

'OUTLOOK'  
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Announcer: 'Outlook' with Ronald Ellison and The Rev. Malcolm France:

R. Allison: A few weeks ago in 'Outlook' we dealt briefly with the unrest apparent among students in Britain's universities and colleges. Since then, there's been more trouble, with demonstrations and, in a few cases, violence. Essex University at Colchester has been particularly in the news lately and its Anglican Chaplain, The Rev. Malcolm France, is one of those very much concerned with what's going on there.

Well, Mr. France, what is going on at Essex University: why is there all this trouble do you think?

M. France: Well initially it was arising out of the demonstration when there was a lecturer coming from Porton Down; though he wasn't going to talk about chemical or biological warfare, some students felt that he ought not to be allowed to talk at all because he came from that establishment and they conducted a demonstration which really effectively prevented him from giving his lecture.

As a result of that, three of them were suspended by the Vice-Chancellor. This was done by means of a letter; there was no hearing, which seemed to the rest of the University to be a contravention of the principles of natural justice and this was really the cause of all the trouble.

R. Allison: When you say the rest of the University, do you mean the rest of the students or the rest of the students and the entire staff?

M. France: Well not quite the entire staff, because many saw what the Vice-Chancellor was trying to uphold; he was trying to uphold the principle of freedom of speech. But it is true that almost all the students and a large majority of the staff were united in the feeling that this suspension was a contravention of natural justice.

R. Allison: So you don't feel then that the suspension of the three students was taken by some militant students as an excuse for a much bigger demonstration against whatever it is that they're unhappy with?

M. France: Well there were certainly some who used it as a peg on which to hang their frustrations, yes. But I don't think they were the majority of students. In fact, one of the remarkable features of the whole thing has been the way in which the moderates among the students proved to be the people who really had the power in the University.

R. Allison: Do you see a left-wing movement in all this?

M. France: Not linking up with other universities in particular, no. I don't think there's anything in the suggestion that Communist agitators provoked the demonstration.

R. Allison: What has happened at Essex is only one example of what's happening almost throughout the entire student world, but as far as British students are concerned, what is it that they are protesting about so bitterly?

M. France: Well it's very hard to put one's finger on one particular issue, but I think in so far as I can, it's against a society, not only a University, but a whole society, which does not allow an individual a real chance to be heard. He's no real means of changing the decisions of governments and if governments are undertaking research into chemical and biological warfare the only way open to him to be heard is to demonstrate.

R. Allison: Do you find that you, as Church of England Chaplain in the University, find yourself attacked because you represent the Establishment?

M. France: I think that one or two students may feel this, but they're mistaken and I think the majority of students realise that this isn't the same case.

R. Allison: Now, given this situation, whatever the rights and wrongs have been, very briefly what do you think can be done to put things right?

M. France: Well, the University Senate have agreed to set up a committee which will examine disciplinary procedures in the University. It will also examine the principle of freedom of speech within the University and related matters. That committee, I think, could have a really very constructive part to play, but there is a need I think for a wide debate upon the nature of a university - what it is. I think that in particular there's a need to get away from the idea that a university is a place for producing graduates. It isn't a kind of factory and the students resent the idea that it might be a kind of factory.

R. Allison: So this in effect is a very, very big argument indeed that's going on?

M. France: Oh it's very wide, very wide indeed, and it includes not only the University, but the whole nature of the society in which we live.

Announcer: In 'Outlook' Ronald Ellison was talking to The Rev. Malcolm France, Anglican Chaplain at Essex University.

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