L'Université Est Morte, Vive l'Université

Paris. Can French universities live with themselves? After the crisis of last May, no one is quite sure.

The strikes, riots, and university occupations of May and June transformed the attitude of many Frenchmen toward higher education. Before then, university problems clearly fell within the domain of the specialist. The press was not particularly concerned, and the Minister of Education was a secondary figure in the cabinet. Five months later, newspapers cannot give too much space to higher education, and, according to a recent public opinion poll, nearly two-thirds of the population expects trouble when the universities reopen. Edgar Faure, the new Minister of Education, is a national personality; his prestige and the importance of his new portfolio are such that he is increasingly mentioned as a dark-horse successor to President de Gaulle.

The events of last spring also made some of the most drastic of the proposed reforms—including student representation on faculty committees—suddenly seem desirable. On Faure's abilities as a persuader and the batch of reforms rest the government's main hopes for placating the disgruntled students. The bill incorporating these reforms has yet to be passed by Parliament, but, despite some grumbling within the Gaullist majority, it will probably be changed little. On paper, the proposed changes look impressive.

The first, which is really a prerequisite for all the others, is university "autonomy." For years, many French educators have demanded an end to the strict centralization that made the universities slaves to both the Ministry of Education (which established tight degree requirements) and the Finance Ministry (which, along with the Ministry of Education, had responsibility for approving almost all expenses *before* the money was spent). The new law gives far greater latitude in both areas.

"Autonomy" also frees universities from a common internal ruling structure, and this change lets students sit on faculty committees. Last spring, student "general assemblies" and "study commissions" worked with sympathetic faculty and administrators to reorganize many universities; the reforms will allow many of their joint agreements to be implemented quickly. Other universities will spend the fall writing new constitutions.

The students' other main dividends from last spring's demonstrations are political rights inside the university. The most bitterly contested and vaguest part of the new law allows student political groups to hold meetings on university property. To deny this right, Faure argued, was to push the students into the streets.

Finally, the new law envisions ending the old system of administratively separate faculties (humanities, sciences, law, medicine) and replacing it with American-style multidisciplinary universities. This change embodies the reform ethos: break down barriers between disciplines, diminish centralism, and leave universities alone to handle their own problems and develop their own strengths.

Future in Question

The proposed changes undoubtedly constitute the most important reorganization of the French higher education system in this century. That, however, does not mean that all will go well.

As Faure is the first to point out, there are limits to what can be done. Teaching styles and practices do not change overnight, nor are all the students' expressed grievances easily solved by altering their education. One reason cited for last spring's upheaval was student worry about not finding suitable jobs after graduation. When French universities were training only an elite, students' futures were no problem. But, faced with a tenfold expansion of the student population in the last decade (to nearly 600,000 this year), Faure felt compelled to say recently that "the university is not a job placement bureau." In short, the greater the number of people who go to a university, the fewer the privileges attached per se to a university education.

The student influx also threatens to dilute any reform by overcrowding facilities. The Ministry of Education expects 90,000 new students this fall, an increase over 1967–68 of more than 15 percent. Buildings are already bulging, and the number of faculty members has been repeatedly called too small. Last spring also served as a powerful stimulant to the ministry's budget, yet this year's spending is only slightly higher than last year's, and a large chunk of this year's money will be eaten up by inflation, which is, conservatively, 3 or 4 percent.*

The numbers pressure will probably get worse before it gets better. Every student who passes the baccalauréat examination at the end of high school is automatically entitled to entrance into a university; this year the passing percentage rose from a normal 50–60 percent to 80 percent, as professors apparently decided not to be too severe on students. In the universities, difficult exams serve to eliminate many students during the first 3 years. As a result of last May, however, many of the exams will probably be modified, and, here too, the number of failures may drop. One school of educators believes the only solution is to end the baccalauréat special role and institute entrance exams. But most students are against this, and so is Faure.

Equally troubling for the universities are the ambiguities and uncertainties of the new law. In the case of finances, for example, each university will receive a lump sum and be responsible for setting its own priorities; spending will be reviewed afterward. This change displeased the Finance Ministry, and it remains to be seen how "autonomous" the universities can be if the state is their only source of income.

Another crippling defect could be the absence of any effective executive power in each university. Some of the new university constitutions provide for strong presidents, but some don't. Under the old system, when the ministries held the real powers, the importance of local deans vis-à-vis faculty assemblies was relatively slight. Now the prospect of universities' being dominated by student-faculty assemblies (themselves unsure of their new roles) is one

* A good example of last spring's consequences is the number of new professorships. According to the Ministry of Education's figures, 4600 new teaching posts will be created this year in addition to the 24,000 there were in 1967–68. Of the new posts, 2100 were scheduled as a normal addition, but the rest were created as a result of last spring's protests. Of the 24,000 existing posts, about a third are held by tenured professors, the rest being divided between teaching assistants and *maitre-assistants*, a permanent position half-way between teaching assistant and full professor. About 40 percent of the new posts are full professorships.

that many educators find unwelcome.

Even the extent to which the individual university will be allowed to set its own program requirements under the new law is ambiguous. The Ministry of Education retains its power to set uniform national standards for degrees, and the university's jurisdiction will necessarily depend on the flexibility of the national requirements. A lot, then, depends on the implementation of the new law. There could be confusion under the most harmonious of conditions. Understandably, conditions are not exactly harmonious.

Last spring's heritage is mixed. In Paris, the May demonstrations brought many students together for the first time; the university is more inviting today to students not only because they feel they have some control over their education but also because they simply know more people. But what was good for many students embittered others, and certainly embittered many faculty members. Last spring's crisis did not merely expose certain student grievances; it opened a major confrontation between (and among) faculty and students on the very nature of the university. The stakes are high, and many faculty members clearly feel threatened by the outcome.

Meaning of "Participation"

"Participation" (de Gaulle's word) is probably an inexact term for what the students—or, at least, the most militant of them—really want. They seek self-determination. They do not want simply to be consulted or informed. They want to decide, and, if it is impossible that the decisions should be theirs alone, they want it made clear that sitting down with deans is not merely a fancy formality for buying student cooperation.

Under the new law, students can control up to half the seats in the university's ruling assembly, which elects the president; their access to "power" will be reinforced by similar representation on departmental committees. There is, nevertheless, likely to be friction. One of last spring's major grievances concerned the traditional exams: students demanded the right to determine the kinds of exams they would be given. The new law reserves to professors all authority over exams. Many professors feel (and said so during the summer while the law was being drafted) that involving students in determining the nature of exams would be an unconscionable alteration of the professor's

NEWS IN BRIEF

● **TRAILS AND SCENIC RIVERS:** Congress has passed two major conservation measures, which provide the first national system of urban and rural trails, and the first national wild and scenic rivers system. The trails bill will incorporate the Appalachian Trail in the East and the Pacific Coast Trail, stretching from Mexico to Canada in the West, into a system of national trails administered by the National Park Service. The aim is to preserve and extend present trails and to provide for new trails, which have historical and recreational value. The bill also provides for the study of 14 other trails for possible inclusion in the national trailways system. The Wild and Scenic Rivers System bill provides for the preservation of unspoiled segments of eight rivers and studies of 27 other rivers for possible inclusion later. The bill forbids the Federal Power Commission to license any dam or powerhouse that would infringe upon the river segments designated as scenic rivers or included in the study. Congress has authorized $5.5 million for the national system of trails, and $17 million for land acquisition for the wild and scenic rivers system. Both bills were signed by the President on 3 October.

● **EUROPEAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY:** Physical societies from 18 countries in Eastern and Western Europe have become members of the new European Physical Society (EPS). Founded on 26 September in Geneva, Switzerland, EPS has been formed to coordinate the advancement of European physics research efforts; to organize faculty, student, and research exchanges between countries; and to coordinate seminars, lectures, and the publication of physics journals in Europe.

● **VASSAR TO BE COED:** Vassar College, a women's institution for 107 years, has announced plans to become coeducational. As a move in that direction, Vassar will participate in a student exchange program with Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., in January, and later with several other men's institutions. Vassar will eventually have men and women as part of the same institution with one faculty and administration. Last November Vassar rejected an offer to affiliate with Yale University.

● **WHEELER WINS FERMI AWARD:** John Henry Wheeler, Princeton University professor of physics, is the 12th recipient of the Enrico Fermi Award. The prize, which consists of $25,000 and a gold medal and citation, was awarded to Wheeler by the Atomic Energy Commission for his continuing contributions to nuclear science. The Enrico Fermi Award was first awarded in 1954 and is international in scope.

● **NORTH CASCADES PARK:** Conservationists have won a major victory with the establishment of the North Cascades National Park in northwest Washington State (*Science*, 1 September 1967). The North Cascades Park bill, which sets aside 1.2 million acres of public and private land for the 35th national park, was signed on 3 October by President Johnson.

● **MARS MISSIONS:** The National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) is attempting to interest scientists in proposing experiments for future orbital missions and unmanned lander flights to Mars, tentatively scheduled for 1973. In one of its first open solicitations, NASA invites scientists to apply for grants and contracts to develop instruments in such fields as physics, chemistry, geology, astronautics, geochemistry, and the optical sciences. Scientists interested in participating may attend a NASA preproposal briefing on 16 October in Washington, or request the briefing report at a later date. Inquiries may be sent to M. A. Mitz, Code SL, OSSA; NASA Headquarters, Washington, D.C. 20546. Applications must be submitted before 1 December 1968.

● **COBB SEAMOUNT:** One of the most detailed U.S. explorations of an undersea mountain will be conducted this month when the Commerce Department's Environmental Science Services Administration explores and maps the surface of Cobb Seamount, a submerged extinct volcano off the coast of Washington (*Science*, 19 July). The exploration will provide scientific data to be used in the eventual construction of a manned habitat on the surface of the seamount. The topography will be surveyed with electronic equipment from the *Oceanographer*, and teams of divers will explore the seamount surface.

Psychologists Reject Chicago Again

By a 79–22 vote, the governing Council of the American Psychological Association (APA) reaffirmed its earlier decision to move the APA's 1969 meeting from Chicago. The Council voted at its 5 October meeting in Washington, after hearing the plea of William H. Edwards, who represented the Chicago hotels. In his speech, Edwards made the unexpected concession that the Chicago hotels would free the APA from its contract to purchase hotel space for next year's meeting but expressed the hope that the APA would still choose to meet in Chicago. Although Edwards' gesture was appreciated, the council majority was unshaken in its desire to show its disapproval of Mayor Richard Daley and the Chicago police department for the widespread beating of demonstrators during the Democratic National Convention.

In an interview with *Science,* Edwards said that the Chicago hotels had not offered to free other professional associations from their legal obligation to purchase hotel space in forthcoming years, but that the hotels were treating each case individually. (In the wake of the August battles, several groups, including the American Sociological Association and the American Political Science Association, voted to shift their scheduled future meetings from Chicago.) Although it has not yet been publicly announced, the APA's next annual meeting will be held in Washington, D.C.—B.N.

traditional autonomy. The students see the exams as a key point of control over the nature of their education.

Likewise, they feel that a voice in the recruitment of new professors is essential to student influence within the university; but the law gives professors monopoly power in this area also. A student voice in making research commitments will be reserved to graduate students engaged in research. There are countless other seeds of potential contention.

The law prescribes neat formulas, but, in fact, neither students nor faculty has accepted any common ground rules for settling conflicts. Leadership rivalries and policy disagreements are part of "participation" politics. The question is whether such politics will lead merely to controversy or to open, disruptive combat.

What complicates matters is the emergence, first apparent last spring, of a new "student movement" roughly comparable to the American "new Left." Like its American counterpart, it is more a state of mind than an organization; and, again like its American counterpart, it has no central "leadership" and, thus, is not easily controlled by either the "old Left" or the government. In the view of many professors and students, this new force threatens the existence of the traditional "liberal university."

Raymond Aron, the political sociologist, has become the chief spokesman for this worried group. He conceives of the "liberal university" as a place where scholars pursue their research independent of political pressure and where teachers teach rather than indoctrinate. To him, May was a disaster. He has argued:

> The young and many of my colleagues [who cooperated with the students] destroy a precious institution because they weaken its moral foundation. There is no other moral basis for the university except reciprocal tolerance between teachers and the voluntary discipline of students. There will be no more higher education if the students utilize the university as a place for political agitation. That would signify the *Latin-Americanization of French universities,* the ruin of the universities. Whatever part the students take in running the universities, and particularly if that part is eventually large, the more the students' voluntary discipline is needed as the indispensable condition for the university's survival.

The new French Left is far from homogeneous. One large component, though it often mouths radical political goals and believes in tactical militancy, fundamentally aims at university reform. But another element has its roots deeper in the French political past. At the center of this second group are a dozen or so small political organizations, most with anarchist, Trotskyite, Maoist, or Castroite backgrounds; the government charged these groups with fomenting much of the violence last spring and, in June, officially disbanded them.

Because their aims are strictly political, these students care very little about the universties as such—at least as they exist in the present society. The universities, they say, inevitably reflect society, and it is impossible to change one without changing the other. To many of these militants the universities represent, at best, a fertile place to start agitation (last May proved that) or to demonstrate to workers useful lines of protest. Thus, last spring the students occupied the universities and the workers followed suit by occupying the factories.

In much student rhetoric it is difficult to separate "reform" and "revolutionary" goals; the mixture—or apparent mixture—makes student "participation" and student political rights inside the university the controversial issues they are.

Optimists believe that the reform can be implemented as long as students maintain self-discipline (no violence) and mutual tolerance. Pessimists, including a large corps of faculty members, fear that the university will become "politicized"—that students and faculty will become preoccupied by questions of internal and external politics, that educational decisions will become dominated by doctrinaire politics.

Against last spring's militant heritage, it is possible to balance moderating forces. The present student mood, though difficult to judge, seems more mellow; the thought of renewed protest raises the prospect of losing a full year and, for some, the possibility of financial difficulties. Faure's reforms, tactically designed to split the moderates from the militants, may succeed in doing just that; to date, he has been particularly restrained in his use of police, the symbolic rallying point for the students. Paris, where one-third of French university students go to school, presents the major problems; in the provinces, the new year appears to be beginning more smoothly. Finally, the majority of French students are from middle-class families, and, whatever their political values, they still retain fundamentally bourgeois values and life-styles.

Only events will tell how these different forces interact and which, if any, prevail. The underlying consensus about French universities—who is to run them, what they are all about—may not be completely shattered, but it is showing some prominent cracks.

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