

Announcer: The row over those three students at Essex University continues. Today their leaders angrily repudiated any suggestion that the trouble was fomented by a Communist cell. Just back from the University where he's been all day, here's Tony Scase:

Tony Scase: At a mass meeting 500 students this afternoon called upon Lord Butler, who is Chancellor of the University, and Lord Alport, a member of the University Council, to substantiate their allegations that Communist infiltration was behind the trouble. The students said they lacked any evidence whatsoever of international conspiracy. They called on the Senate Committee of Inquiry into the affair to invite Lord Butler and Lord Alport to submit their evidence and the students asked the University to take note of the response the pair have made to such an invitation in assessing their suitability to hold office. I asked one of the students' leaders, Rick Coates, if he knew of any Communist agitation:

Rick Coates: I think as far as I'm concerned and as far as most people here are, this is almost certainly 100% untrue.

Tony Scase: Well, is there any political infiltration in this at all?

Rick Coates: Not at all. I think what has happened here has been a result of the particular action of the Vice-Chancellor and the way people themselves feel about his action.

Tony Scase: So there's absolutely no political incidence in this at all?

Rick Coates: Not of any kind of organising form, no.

Tony Scase: And today for the first time on television, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Albert Sloman, put his case. I asked him why he himself suspended the students:

Vice-Chan: Because this was a total disruption of a lecture by a visitor to the University and in my view this is conduct which is absolutely intolerable in a University. Freedom of speech is essential and if universities are not prepared to defend that I think they have no longer the right to call themselves universities.

Tony Scase: But why didn't you give the students a chance of a hearing to put their point of view?

Vice-Chan. Well I have my reasons for this and I acted absolutely constitutionally. The constitution of the University allows the Vice-Chancellor to exclude a person from the University without assigning a reason.

Tony Scase: What is the position in the University today: does a state of anarchy exist?

Vice-Chan: No, I think that the University today is just about back to normal: classes are being held and I hope that we shall now go on and have our examinations.

Tony Scase: There appears to be a split in the staff: is there a 'great divide' between them?

Vice-Chan: There are staff who think differently from other staff and I shouldn't like to say where the division lies. My personal view is the vast majority of staff are wholly behind me in defending freedom of speech.

Tony Scase: Will there be any sackings at all?

Vice-Chan: Sackings of the students or staff?

Tony Scase: Staff.

Vice-Chan: Oh I haven't contemplated this.

Tony Scase: There have been reports that you may be thinking of resignation?

Vice-Chan: I've had no thought of resignation because from the beginning I've consulted my senior colleagues and they and the Senate as you know have fully endorsed the action I took.

Tony Scase: You've attempted to set up a liberal University here. Do you think the students have abused the freedom you've given them?

Vice-Chan: I don't think so. I would hope that every University was a liberal University.

Tony Scase: Do you think there's any possibility of this University ever being the same in future?

Vice-Chan: Oh, I think that this is a crisis it's going through, but I personally am not pessimistic about it.

Tony Scase: On a wider issue, many students want to turn universities upside down: they want more say in the government of universities - they've even talked about abolishing examinations. How do you feel about this turmoil which is going on at present?

Vice-Chan: I wouldn't accept that as a statement of fact. I think the great majority of students are sensible and tolerant people: I think they have a great contribution to make to universities and my personal view is that universities should in fact bring students more into the decision-making which goes on. Up to now, in this University they've been associated very much with non-academic matters, but we do now bring them in on academic matters through staff/student liaison committees, and I think that this is a very wise and indeed an essential thing to do.

Tony Scase: If there were another student demonstration, much like the germ-warfare one, would you again crack down in the way you did last time?

Vice-Chan:

I think one must crack down on any threat to freedom of expression. This is basic to a University; this is what a University is about - a University's function is to pursue truth and if it does not allow freedom of expression, which includes of course the right of dissent, but if it doesn't allow freedom of expression it has no right to be a University.
