

# The Occupation of University Hall

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*Harvard Students Eject Five Deans, Seize Building.* That headline announced the beginning of the most intense flurry of propaganda, dialogue, and sloganeering that Cambridge had witnessed since the Boston Tea Party. The most striking impression which remains with me after the seemingly interminable faculty meetings of this spring is that the active participation of the moderate is crucial for effecting reasonable and essential transformation in society and for denying to the radical elements in society the exaggerated political leverage which they so often enjoy.

The action began on April 9 in the Yard, a small portion of the campus distinguished from the rest by a circumferential wrought iron fence which long ago marked the physical bounds of the University. University Hall, a rather modest gray stone building located in the geometric center of the Yard, houses the offices of the president and an assortment of deans. On the morning of April 9 seventy-some members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) entered University Hall and emptied its contents (secretaries and deans) into the Yard, using force in those instances where argument proved ineffective. A picture showing Dean Archie C. Epps being rudely catapulted out of the building appeared in the press and on television that evening. To this point the SDS had elicited little sympathy. Not only were the large majority of the thousand or so spectators (mostly students) who descended on the Yard unsympathetic to the Hall's new occupants, but in a meeting of the SDS membership the day before, a motion to occupy a building had failed to gain a majority. A minority within SDS had decided to act despite the vote.

The stage seemed set for the demise of the SDS, which heretofore had been able to drum up little support on campus. Unfortunately, President Nathan M. Pusey was not reading the cues clearly. He and his advisers, the

deans and housemasters, were having difficulty viewing the drama with detachment. Whatever remnants of objectivity did exist seemed to vanish when these men learned that the University Hall occupants were systematically going through the files in the various offices and pilfering personal records and other potentially fascinating information. Shortly thereafter the decision was reached by this administrative group (the faculty was at no time consulted) to call in the police. The occupants were ordered to evacuate the building or be subject to legal process. They refused to move.

Four hundred strong, the police moved in at dawn on April 10 and clubbed and kicked the occupants, now numbering about two hundred, into submission. Those observers not psychologically inured to brutalization were sickened by the event. That one event transformed the mood of the University community from one of disdain for the SDS and its tactics to one of revulsion at the methods employed to rectify the situation. That event so galvanized the community that a mass meeting was called to order almost immediately in Memorial Church.

The Memorial Church meeting was tumultuous. After excited and heady debate the participants declared a three-day moratorium on classes (the SDS immediately labeled it a strike) in order to permit the entire University community to give undivided attention to a range of problems which at this stage jeopardized the very existence of the University. (There is a rumor that an ancient Massachusetts law provides for the state to take control of the University if it should ever be closed down — a novel and inexpensive technique for creating instant state universities.) Despite the atmosphere of intense emotion, the decision of the students at the Memorial Church meeting was both moderate and wise. It reflected a generous attitude, for the issues on which the SDS had focused attention had already been under consideration by the faculty, at the behest of the students, for more than a year. Deliberate stalling, obfuscation, and apathy had taken its toll of patience among students. Now in the midst of crisis the students were deliberately giving the faculty one more opportunity to play its proper role in guiding the University.

On Friday, April 11, the faculty met in a special session to deal with the crisis. There were those who strongly condemned the action of the administration, and there were those who supported it. An equally wide divergence of opinion obtained on most other questions. Nevertheless, in a surprising show of unanimity, the faculty passed a compromise motion by a large majority. The motion consisted of three parts: a condemnation of those students who participated in the occupation of University Hall, a reprimand

of the administration for bringing the police on campus, and a decision that a committee be elected by the University community to deal with some of the knottier problems. This committee of fifteen, composed of both students and faculty, was to be charged with three primary responsibilities: (1) to review the events that led up to the strike and the occupation of University Hall, (2) to determine the disciplinary action to be taken, and (3) to make a long-range study of the nature and governance of the University.

On Monday more than 10,000 members of the University community massed in Harvard Stadium to consider their response to the events of the previous four days. Such widespread interest in a single issue is unheard of in the University for anything except a Harvard-Yale football game. The surprisingly orderly meeting resulted in a decision (complimenting the faculty for its action on Friday) to suspend the "strike" for seven days to await the outcome of further actions by the faculty and administration.

The faculty began its deliberation in earnest the next day and continued in special sessions each Thursday and Tuesday thereafter for several weeks. The primary demands the faculty had to face were (1) abolition of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), (2) nonexpansion of the University into the Cambridge housing market, and (3) establishment of a black studies program. The first two demands were the major components of the six made by the SDS. They were very well chosen, for the problems they represented were real and evident to everyone. Even the staunchest supporters of the ROTC had to admit that its role in the University is anomalous. In no other academic discipline is control of the curriculum and/or faculty appointments vested in a body outside of the University. In fact, the faculty had voted earlier in the year that this anomaly be eliminated by making ROTC an extracurricular activity, since the military seemed unwilling to give its control to the University. Unfortunately, however, the administration was decidedly uncooperative in implementing the wishes of the faculty, and this hesitation caused unpleasant confrontations between impatient students and members of the faculty who had already done what they could to deal with the ROTC issue. Ironically, a series of rather uncompromising statements on ROTC and related issues made by administrative representatives immediately preceding April 9 figured prominently in the decision of SDS members to occupy University Hall.

The nonexpansion demand (which is more complex and cannot be explained here in detail), was originally championed by the Student-Workers Alliance caucus within the SDS and is related to the high cost of housing in

Cambridge and the continuing growth of both Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (which is also located in Cambridge). Again, as in the ROTC case, a faculty committee had previously drawn up an extensive report. Entitled "The University and the City," the report made numerous recommendations regarding the role of the University in the community. These recommendations had been discussed, although with a singular lack of enthusiasm by the faculty (most of whose members do not live in Cambridge), and a preliminary report had been given tentative approval.

The issue of a black studies program emerged during the course of the turmoil, although it had not been part of the original demands made by SDS. For several years the University had grappled with the problem of introducing a black studies program that would be satisfactory to the black community on campus and not incompatible with the structures of the University. A committee, chaired by Professor Henry Rosovsky and composed of representatives of both the faculty and the ad hoc committee of black students, had been created in May 1968 to bring to the faculty a report on ways to implement such a program. In its report this committee recommended that a joint committee of students and faculty be set up to recruit black students and black faculty who in turn could establish a black studies committee that would function for a period of several years until an appropriate departmental structure could be instituted. The report had been prepared with great care, presented to the faculty, and officially approved. After the events of April 9, however, that report seemed consigned to oblivion. Not a single motion reaffirming the Rosovsky recommendations appears on the docket, although a variety of other motions proposing various unstudied solutions to the problem were submitted.

The resolution of this crucial problem was unnecessarily complicated by the actions of the president of the University, who presided over the faculty meetings. During previous meetings the faculty had operated under a suspension of the parliamentary rule that prohibits consideration of more than one motion at a time. This change was especially effective under the circumstances, for it permitted debate on several related motions to be carried on simultaneously. Now, however, the president inexplicably reinstated the rule. Requests for reconsideration of his decision were ignored.

In keeping with a prior request by the faculty, representatives of the Association of African and Afro-American Students (AAAAS) presented their views on the black studies program. One of the presentations was eloquent; one was misleading and sprinkled with a number of ominous,

thinly veiled threats. The students concluded by presenting the AAAAS demands.

Immediately a member of the faculty entered those demands as a motion. Again several members of the faculty requested that the "one-motion" rule be suspended, but the president refused to reconsider the matter. Consequently the motion affirming the demands as read became the first order of business. This presented the faculty with a delicate choice. Many members of the faculty were unhappy with some of the features of the AAAAS proposal; but if one wished to affirm one of the more moderate proposals (which, although on the docket, had not yet been officially submitted as motions), he would have to vote negatively on the first motion, aware of the recriminations that would surely result. The debate became acrimonious at times, and at one point the chairman confessed that he didn't know what was going on. Often questions from the floor were left floating in the air unanswered. Eventually, amid confusion, anger, and momentary exhaustion, the faculty voted to approve the black studies program essentially as proposed by the AAAAS.

Two features of this action are important. First, the committee to control the black studies program is to consist of equal numbers of student and faculty representatives, who are to determine both curriculum and tenure. This is a rather abrupt departure from past policy, and there is reason to believe that it is an unwise move. Already it appears that the task of finding qualified black scholars willing to commit themselves to a program over which they have negligible control is very difficult. Second, the elections for half the student representatives to the committee are to be conducted by the AAAAS itself, which is merely one of many extracurricular clubs on campus. This arrangement has already been criticized by black community members not in agreement with the association's tactics. The precedent set here is astonishing: it has been suggested that next year the Harvard Glee Club might argue, by analogy, that it be given the power to determine questions of tenure and academic policy in the music department.

There is much to recommend the idea that students be given a greater role in University affairs — not only in matters that affect them personally, but especially in evaluating the effectiveness of faculty members as teachers. This need is probably even more critical in a black studies program than it is elsewhere. Nevertheless, divisions of authority are also essential, and good judgment must establish reasonable bounds and powers in each case. In regard to the black studies program, that judgment seemed to many to be somewhat askew.

At the same time, in spite of this criticism, I would be quick to point out that harsh judgments of the faculty by those not involved may be too easy. Calm and distant deliberation yields a different perspective. One would certainly wish that more incisiveness, common sense, and objectivity had been in evidence in the faculty meetings. However, confrontation had taken place, and the faculty operated under great duress; emotions ran high, and time for reflection was minimal. Probably the response is typical of what one might expect from any such diverse group acting unprepared in a crisis. *What is clear is the high cost of postponing decisive action until the point of crisis has been reached.*

This extended account of the forces and actions surrounding the black studies issue illustrates the pressures and complexities which characterized these faculty meetings. These pressures were obviously greatly intensified by the immediate and harsh response of the administration to the occupation of University Hall. The decision to call in the police was unfortunate in the extreme. This judgment is based on pragmatic though sometimes subtle factors. Fraternalization between students and police is not especially common. In Cambridge the town-gown conflict is acute, and law enforcement agents (much like the rest of society) seldom make the distinction between students and those undesirable elements that often operate in the vicinity of an urban university. The attitude of mutual disrespect is hardly conducive to cooperative action.

There is also the recurring question as to why university administrations are so anxious to yield to the demands of the militants. Yielding to their stated demands — such as abolition of the ROTC and nonexpansion of the University into the community — may be appropriate because of the “unassailable” logic of their arguments. However, the effectiveness of the SDS depends on the support of more moderate students, who can be aroused to give that support only when blood actually begins to flow; for this reason one of the most important but *unstated* demands of the militants is for police action. And that demand is rarely denied.

In retrospect one might wish that President Pusey had exercised the kind of shrewd judgment he displayed at the graduation ceremony two months later, when in the midst of hoary ritual an irreverent SDS member demanded equal time. To the subsequent dismay of all the radicals present, the president granted the request. Thereupon the student presented a three-minute oration, impromptu and illogical, which did little to advance the cause he espoused and which served to enhance greatly the image of the president. (Alternatively in April, the president might have chosen to follow the

precedent set at a sister institution some years before when those who defiantly staged a sit-in were served cookies and milk by typically affable campus guards. Such a strategy may have been impractical, but it would probably have done much less damage than the strategy actually used.)<sup>1</sup>

No evaluation of campus disorders can be complete without a consideration of other less apparent forces that create a climate for confrontation. Among these are the profound changes that have taken place in the structure of the university itself. Twenty-five or thirty years ago the university played a less direct role in the affairs of society. But World War II and subsequent developments have produced an exponential increase in the number of students. In addition, the large infusion of federal funds for science has transformed university research into big business. More and more members of the university faculties have become involved as advisers and consultants to the government; and scholars in all areas have played an increasingly important role in determining public policy. This development has thrust the university into the mainstream of the political and economic life of the country in an entirely new way. But, as the transition from adolescence to adulthood often goes unrecognized, so this transformation has been largely ignored.

One effect of these changes has been a serious deterioration of communications among students, faculty, and administrators. In earlier times the faculty (then a small, intimate community) had handled its problems with the erudite debate characteristic of statesmen. Today, when there are much larger numbers of tenure and nontenure members, often one tentacle is ignorant of what the others are doing. In addition, the administration, which usually sees its primary responsibility as concern for orderly procedures, is often out of touch with the mood of the faculty and the mood of the students. At Harvard, the apparent attempt by the administration to sidestep the desires of the faculty on the ROTC issue enraged the students and the faculty alike and suggested an insensitivity to emerging realities.

These emerging realities are most visible, of course, in society at large. Race, war, the draft, poverty, the government's control over individual lives, the seeming irrelevance of organized religion — these are central issues. Students possessed of a large degree of idealism sense that these are the issues that are significant to their futures. Whether rightly or wrongly, they feel that the older generation has become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Therefore, they feel, they must engage in the transformation of present society in order to prevent its self-destruction.

The idealism which in former days was directed into less violent channels — including organized religion — today seeks its own norms and forms of action. To many of us these forms are distasteful. But to the participating students there are few other means which they find effective. Peaceful protests, letters to congressmen, conventional politics, and other similar activities have had minimal influence on the major issues. Confrontations and the display of power have often initiated meaningful action. Consequently, in an atmosphere where the display of power seems to be essential for substantive change, and in an era in which most of those now seeking change have been nurtured on a steady diet of violence provided by modern mass media, the confrontations that we have seen on the campuses in the last few years do not seem quite so stark as they would earlier in another setting.

It must also be remembered that the initiation of disruptive acts on university campuses is in general the work of small groups of revolutionaries (usually less than one percent of the students), whose primary aim is the radicalization of society at large and the entire overthrow of present structures. On the other end of the spectrum are those who object to change in any form. These two groups tend to be the most militant. The large body of moderate opinion between the extremes is seldom solicited or heard. Nevertheless, the active participation of the moderates is essential to the stability of society. By abdicating its responsibility, this moderate group in fact invites the inevitable measures of repression which the actions of the usually weak radical element engender.

Fortunately, at Harvard the moderate voices were heard. (The moderate students especially made some of the most perceptive and practical suggestions.) If they had been heard earlier at Harvard and on other campuses, they might have prevented the kind of legislation being introduced across the country which may severely restrict the university in its freedom to maneuver both in its own governance and in the role it can play in shaping society. Of all institutions in a democratic society, the university certainly should play a dominant role, exercising the faculties of reason, deliberation, and study to protect (not preserve) our traditions and renew our institutions through continual search for understanding. The universities themselves need to change. New policies need to be instituted, new procedures established. The governance of universities must be reviewed. But all of these things should be done judiciously, with all segments of the university contributing their reasoned positions. Ideally one might wish that *before* the events of early April the administration and the faculty both had given more serious attention to the issues that were being martialled for con-



frontation. More decisive and flexible action at an earlier stage could have initiated reasonable and progressive change; now the failure to gauge the sense of the sixties has forced the University to submit to unreasonable change. These are lessons that history has taught before, and one might hope that at least the academic community would have been more alert to the possibility of such developments. But that community is so involved with the daily routine of administration and scholarship that atypical matters of justice and equity are often ignored. Unfortunately this event, and others on the campuses and in the cities throughout the nation, will probably not suffice to bring our society to the point of dealing seriously with crucial issues while there is still relative tranquility.

Campus confrontation has become distressingly routine. It can almost be characterized as the dramatic production of a touring company engaged in producing living theater. The drama might be entitled "How To Be Trying Without Really Being a Revolutionary." It will be performed again. The one at Harvard was acted out on a small stage. It may be worthwhile for us to study the plot, for it contains within it many of the elements of a larger drama in which all of us must participate.

<sup>1</sup> Two quite accurate accounts of the April event at Harvard can be found in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* 71, 11 (April 28, 1969) and in the *Report of The Committee of Fifteen* (June 9, 1969).