

To the Committee of Enquiry :

ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH

The comments enclosed were written before the Committee of Enquiry produced their statement of 11th June, 1968, in which they outlined three guiding principles on freedom of speech, so that members of the University could express disagreement or dissent (or both), from those principles.

Consequently my comments do not refer specifically to the three principles outlined. Nevertheless, I hope the Committee of Enquiry will find some relevance in my remarks which may be of some assistance in drawing up a "definition of free speech".

Exhibit Peter Archard

## FREE SPEECH AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE 20th CENTURY

Peter Archard

### INTRODUCTION

The Senate of the University of Essex have outlined for the Committee of Enquiry a term of reference with regard to the principle of free speech which in essence is a post-facto definition of free speech arising out of the demonstration against CBW (Chemical and Biological Warfare). As a result of the demonstration a visiting lecturer was prevented from addressing the Chemical Society at the University. Senate's definition, by virtue of its post-facto nature, should be unacceptable to the Committee of Enquiry; more properly, the Committee should, if at all possible, arrive at ~~maxi~~ a definition of what "free speech" means in the University context, without the constraints of an edict passed by an undemocratic body such as Senate.

Paragraph 2 of Senate's statement of 16 May, 1968 states: "The Senate affirms that the University must uphold the principle that any group of individuals in the University is free to invite any speaker and to arrange with him the subject on which he is to address them; and that no other individuals or groups within the University have any right to prevent such a speaker and group communicating on the subject of their choice, except by way of action through the courts. The Senate noted that the right of peaceful demonstration has never in this University been in question."

This definition of free speech is, at best, a woolly-minded statement in the tradition of 19th Century bourgeois liberalism, and at worst, a meaningless pronouncement snatched out of thin air without any attempt to relate to the wider social and political system which the University unavoidably finds itself in.

We cannot talk of free speech in vacuo, but only in terms of its political and social implications. What follows is, implicitly and explicitly, a political attack on Senate's statement, and thus precludes us from ever reaching a value-free definition of what free speech and the role of the university is. I do not claim for one moment that a value-free, neutral definition is attainable; but implicit in many of the assumptions that University administrators and academics

hold is that such a definition is attainable: Senate's statement of May 16th is, in part, a reflection of this mistaken attitude.

#### FREE SPEECH

Students throughout Britain's Universities are being penalised for their radical political activism. They are being penalised, particularly, because of their mode of protest which has now moved outside the boundaries of what bourgeois liberals consider appropriate dissent. This is not the place to outline the reasons for the new student militancy; nevertheless, it remains that increasing numbers ~~for~~ of students are becoming aware that the traditional forms of protest virtually always go unheeded by those in power. Direct action is proving to be much more effective as a form ~~for~~ of radical dissent.

The ostensible reason for disciplining students who are engaged in radical political action is that their behaviour constitutes a breach of defined or undefined campus regulations. Behind this reason, which is apparent to the great majority of us, is the more subtle and covert political power of the administrator working within and for the rules of the bourgeois liberal society, and therefore for the maintenance of the status quo. Disciplinary action against student political activists, which on the face of it appears to constitute a support for "law and order", is in essence a subtle form of political repression.

The demonstration against CBW here at Essex on May 7th, the unjust suspension of three students for their participation in the demonstration, and the escalation of the suspension issue over the next two weeks, probably constituted the British vanguard (except for the LSE) of what is now common practice in the USA. There, in every campus affected by demonstrations against the ~~area~~ draft, the CIA, and Dow Chemicals, administrators claim that cited students must be disciplined in order to protect rights~~s~~ of association, assembly and free speech of military recruiters and napalm manufacturers. Their action is to be seen as strengthening the University as a "free forum" for all ideas. In the USA administrators never acknowledge the possibility that students facing the draft are being denied the right to determine their own future and that the propagation of nuclear and biochemical war is related to the ultimate means of suppressing free speech-

death at the hands of such weapons. Students are having their civil liberties denied and their careers destroyed for the sake of what administrators call "free speech" and under the banner of what faculty members call "civility".

The free speech issue of the recent crisis here at Essex does not only constitute an abstract principle propagated by the Administration to protect the right of genocidal scientists such as Dr, Inch to speak on the campus, but is used systematically and concretely a) to justify unusually severe punishments meted out against political activists and b) to legitimise the de facto complicity between Universities and organisations which are essential to the propagation of war. Universities continue to minimise the dangers of moral insensitivity and intellectual emasculation arising from this complicity; and continue to claim that administratively prescribed suspensions of student activists is a fair and objective enforcement of academic rules essential to the "normal functioning of the university". So long as these irrational trends continue, there can be little prospect that the growing student movement will diminish or that the trend toward increasingly violent confrontations between students and university administrators will be reversed.

Administrators talk of "free speech" as if it were absolute, an imperative to the proper functioning of the university. Without going into it too closely, it would appear that such a definition is a left-over from the days (medieval, pre-industrial?) when universities seem to project themselves as institutions operating as "ivory towers", independent and outside the functioning of the wider society. To-day, as we shall see below, the role of the university is totally different. There is a very ~~very~~ definite link between the University of the 20th Century and the environment it finds itself in. That the suspension ~~of~~ and exclusion of student activists will continue is not difficult ~~to~~ to predict. After all, the trend toward corporative liberalism in universities is becoming more and more apparent within an increasingly corporative liberal society. Administrators, in disciplining political activists, often claim that they do so within their own right, and not as a result of outside pressures. That such pressures, on the whole, do not manifest themselves in direct statements from

political and social elites outside the university may be true. However, it is a fact that the administrator knows intuitively what is expected of him from those people who "matter" outside the university. The administrator's value-orientations are profoundly influenced by prevailing cultural definitions and are subtly attuned to the shifts in public mood. He is a seasoned veteran in the difficult task of sensing how others define a situation and acts accordingly. Much of his reputation rests on his ability not only to control disruptive movements and punish individual dissenters, but also to manage the news and public ~~ig~~ imagery about these movements in terms of whatever legitimating ideologies are most acceptable to the audiences and publics he must appease and flatter. The university does not need to be ordered to punish radical activists. As a creature, ~~or~~ carrier and benefactor of conformist ~~in~~fixed beliefs, he is ~~socialized~~ socialized and committed to them. The administrator is not "free" to act on his own when faced with massive protests ~~and~~ disruptions; he is effectively programmed to act in institutionally prescribed ways and to feel as if he is autonomous and free.

#### THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE 20th CENTURY

In the middle of the 19th Century John Stuart Mill noted: "The proper function of the University in national education is tolerably ~~well~~ well understood. At least there is a tolerably ~~measure~~ general agreement about what the University is not. It is not a place of professional education. Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but ~~in~~divided capable and cultivated human beings... Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; ~~and~~ and if you will make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians. What professional men should carry away with them from a University, is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general ~~knowl~~ knowledge culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit... And doubtless, the crown and consummation ~~of~~ of a liberal education ... (is that

the pupil be taught) to methodize his knowledge; to look at every part of it in its relation to the other parts, and to the whole..."

However, the conception of the University in the 20th Century is a much modified one. Clarke Kerr has defined the University: "The University ... once was an integrated community ... It had a single purpose ... The conversation was in common.

This community chose to destroy itself. It became larger. It became heterogeneous. It came to ~~mix~~ talk with many tongues ...

Knowledge has expanded and expanded, from theology and philosophy and law and medicine and accounting to the whole range of the humanities, the social sciences and the sciences and the professions. More knowledge has resulted from and led to more research on a larger and larger scale. Research has led to service for government and industry and agriculture ...

The campus has evolved consistently with society. It has been pulled outward to ~~society~~ society and pulled to pieces internally. The campus consistent with society has served as good introduction to society - to bigness, to specialization, to diffusion of interests.

The University and segments of industry are becoming more and more alike. As the University becomes tied to the world of work, the professor - at least in the natural and some of the social sciences - takes on characteristics of an entrepreneur .... The two worlds are merging physically and psychologically ... (The University is) a mechanism held together by administrative rules and powered by money."

Yet the myth that universities are still the institutions that they were during Mill's time remains - administrators and academics still cling to the notion ~~of~~ of the University being an autonomous institution, in some way ideologically neutral, independent of political and financial pressures from outside, an <sup>within</sup> island of freedom ~~from~~ an increasingly corporativistic society. The myth needs destroying. To-day's university is the direct outcome of the development of centralized bureaucratic power economic power - extended now to such a point that it ~~is~~ is able to absorb what was once proclaimed to be a transcendent centre of analysis and judgement. Although the very ideal of autonomy has not been denied, the

present definition of purpose for ~~which~~ the university is derived from the existing agencies of political and economic power. Inevitably, under this new dependence, particularly financial, the university performs the functions imposed upon it, and in doing so it rationalises its imposed role with an ideology justifying the established structure of power and privilege in the wider society, by discrediting any source of radical dissent within the university.

The increasing demand for specialised skills and personal services in the industrial system, where managerial, bureaucratic, and highly atomised scientific and intellectual skills are sought, is answered for by the contemporary university. Expenditures at universities have been largely restricted to the physical and biomedical sciences, and to engineering, with only a minute percent for the social sciences and the humanities. The financing of the university, and the policy that accompanies that financing, are part of the media through which the pattern of society is impressed on higher education. One of the most crucial corruptions is the destruction of the internal community of the university and its replacement by a series of fragmented and isolated departmental structures without common speech, common imagination, or common purpose. Result: education is defined mechanically as the piling up of specific skills and bits of information; the student is never required to state the relevance of one area of understanding for another.

What the specialist lacks is the comprehensive understanding, the capacity to see how a specific social defect is rooted in a large structural pattern, as for example, how the abuses of CBW research, wherever it may be carried out, stems from the irresponsible distribution of power. The atomisation of knowledge results in a series of divisions which are anathema to the intellectual reason and life. The man of reason is no longer: instead we have adversaries. The teacher stands against the research scholar, the man of thought against the man of action, the neutral analyst against the ~~recruit~~ man of passionate commitment.

The loss of rational autonomy and moral responsibility which underlies the division between thought and action is the source of dichotomies between fact and value, means and ends. Reason is limited to an analysis of those means which



will lead most efficiently to given ends; reason is strictly precluded from passing judgement on the ends themselves. The value of the exercise is said to lie in the accumulation of stores of neutral knowledge, useful for whichever ends we intend to employ them. The significance of this position is that it places reason and technological expertise at the disposal of prevailing power. We are witness to the spectacle of men of small imagination, limited in comprehension to diminishing areas of enquiry, lacking the capacity to note the import of their activity for the more pervasive aspects of the human enterprise, subservient to an establishment that may not hesitate to use them for the most inhuman and obnoxious ends. Men of technical reason, such as are found at Porton Down, as skilled at killing as at healing, progressively unconcerned with this distinction, become unaware that value resides anywhere but in technique itself.

#### CONCLUSION

It is clear that a university should have a moral obligation. At the same time, from the above analysis, we can see that the university in the 20th Century, as a public institution, is not bound to strict neutrality. It is no less neutral to oppose society than to support it. Neutrality is only conceivable with isolation. The being of man in the world is only possible through action, which requires the selection of one alternative and the foreclosure of others. One cannot, in all instances, avoid choice; the only hope is to choose responsibly, in light of the larger understanding and the most humane commitment. As the university is rooted in the world, it must, at given moments, choose a public course; the liberal contention that the university refrains from criticism is an expression of "preferential neutralism", a transparently hypocritical device for the maintenance of continued service.

Of course, it is not the corporate function of the university to speak to every public issue, nor even to the vast majority of prevailing social concerns. The fundamental purpose of the university does not encompass any specific policy in regard to most university contemporary matters, and in its public pronouncement, the university should refrain from endorsing particular views in the overwhelming number of cases. But when the university's support is solicited

by established agencies of power, it must decide if the services requested of it violate its defining purpose, and reject them if they do. And so, it is also obligated to protest, when society has undertaken to violate, either in regard to the university itself, or humanity at large, those values the university is specifically charged to honour as a requirement of its public function.

To discover the public function of the university one must begin with its internal imperative - the gathering of a community of scholars in devotion to disinterested knowledge. Such, at least, is the traditional wisdom. But it is not adequate to our time. John Stuart Mill wrote for an age in which the distinction between pure and applied research was ~~valuable~~ largely valid. The man of science could pursue his theory in the general expectation that it would not be employed to endanger mankind. But to-day the distinction between pure and applied science is disappearing with the growth of state power so imperious and technologically competent that it can~~not~~ transform the most esoteric knowledge into techniques of terror. Science has itself contributed to the creation of the state machinery which now makes the enterprise of science hazardous. It has done so, because it has lacked responsibility for its growth. It is too late now to fall back on the platitudes of academic freedom; no biochemist can be sure that in pursuing the structure of an enzyme he is not perfecting a lethal form of warfare.

Peter Archard

16th June, 1968.