
**SOURCEs of Student Dissent: lA troBe university, 1967-72**

**BARRY YORK**

Student unrest on university campuses in the late 1960s caught social theorists by surprise. Capitalism, after all, was functioning as an efficient economic mechanism and cold war conservatism was winning against socialist alternatives. Moreover, the end of ideology was asserted to have occurred. The campuses were silent. Then, suddenly, in 1964 students at Berkeley University launched their free speech movement. And by 1966, Time magazine was speaking of the biggest year for students since 1946. Student uprisings were taking place from Argentina to Yugoslavia. These movements were often revolutionary in that they sought the overthrow of existing ways-of-life. Nourished by intellectual sources, which were traceable to Marxism they were sometimes regarded as dangerous to the very fabric of Western society. Indeed, they tended to function outside of institutional politics. The problem confronting theorists was how to explain the advent of essentially similar student rebellions, occurring, at roughly the same time, throughout the Western world. The student movements of the advanced capitalist societies simply did not fit the existing theoretical models. One of the most perplexing factors relates to what Hannah Arendt has described as their almost exclusively moral motives. Generally there was little self-gain for the student in the objectives of student movements. They were, indeed, movements based on human subjectivity in this, the era of the scientific and technological revolution. There is, of course, no single master hypothesis. It is necessary to look for the specifics of post-war capitalism: the causes of conditions that combined in the post-war period to produce the 1960s phenomenon; to locate student movements in their particular geo-political, cultural, and social contexts. Lewis Feuer, possibly the most influential critic of the late 1960s, is notable for his violation of both methodological tenets. Feuer attributes student rebellion to oedipally-projected politics; that is, the ideological acting out of the sons' subconscious hatred of their fathers. Feuer, however, fails to account for the fact that not every generation produces a radical core, even though presumably the paradigm urge is constant. His reliance on student songs and poems as primary sources highlights the second methodological flaw, for it cuts across historical as well as cultural lines. And empirical studies into the familial background of American student activists contradicted Feuer's emphasis on son-father antagonism. Arthur Koestler suggested that Western youth's rebellion was a by-product of an existential vacuum. Other popular hypotheses of the time suggested that youth was naturally rebellious. The natural revolt theory; however, failed to account for such phenomena as the British movement of the 1950s. Bruno Bettelheim blamed student unrest on the alleged self-hatred arising from permissive child-rearing, liberal schooling, and subsidized university education. Yet are we to believe that all student rebels, from Paris to Tokyo, were so reared? Conspiracy theories also assumed a certain vogue, epitomized by Van Maanen who traced all campus unrest to a speech movement. And by 1968, these movements were indeed making the headlines. And by 1968, these movements were indeed making the headlines. Arthur Koestler suggested that Western youth's rebellion was a by-product of an existential vacuum. Other popular hypotheses of the time suggested that youth was naturally rebellious. The natural revolt theory; however, failed to account for such phenomena as the British movement of the 1950s. Bruno Bettelheim blamed student unrest on the alleged self-hatred arising from permissive child-rearing, liberal schooling, and subsidized university education. Yet are we to believe that all student rebels, from Paris to Tokyo, were so reared?
industry, serving national growth in the same way as heavy and automobile industries in a bygone era."

Such key strategists as the Murray Committee (1967), the Martin Committee (1964), and the Australian Universities Commission predicated their recommendations on the assumption that universities were not, and should not be, fundamentally involved in the problem of national economic growth. A conceptual stress between the two models is apparent in Murray's Report. But it is all but gone in the Martin Report, which concluded that,

Education should be regarded as an investment which yields direct and significant economic benefits through increasing the skill of the population and through accelerating technological progress.

With new universities popping up in New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria, Australia's higher education system was booming along with the economy. One thing was wrong, however; some students felt uneasy about being units of human capital, especially when university authorities persisted with the 'community of scholars' myth. This contradiction became a constant factor underlying student unrest and manifested itself in various forms, as will be seen later.

An equally basic originating source of campus dispute is to be found in the youth culture of the time. The advent of a teenage market after the War nur­
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An autonomous youth culture — confined to those between puberty and thirty, and characterized by a rebellion of the adult world, a desire for greater freedom and independence, and with its own lead­
ers and symbols — emerged at the mid-1950s, (as "Teenrage" and "The Underground"), films ("If", 'The Graduate', 'Easy Rider'), and novels ("Kommotion", 'Action'). It's all Happening, and 'Countdown'; and newspapers such as 'Go youth's 'Countdown'); and newspapers such as 'Go youth' were being made more aware as a result of the global village.

Various developments in media technology had resulted in immediacy in newscasting. Any world event could be reported in Australia within 24 hours. And by 1962, 95 per cent of Australian households were in reach of a television set. It is interesting to note that Keniston's subjects frequently mentioned some world-historical event as a catalyst for their activism and that television was often the primary information source. If youth was being made more aware as a result of the global village, then issues such as conscription were providing an opportunity for the new aware­
ess to be politically applied.

In Australia, conscription made the Vietnam war an unavoidable issue for thousands of young people. Registration periods occurred in the early and mid-1960s. Young men aged 20 years old who failed to comply could receive a two-year prison sentence. The politiciza­
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sity was kept in the mid-1960s, nuclear weapon capacity was still a strategic objective of the Cold War. One issue, however, changed all that. The American bomb was dropped on Aug. 6, 1945, and, when Nagasaki was so offer a Vietnam protest movement was underway. Hip student movements were developing locally (at Sydney, Queensland, and Monash universities), while student movements in the United States were being made more aware as a result of the global village.

La Trobe University was formally opened on 8 March, 1967. A week before the inaugural ceremony, the Vietnam war's biggest battle took place near the Cam­

bodian border, leaving one hundred dead. Presi­
dent Johnson announced that the demilitarized zone, as well as North Vietnam, would be bombed. And Australia was committing the largest fighting force sent overseas since World War Two — including conscripted troops. The war provoked the first post-war Australian university conflict between students and Administration when Monash's Vice-Chan­
celler attempted to ban the Labor Club, and launched a campaign for the resignation of the Chancellor, Sir Archibald Glenn.

The student Left maintained that Glenn's position summed up the "entire social function of the univer­sity under capitalism, as a servant of capitalism." In addition to being Chancellor, Sir Archibald was also managing director of Imperial Chemical Industries (ANZ) and a director of the parent com­pany in London, ICI. The former had been listed for consumer boycott by the Moratorium Cam­
paign because of its links with the explosives industry, while the latter had been condemned for involvement in South Africa's ammunition and explosives industry.

Protests against the University's governing body, the Council, culminated in a blockade on 19 July. Large numbers of police intervened, and disciplin­
ary charges were laid against the perceived leaders. Further protests including occupations of Administration offices, and further discipline, resulted in the year ending with 25 students under exclusion. 23 fined a total of $3,175, and Sir Archibald's announced intention to resign. It was only at this time that the student movement reached its peak in April 1971, when more than one hundred student protestors were arrested and taken to a police station. The events on the La Trobe campus were extraordinary in that the campus continued to experience student demonstrations and occupations in 1972. Elsewhere, student move­
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students during the period 1967-72 were from Melbourne, the metropolitan homes,37 and given that by the late restraints and the lodestone effect of Leftist student residences might be more useful if taken as an significant in terms of freedom from parental con­

ed by Walter suggests why it did? We may start by looking at the students themselves.

In 1972, 86 per cent of La Trobe students were from metropolitan homes, compared with 75 per cent at Monash and 79 per cent at Melbourne.31 James Walter suggests that country students are less likely to be politically active, but it must be pointed out that Monash's turbulence was not diminish­

utings sought to avoid is in fact ensured. Theoreti­

tions. And we know from Henry's research that a activists were Arts students. Indeed, an examina­

self-employed, skilled manuals are less likely to be campus activists than those from pro­

The most important area of attitudinal separation, however, concerned the university in society. Henry's survey suggests that a radical and idealistic ethos prevailed among the student body. One per cent were ever concerned with critically examining social values. Thus it should be concerned with preserving traditions of scholar­

Larke was also the newest, and fastest-built uni­

Demoralization and a nine-to-five mentality could, and did, result. But, in such a situation, the student problem was not the more capable. It was, after all, active, bringing life to what some regarded as a society's edge. With one or two exceptions, the leading La Trobe students were in Arts. Indeed, an examina­

tion of the 29 charged with breaches of discipline in 1971 reveals that 25 were in Arts and Social Sciences. This indicates that student activ­

mOve­

38 or 43 per cent (3 chaired corporations such as lei, Tartar, and BHP). Two Knights, two Queen's Councillors, and a Companion of the British Empire completed a portrait which was antithetical to the student cul­

perspectives) was highlighted by the attempt to sustain a dinner-in-gown policy once a week during 1967. All students, at this time, were enrolled in the A.B. of Education, at the Glen College. By 1969, the gown impositions was abandoned, with some administrators learning that La Trobe students were not nineteenth century Oxford boys.

The guilt between the governing authority and the student body reflected the pyramidal power structure of the university. Further, the separation was also social and cultu­

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The college concept provoked considerable con­trovery, however, with the Left regarding it as pernicious. 'Nothing ever happens in this place', complained one news sheet, 'because the existing system is designed to be the student body up.' The extent to which the college concept and some university authorities were out of step with modern Australian attitudes (let alone political

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY STUDENT AGES, 1967-72

(Percenage of total student population in brackets.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Male Students</th>
<th>Male Aged</th>
<th>Number of Males who turned 20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>552 (118%)</td>
<td>329 (59%)</td>
<td>240 (45%)</td>
<td>53 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1163</td>
<td>721 (61%)</td>
<td>493 (42%)</td>
<td>110 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>2052</td>
<td>1284 (62%)</td>
<td>831 (40%)</td>
<td>109 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2519</td>
<td>1536 (61%)</td>
<td>819 (34%)</td>
<td>275 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>3912</td>
<td>1804 (40%)</td>
<td>921 (29%)</td>
<td>275 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>4302</td>
<td>2573 (60%)</td>
<td>1216 (29%)</td>
<td>256 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Censuses, Registrar's Department.
An intensely political culture dominated the campus during 1970 and 1971, nourishing and being nourished by the political student who could not avoid being political. The prevailing attitude was one of apathy. The political student could not avoid being political in the form of wall slogans and posters, or the vast supply of leaflets which could be found out at every corner. Red Moos (published by the La Trobe Communists), Engraves (Labor Club Unit), Postgraduate Research Workers' Union, Black Barb (SDS), Red Ned (SDS-Anarchist-Marxist), Libertarian Youth, Student Alliance, Flowering Initiative (Anarchists), Red Atom (Science Study Group), The New Course (Socialist Youth Alliance), Dubcek (Socialist College of Communist men's Liberation Group), The Spark (the Left Opposition within the Labor Club), and Proletariat (Labor Club Marxist-Leninists) represented the Left, as well as highlighting the divisions within. The conservative Right similarly contributed to the political process, and its actions were legitimized by the social requirements.

The strategy based on "mass action for effective results, not "representative" action," was rendered very credible because of the conservative nature of the SRC. At the same time, the SRC was dominated by conservatives, but its legal status really defined its limits; as was revealed in 1972, the SRC was a very poor university.

The SRC was under no pressure from the authorities to either guarantee open hearings, hearings on campus, or render accusations of victimisation rather plausible.

Just as important as the nature of the disciplinary tribunals, however, was the view of the student dissident underlying the Vice-Chancellor's reliance on such measures. In August 1969, he had responded to the Road events with the promise that "students desirous of social change will be charged with sedition and not avoid Left wing police brutality. The perceptions of a subversive external enemy, with an internal enemy, with an external friend, were apparent in September 1970 when the Maoists, while stilllatent action, enabled the divisions within it. The SRC was under no pressure from the authorities to either guarantee open hearings, hearings on campus, or render accusations of victimisation rather plausible.

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The intensity and severity of the La Trobe experience in terms of Dr. Myers' stringent responses as well as in terms of the Maoist strategic objective of destroying the university as a servant of capital. However, this seems to the signifiers of concern by the remnants of the student movement and there was no representative of the student movement that its position been deemed non-negotiable, despite its centrality in the list of student demands. The entire cycle of student-action/Administration-reaction might have been avoided had Glen's position been deemed a legitimate subject of concern by the Vice-Chancellor. Indeed, the move towards direct action received its most significant boost after the April general meeting, when Dr. Myers declined an invitation to address a general meeting on his revision of the student's charter. Any possibility of either the Council or the movement calling a truce in light of the Referendum was thus laid to rest.

By October, with seven students excluded and others under threat, the Vice-Chancellor's determination was expressed in the form of heavy-gauge wire being applied to the administration office windows; the same windows from which occupying students had escaped police arrest. Against such a background, it is not surprising that the La Trobe student movement developed in response to the social, political, and cultural environment into which it had been born, shaped by the responses to it and by the necessary conditions, it is ultimately possible to identify the zealous group that had made many seemingly outrageous actions acceptable to their youthful participants were concerned. Faded wall slogans constitute the hard evidence of that bygone era. And various sixties' songs, such as Eric Burdon's anti-war classic 'Sky Pilot', remind us that the essential problems are still with us — even if the rebellious spirit de corps is not.

References
5. L. Feuer, The Conflict of Generations, N.Y., 1969. The absurdity of Feuer's 'psycho-history' is revealed in its application to some twentieth century events. The Chinese revolution, for instance, is seen as a product of Mao's conflict with his father and its primacy as a motivation for his political ideas. (p 186).
6. Feuer's thesis is certainly amiss in the gloomy 1960s where, despite fulfillment of his precondition for revolt i.e. the co-optation of the older generation), the prevalent student culture is cynical and consummative.
41. Henry, op. cit., p 227 (52 per cent were 'bonded' in
40. Little, op. cit., p
37. The assumption of 75 per cent average during 1967-
36. The Registrar's office was unable to supply statistics
35, 34. G. Little, op. cit.
33. J. Walter, op. cit.
32. The financial autonomy issue had become academic
29, Enrages
Maribyrnong, Prahran). Clifton Hill, Other
West, Glenroy, Wick, Coburg, Fitzroy,
Altona).
1970).
237) and on Walter's 1972 figure (86 per
cent).
229, with Chisholm joining them in 1972. The
college concept was aban-
don during 1971 and a central Union facility
24. A. Glenn to Minister of Education Bloomfield, 23 Sep-
tember 1964, cited in Victorian Parliamentary De-
bates, 1964, p 521.
25. Ibid.
28. La Trobe University: Who Does it Serve? (Labor Club
behind), 19 April 1971.
30. A. Barcan, 'Changes in Student Outlook', in Guard-
31. (La Trobe Labor Club membership reached a peak
during 1970, but even then it was only 8 per cent of
the student body (or, 160 students). Yet it was able to
mobilize more than a thousand students (53 per cent
of the student population) against the Council in
1971.)
62. Prose (Postgraduates Society), 2, 7, September 1970
The Moderate Student Alliance, which had sent
obervers, declared that, 'There had been absolutely
no provocation from the students' ('WSA Statement',
September 1970).
63. Red Moat (La Trobe Communists), 20 April 1971.
30

31