the academic community. On this issue, a prevailing view among American professors seems at present to be, let's leave off-campus activity completely outside the realm of university regulation, both as to its substance and as to the time, place and manner in which it is carried out, even when such activity turns out to be illegal, since illegal conduct will be taken care of by the regular off-campus law-enforcement authorities (*9*).

Nevertheless, let us suppose that a student or professor in his political pursuits off campus persists in preaching and manifesting hate or violence. Under the doctrine of immunity from university discipline, our institutions of higher learning could be required to retain such a person as a member of the academic community even though it is determined that his conduct makes him unfit as a student or scholar. To require universities to retain such individuals would downgrade academic standards to the lowest common denominator of political conduct in our society.

All societies place some limitations upon the political activities of their citizens. Communist societies prohibit certain Nazi-style and democratic activities, Nazi societies prohibit certain Communist-type and democratic activities, and democratic societies try to regulate certain kinds of Nazi and Communist activities. This need not necessarily mean that the universities of democratic societies should expel or discharge, or should absolutely refuse to admit or hire, students or professors for reputed adherence to Communist or Nazi doctrine or discipline or for mere membership in the Communist or Nazi parties. To exclude such individuals from the universities is not the practice in some of the world's most mature democracies and need not necessarily be in our own. However, those American colleges and universities which decide that they wish to free themselves of students or faculty who, through intolerant behavior, show that they lack the rational qualities required for membership in the academic community should not be prohibited from doing so.

Past experience of American professors in having to defend some of their colleagues against loose and unjust accusations of unfitness may deter them from giving sympathetic consideration to this difficult problem of establishing criteria of fitness. Furthermore, there may be good pedagogical grounds for arguing that professors should be more reluctant to apply these standards to the conduct of their students than to their own conduct. But, in refusing to take a stand themselves on such difficult matters, professors ought not deny the right of professional colleagues or sister institutions to take such a stand if these colleagues or institutions deem a strong stand necessary to the fulfillment of their responsibility for enforcing standards of academic selection or academically relevant standards of political conduct.

Political Freedom and Academic Responsibility

Now let us consider one of the most neglected aspects of the issue of academic freedom as it is now being posed

at American universities. Academic freedom should be defined as constituting more than a guarantee of intellectual integrity or political liberty. It should comprehend, as well, the freedom of members of the academic community to carry on their work unhampered by colleagues and students who engage in political activity and exert pressures to the point of disturbing the teaching, research, and other relevant functions of the university (*10*). Does not the academic community lose part of its freedom when some of its members, wishing to enlarge their own or the university's role in the realm of political action, interfere with those of its members who want to carry on their work without interruption during the ever-ongoing debates of an active political society?

As for the effects on the off-campus community of political activity on the part of students or colleagues, faculty members tend to be rather indulgent about the spillover from campus to community. Professors often take the position that their primary duty is to their students and to science, let the chips fall where they may. Righteously, often rightfully, they turn a deaf ear to the off-campus public—politicians or press, parents or alumni, special interests seeking favors, pressure groups voicing objections, legislative bodies, or even university governing boards, whose members are also sometimes classified with these "extraneous influences." Irrelevant pressures upon the university have been numerous in the past and still exist today, and faculty opposition to them is understandable and justifiable. But when, on the premises of the university or under the shield of scholarship, professors and their students involve themselves or the rest of the academic community in political activities affecting the wider society, the reaction of the general public or of its various pressure groups becomes relevant, to say the least. Certainly it deserves sympathetic understanding, if not support, on the part of scientists and scholars.

Universities cannot have things both ways. If their political role is allowed to escalate, how can their members dissuade the body politic within the greater society from scrutinizing their supposedly intellectual conduct and from throwing into the balance the political counterweight of other groups or interests who claim to be threatened by the academicians? Once unilateral changes are made in the established boundaries between universities and other societal institutions, no matter how justified such modification may seem to be, we have a game of musical chairs that can be played by all participants in a pluralistic society. In such a fluid society as ours, especially one in which the population is constantly being upgraded intellectually, the realm of the intellect cannot remain the sole preserve of the intellectual, certainly not when the intellectual starts poaching on the territory of others who are often just as knowledgeable about political affairs and possibly about intellectual affairs as he is. Whether any society can remain viable and free if its constituent groups become embroiled in jurisdictional disputes of this kind is an open question.

The belief that the public can be kept from the academic arena while students and faculty increasingly use the university as a sanctuary from which to project upon society their own political preferences is sociologically untenable, and, what is more such a policy is politically unworkable. Why should we assume that the winds of politics will continue to produce students and professors of the political opinion which at present prevails at our universities and which we currently find congenial? For intellectuals who profess the long view, this is a patently short-sighted policy which can easily boomerang. When new and somewhat hostile political elements move in on the campus, as they are likely to do, how are the professors then going to protect the university's "neutrality" when they have already started to sacrifice it?

Trends in Politics and the Role of the Intellectual

The political center of gravity in the professoriat has steadily shifted, with the Square Deal, the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Freedom, the New Frontier, and the Great Society, and we are now apparently experiencing an unprecedented massive trend of student opinion in the same general direction (*11*). This trend in student politics is unprecedented not only in degree but in character: student political strategy is now being coupled with political demonstration, civil disobedience, and institutional disturbance. It would be a mistake to attribute this new form of pressure entirely to the current civil rights movement. In the case of civil rights, legal remedies for reform had been exhausted, the civil authorities had themselves violated the existing legal norms, and the disobedience tactic was understandable as an expression of our revolutionary tradition.

Now, as a possibly emerging trend in American political behavior generally, students and their faculty supporters are, as a matter of course, circumventing legal or academic processes of complaint and consultation and are systematically resorting to direct action and pressure upon political authorities, administrative agencies, university officials, and, sometimes, faculty members themselves. Pressure politics have been employed previously at American universities. but this is the first time the university as an institution and the college campus as a facility have been systematically mobilized as a major organizational base and functioning headquarters for political protest and for related programs of social action.

If American universities are determined to experiment with drastic changes in their functional role, they should do so in accord with tested standards of American intellectual life, not choose criteria of conduct more characteristic of the political hustings. Much of what happens in the future will depend, of course, upon the cumulative impact of pending judicial decisions. For example, will the courts technically equate the American university campus with other special areas, such as medical centers, which are permitted to enforce relevant regulations required for the preservation of their essential character, or will the university campus be considered a site for generally unlimited polemic activities? If intellectuals continue to tolerate the increased use of academic institutions for political protest, they must be more realistic about one political consequence; American universities may become fair game for the radical right and the radical left, who are already eager to exploit this newly approved form of academic freedom.

Conservative and right-inclined groups, though now relatively quiescent at the universities, have also been learning some valuable lessons for the future from the present by-play of academic politics. When the pendulum swings their way at the next or a subsequent election, may not they and

their student supporters and faculty sympathizers consider launching their own "teach-ins," if not their own "sit-ins"? More important still, may not these potentially powerful leaders of our political establishment, when they come to power, take active steps toward changing the political complexion of the academic establishment? If they did not, it would be one of the most remarkable cases of political abstinence in history.

When that day comes, with what moral conviction or sense of justice will professors be able to resist the incursions of the public into their preempted domain over such educational questions as curricula and courses, student admissions, faculty appointments, extramural speakers, and "neutral" uses of university facilities. Now is the time for scholars and scientists to ponder whether they want to see a further politicizing of the American university at the expense of its continued growth in the realm of the intellect.

References and Notes

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2. K. E. Gales, "Berkeley Student Opinion, April, 1965," news release, Office of Public Information, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 27 July 1965; A. M. Heiss, "Berkeley Doctoral Students Appraise their Academic Programs" (Center for the Study of Higher Education, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1964). For the British reaction to American higher education, see *United Kingdom, Committee on Higher Education, Report 1961–1963* (the Robbins report) and *Higher Education in Other Countries* (United Kingdom, Committee on Higher Education, London, 1963), appendix 5; see also Lord Robbins' convocation address delivered at Berkeley in the spring of 1965. Nonteaching demands upon the time and energy of American faculties were analyzed early by Logan Wilson in *The Academic Mind: A Study in the Sociology of a Profession* (Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1942), Table 1.
3. T. I. Emerson and D. Haber, *Law and Contemp. Probl.* **28**, 548 (summer 1963).
4. *AAUP Bull.* **51**, 318 (June 1965).
5. For discussion of the full experience of the AAUP with respect to academic freedom and related problems, see "Report of the Self-Survey Committee of the AAUP," *ibid.*, May 1965.
6. The much-publicized faculty resolution of the University of California's Academic Senate, which was similiar to the later AAUP resolution, was adopted 8 December 1964 by a vote of 824 to 115. A resolution drafted along the lines of the analysis presented in this article had been previously defeated by a vote of 737 to 284.
7. Emerson and Haber seem to be among the few authorities who have carefully weighed this distinction between the act of communicating and overt action (see *3*).
8. T. I. Emerson and D. Haber, *Political and Civil Rights in the United States* (Dennis, Buffalo, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 334–338, 480–503; vol. 2, chaps. 4 and 5. See also R. F. Fuchs, *Law and Contemp. Probl.* **28**, 444 (summer 1963).
9 P. Monypenny, *Law and Contemp. Probl.* **28**, 629 (summer 1963); T. I. Emerson and D. Haber, *ibid.*, pp. 550, 556. Compare Association of American Universities, "The Rights and Responsibilities of Universities and their Faculties," as reprinted in T. I. Emerson and D. Haber, *Political and Civil Rights in the United States* (Dennis, Buffalo, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 1070–1077, with "Academic freedom for national security," *AAUP Bull.* **42**, 49 (spring 1965).
10. In contrast to the circumstances at Berkeley, this was the issue at Columbia in the disturbance there of 7 May 1965. The students later "regretted" their "disruption" and the "infringement" upon the rights of their colleagues and were subsequently disciplined by the University administration, apparently with faculty acquiescence. [Letter from deans Ralph S. Halford, Wesley J. Hennessy, and David B. Truman to the university president, 17 May 1965, and enclosures; "Memorandum from the President to the University Community," 20 May 1965].
11. S. M. Lipset, *Political Man* (Doubleday, New York, 1960), pp. 21, 315–316; A. W. Kornhauser, "Attitudes of economic groups," *Public Opinion Quart.* **2**, 264 (Apr. 1938); P. F. Lazarsfeld and W. Thielens, Jr., *The Academic Mind* (Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1958), p. 14; H. A. Turner, C. G. McClintock, C. B. Spaulding, "The political party affiliation of American political scientists," *Western Political Quart.* **16**, 652 (Sept. 1963); A. Gottfried, "Political attitudes and behavior of university faculty," (summary of proceedings of the Western Political Science Association), *ibid.* **14**, 45 (Sept. 1961); R. Yee, "Faculty participation in the 1960 Presidential election," *ibid.* **16**, 219 (Mar. 1963).

Pure Research, Cultism, and the Undergraduate

The student, less informed but also less prejudiced than his professor, is the effective critic of a discipline.

Richard Wolfgang

The wellspring of science is traditionally, and with reason, considered to be pure research. This in turn is defined by its motivation, as that branch of science which ideally seeks only intellectual goals and satisfactions. If material objectives, such as profit, military advantage, or the social or physical welfare of man, are achieved, they are considered to be incidental. But, in renouncing the more tangible goals, pure science also renounces the relatively clear-cut economic and social principles which serve to guide the direction of more applied research.

Since there are no readily defined material objectives, the guidelines of pure research are more subtle and harder to find. By common consent, its objective is an increased knowledge of nature and an ordering and simplification of that knowledge. In particular, our anthropomorphic outlook makes especially attractive any study which gives a clearer idea of man's place in the universe. This prescription is general but also rather vague. To determine whether a given study is important or trivial by this criterion is an esthetic rather than a quantitative decision. And in science as in everything else, esthetics and taste may easily be confused with fashion.

Sometimes it seems easy to judge the importance of an area of pure research. It is obvious that particle physics is important simply because it concerns itself with an elementary and therefore important aspect of nature. It is almost as obvious that indiscriminate accumulation of data on some system into which many complex factors enter is unlikely to produce much enlightenment. In general, however, it is difficult to make a definitive judgment on the absolute and relative merit of a field. The fact that a given problem may demand a very

The author is professor of chemistry at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.