1969

The Phenomenon of Student Revolt, By Milo Ross

Milo C. Ross

George Fox University Archives

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/archives_presidents

Recommended Citation
THE PHENOMENON OF STUDENT REVOLT

by DR. MILO C. ROSS
President of George Fox College
Members of the George Fox College community, and especially the class of 1969: I wish to speak to all of us today on a very popular subject: that of student protest. It is popular, not that society at large is pleased with the situation, but that it is claiming our attention more than any other social phenomenon. Since last September (or when colleges and universities got under way for the season) student unrest has received more coverage, more space, in the public media than did the presidential campaign and inauguration, the Vietnam war, Briere, the death of Eisenhower, the moon shot, demise of de Gaulle, or anything else. As of the first of May, there had been two hundred separate campuses affected in the United States alone, not to mention any other country.

Any student of college history and life knows that student protest is not new. There have been hundreds of petitions, revolts, parades, strikes and rebellions for hundreds of years, especially in the universities of the old world and in Latin countries. The type of university which has followed the Southern European pattern in which students have a large voice in the choice of their professors and Leaders has been especially vulnerable over all their generations. The type of monoplastic structure, owned and operated by the state and with a political ministry of education controlling (such as the Sorbonne which Mr. Ross and I witnessed in Europe last spring) illustrates another type. But, by and large, over the centuries, educational institutions of these types suffered (or perhaps benefited in the long run) by a type of protest (however extreme) which had as its goal the improvement of the universities. Youth wishes to learn more and better. The frightening discussion of the present protests, new to the educational scene, is that a great majority of them have the utter destruction of the university at stake, if not the system—the establishment. Colleges and universities are now fighting for their very existence. Jacques Baran, of Columbia, the eminent philosopher, has claimed that Columbia will take generations to recover, if at all.

At the outset, allow me to state unequivocally that I believe there are many things wrong with our society and with higher education. There are many things which need improvement and change right here at George. It is not the province of this short talk to identify or illustrate hypocrisy, inequality, double-standards, greed, mistaken priorities in our national goals, however provoked. Let us barge in and talk about the riots and the unrest, pur se:

There are four types of protest to date: black power, the authority of the college or university, anti-war, and involving specific professors.

WHERE DO THEY OCCUR? WHAT ARE THE KINDS OF INSTITUTIONS? WHAT BREEDS THEM?

1. There is the conspiracy, as illustrated by the SDS. There are target schools, now running the gamut from the great urban universities to the prestige smaller ivy-league type.
2. There is anarchy. The classic illustration is from the French. The type is utter catastrophe, followed by instant Utopia.
3. There is the kind of institution which appears to be the most vulnerable. These are the most liberal schools. The aims and methods may again fall into groupings:
   a. Personal growth types. Open.
   b. Institutional growth: New buildings, aimed at the faculty, minimum of emphasis upon the student.
   c. Impulse control, protection and control of the students.
   d. The faculty itself. Sociology, and to a lesser degree economics and psychology.
4. The students. Independent of economic life. Parents give them all they need and more. (I am dependent upon Dr. McKenna, of SPC and others for this analysis.)

The PATTERN OF PROTEST is interesting and important to our discussion.

1. We begin with a small group with a legitimate cause. Studies show that 20 years ago, 20% could have controlled a campus. Today, only 4% are needed. As a strategy, it is known now that the silent majority is up for grabs.
2. Next comes the confrontation. The idea is to occupy a building.
3. Next is a list of non-negotiable demands, generally at least fifteen. Among these may be a series which are known to be outside of the control of the people to whom the demands are addressed, i.e., the board of regents is in charge. It is at this point that violence comes into the picture, ransacking the files, burning documents, wrecking buildings, abuse, dumping of human excrement, destruction of possibilities. Then the cry of police brutality.
4. The plea for amnesty. 200 Harvard liberal arts professors asked that all charges be dropped. If you will fire the president, then we will negotiate. Ill. Brandeis.

Out of these crises, day by day across our campuses, have come a number of responses. I met with Mrs. Edith Green in Washington some days ago, having lunch with her, and going over the climate of opinion in the nation's responses. I have discussed this situation, the situation of the present protests, new to the educational scene, is that a great majority of them have the utter destruction of the university at stake, if not the system—the establishment. Colleges and universities are now fighting for their very existence. Jacques Baran, of Columbia, the eminent philosopher, has claimed that Columbia will take generations to recover, if at all.

At the outset, allow me to state unequivocally that I believe there are many things wrong with our society and with higher education. There are many things which need improvement and change right here at George. It is not the province of this short talk to identify or illustrate hypocrisy, inequality, double-standards, greed, mistaken priorities in our national goals, however provoked. Let us barge in and talk about the riots and the unrest, pur se:

There are four types of protest to date: black power, the authority of the college or university, anti-war, and involving specific professors.
Both the administration and the students should anticipate problems of this nature. Beginning with the president down; leadership is thought to be illegitimate. There is a crisis of authority. Anyone who wears the hat of the establishment is a target.

Every college, George Fox included, has or should have, a plan. What is the method in case of a sit-in? Who is in authority at any time, day or night? How do we ward off upheavals and attack? But I come to a more positive position. I am now convinced, and I am not alone in this, that many of the incipient riots could have been headed off, or at least postponed, if there were a spirit of open trust between the administration and the students. As one has commented: not only an open door policy, but an open mind policy. For in most instances, the great rebellions and disruptions have occurred where incipient demands were ignored, where grievances were of long standing, where conditions, thought to be intolerable by some, were not redressed. Then, the SDS and the Black Power Union jumps upon something legitimate and makes of it a monstrosity.

I plead for an era of continued trust. There is no reason why Dr. Le Shana cannot have the candid trust and confidence of everyone of our college community. There is no reason why we cannot move, by legitimate means and peaceful dialogue, to new and better positions. And all of us will be the better into the future—the college as an institution, our mature judgments will be vindicated, and we shall be better prepared to enter upon adult society ready to grapple with the problems of our cities and our world.

For those of you who will be here next year, you can create a climate of majority opinion where it is difficult to drum up a crisis. There is nothing like the attitude personally and corporately which poses the question of "What would Jesus do?" But we go on from there. What is in deference to others? What commands the respect of myself and others? What will come out best for the world into which I find myself emerging? What admits the best in and to the other person? And let this be known: the entire establishment does not have to come tumbling down to create the instant Utopia! There is no social ill, no inequality, no wrong, no dispute but what can be adjusted and corrected by persons of goodwill. The use of the Golden Rule on both sides can produce the desired change for all concerned.

And now, especially to the senior class. Your leaving here will not insulate you from this world of riot and protest. You may find it in the university where you go in a few weeks. You may find it in the corporation where you will be employed. You will find your church and school district undergoing great changes. May I suggest that you make your lives the center of peaceful change. I would not be satisfied with what you find. But, beginning where we are, I should work and pray for a better society based on Christian principles—on the dignity of every man, on love that casteth out fear, on love of country and respect for its laws, on the dignity of work. In your families, early bring in God to every decision and problem. Early teach your children to love God and honor you. Let it be known that love is the fulfilling of the law. There is yet hope for our world, dominated or at least infiltrated by persons who— "do justly, and [to] love mercy, and [to] walk humbly with (their) God." Micah 6: 8