TOPICAL COMMENT: GET AT ROOTS

A Plan to Achieve Campus Peace

BY SIDNEY HOOK

American colleges and universities today face the gravest crisis in their history. Some university presidents to the contrary notwithstanding, it is not a crisis caused by lack of money. It is a crisis caused by the lack of a coherent educational philosophy, by a betrayal of the primary commitment of the university to the quest for truth and integrity in inquiry, in learning, and teaching. All the money in the world cannot remedy the failure of nerve and intelligence entailed by the loss of central purpose.

Nor is the crisis one of student unrest—if unrest is related to the pursuit of an education, to interest in ideas and beliefs. Intellectual unrest is not a problem but a virtue, and no university can have too much of it if it is engaged in genuine educational tasks.

The problem and threat is not academic unrest but academic disruption and violence which flow from substituting for the academic goals of learning, the political goals of action. Some administrators who have abetted the erosion of the academic ideal are seeking to muddy the waters by pretending that the public is getting fed up with controversy, and that the chief threat to academic freedom today comes from without and not from within. This is noisome hogwash.

The objection is not to controversy, for intellectual controversy is the life of mind. The public objection is to how controversy is carried on—to the use of bombs, arson, vandalism, physical assault and other expressions of violent strife and turmoil.

Objections Mount

Most of the problems that plague the American campus today and threaten its future as a genuine educational institution can be traced to the view that unless "the major social and foreign policy problems of our society" are met satisfactorily, campus disruption and violence will continue. Leading university administrators have endorsed this proposition. One of them has even proclaimed that academic violence in part "derives from the distance separating the American dream from the American reality."

This view and the actions that flow from it lead first to the political polarization of the campus, then to the political alienation of the campus from the democratic community. If unchecked it will result in academic genocide—the destruction of academic freedom.

What is wrong with it? Many things. First, there will always be a disparity between the American dream and reality, even if, as we raise our sights higher, we redefine the meaning and content of that dream. There will always be social and foreign policy problems in an open society of uncoerced opinion, so that we are confronted by a perspective of unending academic violence if we accept this view.

Second, it perverts the university's function, which is to study these social and political problems and to analyze alternative purported solutions to them. It transforms an agenda of study into an agenda of action, and therewith converts the university into a political organization agitating for the adoption of partisan political goals. It not only prejudices the university's tax exempt status, but invites political reprisals from a public that does not share its political commitments.

New York University and president of University Centers for Rational Alternatives. He is the author of numerous books, including most recently "Academic Freedom and Academic Anarchy." This article is adapted from his statement before the President's Commission on Campus Disorders.

Influential Fraction

Third, and most important, it violates the fundamental principles of political democracy by threatening to resort to force and violence unless the community adopts the solutions to social and foreign policy problems advocated not by the majority of the electorate, but by an elite minority.

To whose satisfaction must the "major social and foreign policy problems of our society" be met before we have surcease of campus violence and turmoil? Even if there were complete unanimity among students and faculty on how these problems are to be solved—which is far from being the case—what right would they have to make ultimatistic demands on the community that the solutions they advocate be adopted? Such decisions are for the representative legislative bodies of a democracy to make.

The political process is open to students and faculty on the same footing as all other qualified citizens to express their point of view. It shows profound contempt on their part for democratic due process to use or to threaten or even to condone violence, when they have failed to persuade or convince the electorate.

Suppose the trade unionists or the farmers of the nation, who are also minorities but much more numerous than students, were to threaten violence unless "the major social and foreign policy problems of our society" were met to their satisfaction? Everybody would recognize such threats as subversive of the democratic process, as harbingers of fascist rule no matter what the revolutionary rhetoric in which such threats were clothed.

Fourth, actually the university community is not homogeneous. The most militant of the student factions are small minorities. They make no bones about their hostility to democracy, their scorn for rational process. Their heroes are the leaders of the most ruthless dictatorships—Lenin, Mao-Tse-tung, Castro, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara. They openly declare that "our major social and foreign problems of our society" can never be solved to their satisfaction, for their goal is the destruction of our society. How, then account for their influence, for their ability to create a major crisis in American higher education?

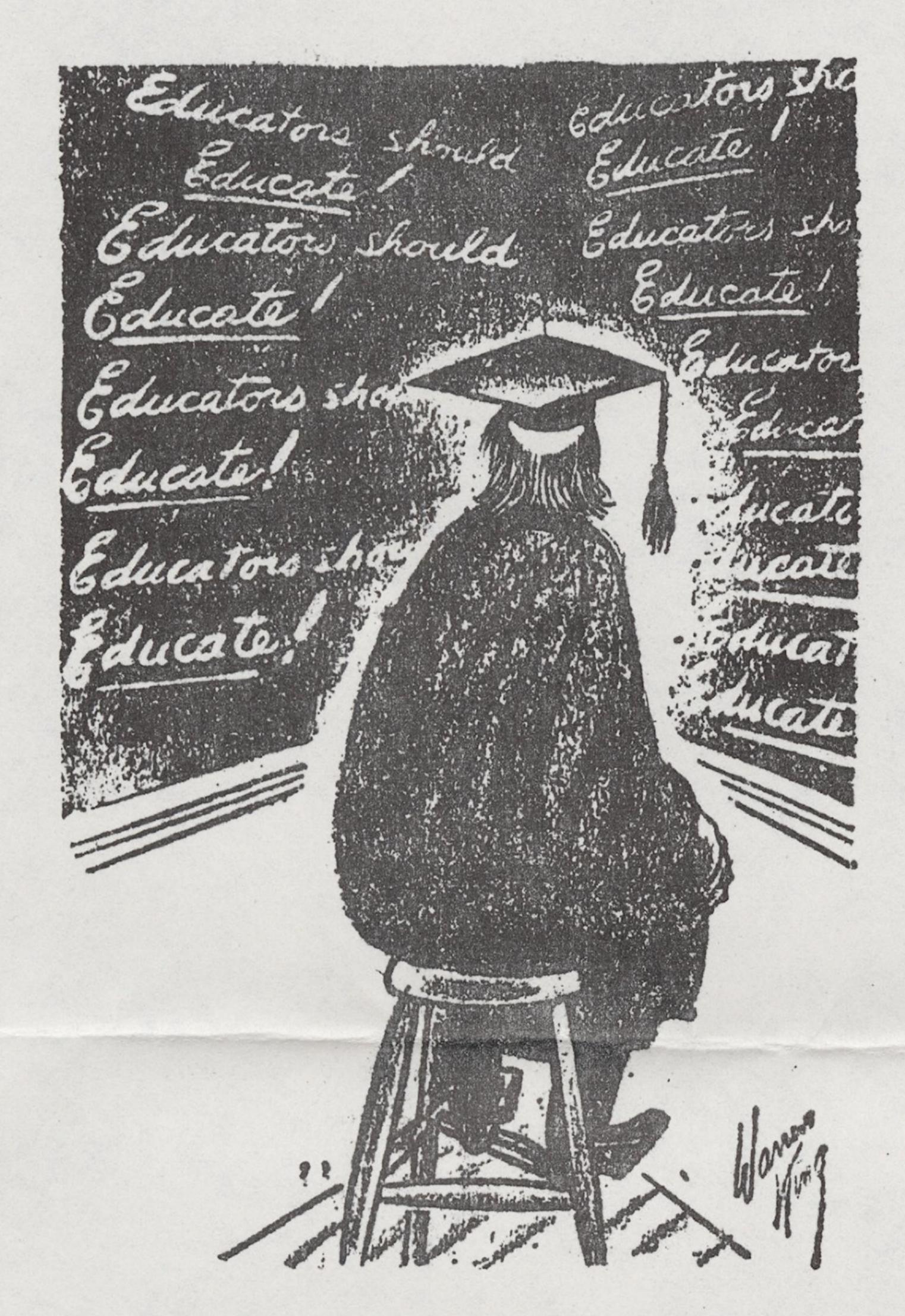
There are many reasons. Among them are the build-up and great publicity extremist student groups and their irresponsible leaders have received in the mass media. Liberal students who do not threaten to blow up computers are not news, no matter how intelligent their programs of educational reform. Much more important is administrative cowardice, and in consequence of this cowardice, administrative connivance.

The scenario runs something like this. Different extremist groups vie with each other in making all sorts of demands on the university under the threat of tearing the university apart. In hopes of winning them over or purchasing peace, the administration, often with the support of the faculty, yields to threats,

grants amnesty for previous defiance of rules governing student conduct. The mood of peace at any price, together with actual physical fear of harassment, become dominent.

The extremists escalate their demands until administrations and faculties, to avoid further confrontation, yield on issues that politicalize the campus. The university is saved by destroying or transforming its raison d'etre. The prestige of a handful of extremists is thereby enhanced while those who disagree with them appear ineffectual. Violence and the threat of violence seem to pay. When violence gets out of hand, and measures of meeting it also get out of hand (as at Kent State), a sense of collective guilt weakens the will to resistance of almost all administrators and faculty bodies against arbitrary demands to politicalize the university.

Fifth, an obvious consequence of the politicalization of the university is the erosion of academic freedom—of the right to teach and the right to learn—of faculty and students.



Keep Universities Open

Once the university as a corporate body takes a political stand, members of the faculty who disagree with that stand are harassed.

When classes are suspended for purposes of political demonstration or colleges are closed down by strikes, the teacher's freedom to teach has been abridged and the right of students freely to attend their classes destroyed. Even before recent events led some prestigious universities to mobilize all their educational resources in order to influence Congress to take political action, or to strike in behalf of causes that had nothing to do with educational issues (like the Yale strike in behalf of the Black Panthers) or to announce the closing down of the university in the fall (as at Princeton) to permit electioneering for so-called "peace candidates," the intimidation by extremist students of faculty members and students had become widespread.

American campuses today academic freedom has been severe's crippled. Certain extremist groups have interfered with the rights of students and faculty to hear views that disagree with or challenge their own. The aftermath of the so-called Free Speech Movement at Berkeley is that in many areas free speech has disappeared at that campus. And not only at Berkeley.

At scores of universities speakers are shouted down, sometimes assaulted. While spokesmen for movements hostile to the government have unlimited freedom to incite to violent action in opposing government policies, spokesmen for these policies are often barred from campuses or can appear only under heavy police escort.

By and large, in these institutions faculty and administration either remain silent or issue ineffectual releases mildly deprecating the worst excesses. Even when official guests of the university have been insulted or scandalously mistreated, they seem loath to introduce or enforce disciplinary action. On some campuses fanatical student extremists have disrupted with relative impunity classes of professors of whom they have disapproved.

And most shameful of all, these students have faculty allies who encourage and extenuate attacks on the academic freedom of their colleagues.

It is clearly demonstrable that universities which permit themselves to be politicalized are betraying their mission to serve as "citadels of reason, sanity, and civility in a deeply troubled world." Although opportunistic administrators with flexible backbones have opened the doors to the academic vandals, in the last analysis it has been the faculties who have been chiefly responsible for the decline in academic freedom. For they have lacked the moral courage to uphold the professional standards of their calling as teachers and seekers of the truth.

It remains to be asked: what is to be done? What measures must be adopted to insure a change in the climate of violence and confrontation that has engulfed so many of our colleges and universities?

The following tactical proposals have emerged out of a union of experience and common sense. They are not to be blindly followed anywhere or everywhere, but are to be adapted to specific emergencies.

1—The first thing to do is to convoke an assembly of the constituent bodies of the university community—faculty, students and administrators—or their representatives. Its chief order of business should be to draft the principles that are to serve as guidelines affecting the expression of dissent on any matter of interest to the academy whether great or small. The principles should then be followed by specific rules of implementation that spell out clearly—among other things—the kinds of conduct and behavior that shall constitute prima facie violations of the limits of legitimate dissent.

Outline for Action

2—The rules implementing the principles should make provision for the establishment of a representative faculty-student discipline committee. The procedures for conducting hearings and the rules of behavior for defendants, complainants and witnesses should be explicitly endorsed by the academic community or its representatives. The rules should clearly set forth the sanctions to be invoked against members of the academic community, not only students but teachers as well, who disrupt the judicial proceedings of the discipline committee.

3-Violations of rules should be promptly punished by the appropriate sanctions.

4—In the event of forcible disruption of the academic process, the first line of defense should be faculty and student marshals, equipped with cameras, empowered by the academic community to maintain order, report participants, and remain in liaison with the responsible officers of the university.

5—When a situation acquires a gravity beyond the power of faculty and student marshals to cope with it, the administrative authorities, after consultation with the executive or other appropriate committee of the academic community, should apply to the courts for injunctive relief without suspending their own sanctions.

6-If the court injunction is disregarded, its

enforcement should be left to the civil authorities.

7—If and when matters reach an extreme pass and hazards to life and limb from student violence—arson, assault, vandalism—can be contained only by use of police power, faculty and student marshals should accompany law enforcement officers so that their mission can be accomplished without force where resistance is not offered, and with minimum force where it is.

Police Under Control

8—Where the scale of violence, for example, through intervention by large outside non-student forces, takes on a magnitude that makes the previous steps inadequate or creates an atmosphere in which teaching and learning are impossible, the university may have to shut down for a limited period, and the preservation of life and academic property entrusted to the civil authorities. In such a case, before reopening, academic sanctions against those found guilty of violence or inciting to violence, whether students or members of the faculty, should be strictly enforced. Amnesty for "crimes of academic genocide" can only invite their repetition.

These measures are designed to preserve or restore peace on the campuses, to forestall costly and senseless acts of violence, and to obviate the inescapable punitive legislation which continued violence will precipitate. I wish to conclude, however, with the reminder that in the long run the most serious threat to the integrity of teaching and learning comes not from the criminal violence of extremists but from measures of appeasement and capitulation in the vain hope of curbing their frenzy.

The wounds that the academy may inflict on itself in its bewildered and hysterical efforts, to ward off further attacks by its enemies, chiefly the enemies within its own walls, may prove most dangerous to the survival of academic freedom without which the university is undeserving of its name.

The history of American higher education is a history of change. Violence has never played an appreciable role in that history. It need not play a role today if it is recognized that the primary function of higher education is the quest for knowledge, wisdom and vision, not the conquest of political power; that the university is not responsible for the existence of war, poverty and other evils; and that the solution of these and allied problems lies in the hands of the democratic citizenry and not of a privileged elite.

The universities can by indirection help in their solution by providing the knowledge, wisdom, and vision required for intelligent action—but only if it retains its relative autonomy and objectivity, and freedom from partisan political bias.