

Theory, Practice and Inspiration

The 1950s, during which many observers were perplexed by the indifference of American university students to political and social issues, witnessed in Europe and then in the United States a rebirth of interest in Marxist social criticism. A conscious effort to construct what since has come to be called "a new politics," this neo-Marxist current was a reaction to political developments of the day--on the international level, to the nuclear arms race, Suez and the Hungarian Revolution, Khrushchev's Secret Speech and the Algerian conflict; and, nationally, to a host of causes. It first found voice in England in The Universities and Left Review in 1956, and then in the United States in 1959 with the University of Wisconsin's Studies on the Left and Chicago University's New University Thought, in 1960.

Whether in England, France, Japan, West Germany, or the United States, like-minded young people--mostly university-centered--grouped together independently of one another. To date, they have eschewed one creed or one approach. Loosely dubbed the New Left, they have little in common except for their indebtedness to several prominent writers, such as American sociologist C. Wright Mills, Hegelian philosopher Herbert Marcuse, and the late Negro psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, and a few contemporary revolutionary heroes like Mao Tse-tung, Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara. (The term New Left, itself, has little meaning--except as a device to distinguish between today's young radicals and the Communist-Socialist factions of the interwar period. It is taken to mean an amalgam of disparate, amorphous local groups of uncertain or changing leadership and eclectic programs.) The consequence was an amalgam of anarchism, utopian socialism, and an overriding dedication to social involvement.

This intellectual response to the international and domestic crises of the 1950s coincided in time with the emergence of student activism in the United

States, i.e., with the first stirring of the Civil Rights Movement. The experience of the Civil Rights Movement electrified the American university community. Nor did its lessons go unnoticed abroad.

In a few countries nearly moribund student organizations were revitalized; in others, where existing organizations clearly were pawns of old-line political parties, new alignments emerged.

Since then, the two currents, neo-Marxist social criticism and student activism, have co-existed in a mutual search for a meaningful program, a lever for overturning social structures. It is easy to belittle their efforts; more difficult to ignore the thrust behind them. Lacking any useful prescriptive advice from the few intellectual mentors whose writings they value, the dissidents have sought to define a political role for students and young intellectuals. The 100,000-member Union Nationale des Etudiants de France, for example, decided that students are "intellectual workers" and entitled as such to recognition by the state. Carl Davidson, an American radical theorist, has argued that students "share many of the social relations and conditions of production with many of the skilled workers of large-scale industry," and are becoming the new working class. Hence, for him, student revolt is "an important historical



GUEVARA IN WEST BERLIN, OCTOBER 1967

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phenomenon," the "rising of the trainees of the new working class against the alienated and oppressive conditions of production and consumption within corporate capitalism."

Much of the writing of the New Left has an unmistakable improvisational quality about it. The publication recently in France, Italy, and the United States of collections of personal mementos and mimeographed press handouts issued in the course of demonstrations at the Sorbonne, Rome and Columbia make clear that many of the dissidents are concerned most passionately with limited issues of local consequence and have little conception of what they seek once the conflict is broadened.

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Exchange of Ideas

Most of the activities of the dissidents, whether in the Communist or Free Worlds, take place not within but against the framework of established student organizations. Such organizational activity and coordination as exists among and between dissident groups is conducted out of view of most student organizations and out of operational control of their leaders. The mass of dissident students, whether or not affiliated with existing organizations, does appear to have--like the more radical students in the US--an amorphous and frequently changing, de facto leadership, functioning effectively outside an institutional framework. Such de facto leaders make frequent use of personal contact and may assist one another financially.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit traveled to Amsterdam, Frankfurt, and Berlin--all centers of student radicalism--during the recent French crisis. The now disabled Rudi Dutschke and other West German students have visited Prague. The West Berlin unit of the Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund reportedly provided what the French have described as a "modest" financial assistance, and German students in Paris served in some kind of liaison capacity between the two organizations during the riots.

These contacts result in little more than an exchange of mutual experience--largely between individuals who may or may not represent the organizations to which they belong. They are brief, frequently public, and held too irregularly to accomplish much. Nevertheless, they do constitute the nucleus of what could become a source of direction.

There may already be some sentiment for formalizing these contacts. In an interview published in the August 1968 issue of Evergreen Review, Columbia University's Mark Rudd answered a question about whether there would be "any attempt made to unify all the various national student movements:"

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We're planning a conference for August or September of the revolutionary student movements from France, Germany, and the U.S., possibly Belgium, Japan, Cuba, Vietnam and the others. We want them to come here (which has never happened before) to meet us and see that there is a revolutionary movement here, and more important, so that the U.S. student movement can begin to identify with the international student movement--that's one point we've been very weak on.

The division between the de jure and de facto student leaderships exists even within Soviet-orbit countries. In Poland, for example, the Polish Students Union (ZSP), a member of the Soviet controlled International Union of Students, is under the leadership of Communist zealots--some of whom hold office in the IUS. Rank-and-file ZSP members have been in the core of "anti-establishment" dissent among Polish youth for years. Various clandestine discussion groups long have existed under a ZSP umbrella; from them have emerged a number of leaders and groups around whom members of different political persuasion have clustered.

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The Communists and the Students

There is no convincing evidence of control, manipulation, sponsorship, or significant financial support of student dissidents by any international Communist authority. In fact, the Russians and Chinese have received precious little for the time and money they have spent on cultivating Free World youth. The most vocal of the dissidents have been wary of being caught up in any of the international youth organizations controlled by Moscow. Self-styled Marxists and admirers of Ho Chi Minh, the dissidents are contemptuous of the neanderthal leaderships entrenched in most national Communist parties, including the CP/USA.

The Bloc parties have reacted to student dissidence by harshly suppressing riots in Eastern Europe and expressions of anxiety and dismay at their eruption in the Free World. Underlying these reactions is the unmistakable concern of the ruling Communist parties over the "anarchist" thrust of the students and the lip service they pay to "Maoist" and "extreme leftist" slogans. (There also is a healthy measure of respect for the dialectical skills displayed by the dissidents in debate with party functionaries in the West.) On 30 May, Pravda's Yuri Zhukov denounced Western student rebels as "werewolves" determined to split progressive movements and denounced French student radical Daniél Cohn-Bendit as a "provocateur."

In Western Europe, student dissidents have shaken governments in which national Communist parties have had a stake. Nowhere has this been demonstrably in the interests of over-all Communist policy. Relations between the dissidents and the Communist parties of Western Europe have grown grotesque. In West Berlin students deride the Communists as Stalinists on the one hand and revisionists on the other. Both the illegal German party and the French Communists have been aghast at the antics of the leftist students. The indecisiveness of the French Communist Party during the early stages of the Paris riots and Daniél Cohn-Bendit's antiparty strictures once the Communist-controlled labor unions had reined in their stalwarts

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and abandoned the students to face the riot police illustrate the dilemma. Cohn-Bendit's impassioned denunciations of the French "Stalinists" were listened to attentively by student dissidents everywhere. The message was clear: threatened by anarchy, bureaucrats of all stripes embrace.

Neither is there evidence that the romantic appeal of Mao Tse Tung has led to significant Chinese influence. The Chinese have from time to time covertly funded sympathetic factions within Communist sponsored youth groups in a number of countries--exploiting them to embarrass local party leadership and counter pro-Russian propaganda. A few French students under Chinese influence were active in the early days of the disturbances at Nanterre; they soon lost influence, however, and never played a directing role.

The Cubans maintained no such contacts in France or elsewhere in Europe before the outbreak of disturbances, and Cuban personnel abroad shunned participants in the French riots once trouble began. Castro does find favor among the dissidents, who apparently regard him as the embodiment of the student revolutionary. The Cuban leader is determined to counter Russian influence wherever he finds it and welcomes activists anxious to visit Cuba. As a counter to the recent Ninth World Youth Festival in Sofia, the Cubans organized a "Vietnam summer" to attract young European radicals this summer. There is marginal evidence that the Cubans have supplied limited funds to Black Separatists in the United States; there is nothing to corroborate speculation that these monies have found their way to white student activists.

Local Communist parties have gained control of national student organizations in all of South America except Chile, Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Honduras. Nominally accountable to local direction, the leaders of these organizations are likely to prove amenable to Cuban overtures. It remains to be seen, however, whether they will be able to mobilize a following in pursuit of objectives which are in Castro's interest alone and not in the best interest of their memberships.

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For years the Russians have funded two instrumentalities for influencing world youth movements, the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the International Union of Students (IUS). Neither organization seems disposed at present to exert control over student dissidents in the Free World and both may prove vulnerable to infection from without. A hard core of the IUS remains responsive to Moscow; nevertheless, the twists and turns of the Cold War and the increasing degree of ideological diversity within Bloc and Free World parties have vitiated the effectiveness of Soviet influence and divested IUS of most of the sway it held over member national organizations in non-Communist countries.

Those who see the IUS from its organizational and operational viewpoint stress the maintenance of Soviet control and point to sporadic efforts by dissidents associated with the IUS to impose some measure of structure within the diffuse mass of students in the non-Communist world. The opposite view is that the IUS is all but dead, that it is split among internal factions and cannot advance the interests of anyone. The truth appears to be that although it is not completely impotent, neither is Russian control over its leadership nor efforts to reinvigorate and expand its efforts relevant to channeling "student power" in support of Moscow's interests.

The leadership of the IUS has attempted without noticeable success to enhance the attractiveness of its propaganda and to attract broader participation in its seminars and meetings. It also has supported the demands of many western students for academic reform.

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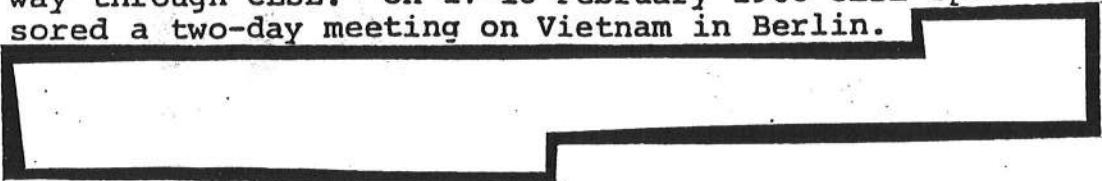
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The Syndicalists

The foremost example of efforts by the IUS to maintain a channel to the dissidents has been its recent attempts to woo the Syndicalist movement of Western Europe. The idea of the French students in the mid-'50s, was that "young intellectual workers" should participate fully in the political process and enjoy living allowances, free tuition and other amenities commensurate with their position. This had little to do with the revolutionary syndicalism of fin de siècle Europe, and even less to do with latter-day corporativism. If anything it had a Trotskyite tinge. The notion found favor elsewhere in Europe in the early 1960s and gave rise to the European Syndicalist Student Organization (CESE). CESE has an international secretariat in Amsterdam for the purpose of coordinating the activities of its national affiliates and exchanging information on mutual problems. It has affiliates in Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, England, The Netherlands, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Switzerland, as well as exile groups purporting to represent Portugal and Spain.

The IUS shunned CESE with its Trotskyite-idealist bent until 1967, when there evidently was a decision by the IUS or in Moscow to attempt to gauge the nature and extent of student unrest in the West by infiltrating CESE's rather loose organizational structure and, perhaps, to seek some voice in CESE's national affiliates.

There is evidence to suggest that at least part of whatever coordination and/or liaison there has been among European dissidents has been channeled in some way through CESE. On 17-18 February 1968 CESE sponsored a two-day meeting on Vietnam in Berlin.



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