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DATE: MAY 2001Dissident Youth: The Dynamics of Protest

- I. Youthful dissidence is a phenomenon of our time.
- A. It is shaped everywhere by local conditions, but ~~nonetheless~~ there are striking similarities world-wide--especially in the more advanced countries. As the lesser developed countries progress on the economic scale and as their student populations grow, it is likely to become even more commonplace.
- B. Some measure of dissidence is traceable to the age-old conflict between generations or to psychiatric problems on the part of a few of the participants.
- C. But much—probably most of it—has other roots.
1. It stems from the astounding growth of student populations in the last 15 to 20 years.
- a. Many of the new generation of European, Latin American, and Asian students are from lower or lower-middle class families; they have first-hand knowledge of the socio-economic ills

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of the day. They expect at the least that the instruction they receive will prove functional. All too often it is not: curricula geared to ~~you-~~  
~~teryears~~ elites do not meet the requirements of mass education in 1968.

2. It derives from the conditions of student life in much of the world, particularly in the metropolitan universities of Europe--woefully outmoded and overcrowded facilities, poor housing and the failure of communication between administrative authorities, faculty members and students.
3. Finally, it is attributable to skillful leadership and growing cynicism.
  - a. This cynicism, particularly in Europe, is the consequence of the failure of political parties and other institutions to accommodate themselves to the economic advances and social changes which have taken place since World War II, to the

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absence of compelling ideological issues in an era of relative affluence, and the diminution everywhere of the moral authority of the family, the church, the state.

- b. Many parties--for example, the Socialists in Italy and Germany, the Communists in most Western countries--no longer are issue-oriented or responsive to the constituencies they purport to represent. A younger generation finds government controlled by a generation which came to maturity 25 years ago and remains committed more to preserving power than to renovating society.
- c. The dissidents find support for their critical view of society in the works of a handful of neo-Marxist social critics, in Mao-Tse-tung's advocacy of mass movements, and in the romantic example provided by two ex-student revolutionaries--Fidel Castro

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and Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Their attachment to Guevara, whose legend grows steadily, is revealing because the dissidents have very few live heroes.

II. The interplay of emotions, ideologies, and attitudes which constitute the motive force behind protest is infinitely complex.

- A. Those who would lead the dissidents must identify and exploit issues which promise a wide following.
  - 1. Naturally, some issues prove more effective than others and evoke a greater response.
  - 2. Naturally, too, these issues change or are replaced by broader demands as protest evolves and a confrontation ensues-- as at Columbia or the Sorbonne.
- B. Few single issues can impel large numbers to demonstrate, but US involvement in Vietnam is most evocative, especially if it is linked to a real or alleged US involvement locally or to an unpopular action by the local government.

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1. The Vietnamese conflict is the first major war in the lifetime of most of the student dissidents who are prone to be highly critical of "great power politics."
2. The radical German students, for example, criticize us for our role in Vietnam at the same time that they demonstrate against the Kiesinger government because of its advocacy of the so-called emergency laws. Arab students charge us with complicity in a "Zionist conspiracy" aimed at establishing Israeli hegemony in the Middle East.

III. The university is the locus of protest because, first of all, it is the institution which most closely affects the lives of the protesters.

In the words of a statement issued in 1959 by a group of young American radicals: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we are to inherit....What are the social forces that exist or must exist if we are to be successful? And what role have

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we ourselves to play as a social force?" (Port Huron Statement)

- A. Many of the dissidents believe that modern society is highly centralized and that its critical institutions are closely inter-related and able to blunt most forms of peaceful protest. But they also believe that society abhors the kind of noisy, forceful demonstration which impedes the smooth operation of any one of its parts.
- B. Consequently, they think that by closing down the university they can force society against its will to listen to their complaints.
- C. Sociologists and psychologists call the process whereby students are drawn to participate in protest/radicalization. There is little agreement over the dynamics involved-- and less evidence that any great number remain radicalized once the exhilaration of combat is past. Nevertheless, a few certainly do find that their outlook has been altered.

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IV. Protest begins with minor confrontations between university authorities and a small but determined group of dissenters whose complaints have grown out of some aspect of university life (not necessarily dramatic).

A. The authorities fail to respond [in some countries real authority is reserved to government ministries and the nominal university leaders are little more than figureheads; in other cases, they merely procrastinate] and the dissidents become increasingly vocal and aggressive and may engage in "dress rehearsals," such as attempts to mar faculty convocations. This was the scenario at Nanterre, outside Paris, and at the Free University of Berlin.

1. An unplanned, spontaneous incident-- perhaps the arrest off campus of a student--provides a dramatic rallying point and picket lines or sit-ins are organized.
2. The dissidents, under pressure from all sides, seek to legitimize their stance by demanding more and more; the authorities reluctantly dribble out piecemeal

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concessions which feed the popular view that the militants now have seized the initiative.

3. The militants, in turn, press the authorities to the point that they balk.
4. Reconciliation becomes impossible and the authorities resort to force. A cause celebre" results. A decision by the administration at Columbia to proceed with the construction of a much disputed gymnasium, for example, was transformed by the effects of police intervention into an assault on the very structure of the university.

V. Student demonstrations are expressive, rather than directed.

A. They are intended to dramatize an issue, rather than to obtain the relief of a specific grievance. The demonstration, itself, becomes the focal point. It is intended to capture public notice.

1. This view of the efficacy of the tactics of confrontation can be traced to the

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experiences of the young people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States at the beginning of this decade.

2. Those young people attracted public attention and because of public opinion were able to overturn antiquated social customs or local statutes not sanctioned by the Constitution.
  3. In doing so, they won the approbation of many observers and their tactics were studied closely by young people elsewhere.
  4. Today's dissidents sense that latent support for their position exists among non-radical students and that it can be galvanized in much the same way that participants in the Civil Rights Movement won support.
- B. For this reason, the dissidents welcome the intrusion of the news media.
1. It is moot whether television or newsreel coverage of a student outbreak can spark similar demonstrations elsewhere. It does

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seem likely, however, that by their emphasis on violence, police intervention, etc, the media probably add to the intensity and the duration of a disturbance.

2. They also evoke the sympathy of other students.

VI. Because of the revolution in communications, the ease of travel, and the evolution of society everywhere, regardless of nationality, today's students share many values in common.

A. They communicate effectively with each other without regard to any institutional framework or national boundaries. Language barriers are almost non-existent.

B. Their common outlook is likely to influence the demands they make on government.

VII. In the last nine months, student dissidents have closed down universities in 20 countries, succeeding in several instances in bringing about changes in government policy.

A. Europe--perhaps the most violent demonstrations have taken place in West Germany and France. In France by far the vast majority of those

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who took part in last May's violence sought to coerce an educational system, which has not changed appreciably since Napoleon's time, into entering the 20th Century. A relative few sought to topple what they consider a "corrupt" and "dehumanizing" government and cultivated an alliance with young industrial workers whom they sensed were chafing under onerous trade union and management direction. In the Federal Republic a small band of ultra-radicals, chiefly at the Free University in Berlin, has been able to disrupt educational routine and bring down civil authorities by exploiting the mistrust which many young Germans have for their elders' political judgment and its mistrust of government by coalition.

- B. Student political activism has a long history in the Far East. In Japan, for example, the students have been accommodated in the political process and function as a quasi-legitimate opposition. They operate under popularly sanctioned ground rules. In Indonesia, students fought the Japanese occupation in wartime and

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were in the vanguard of the struggle for independence from the Dutch. They were a fiercely nationalistic bulwark of Sukarno's regime--only to turn against Sukarno with the support of the army when his complicity in the attempted Communist coup became known.

- C. If education is necessary in most places for advancement, it is doubly so in Africa where a degree means lifetime tenure in the civil service. African students see little chance for employment in business--much of which still is owned by foreign stockholders and controlled by European management--and have less interest in employment which would take them away from what pass for urban areas. They prefer to remain in the cities and press for "prestige" jobs in government.
- D. Until recently, Latin American students were guaranteed a voice in running the universities by custom and a 50-year-old Argentine law which was adhered to throughout the area. They were cultivated and exploited by government and opposition leaders alike and figured in the downfall of a score of governments. Lately,

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however, most Latin American governments have begun to deprive the universities of legal autonomy and to employ force to put down student demonstrations. In several countries the outcome is in doubt. In Mexico, for example, a strong, stable one-party government faces increasing student opposition fueled by resentment over the capital's dictation of nominations to local political office and its monopoly over every segment of national life. In Brazil, restive students are not likely to bring down the government--but their demonstrations may result in hardline military elements pressuring the government to adopt harshly repressive measures.

VIII. There is no convincing evidence of Communist control, ~~manipulation, or support~~ of student dissidents.

A. The most vocal of the dissidents everywhere are wary of being caught up in organizations controlled by Moscow, by its allies, or by either the Chinese or Cubans. And they are scathingly critical of "neanderthal" local Communist leaderships whose aspirations toward

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parliamentary participation they denounce.

In Italy and France, student riots have cost the Communists electoral strength.

- B. Moscow can take little comfort from any of this, even if it exacts fleeting advantage from whatever confusion the dissidents cause the United States and its allies.

IX. In the long run, the Communists will have to deal with their own young people who are increasingly alienated by the oppressive features of Soviet life.

- A. There is ample evidence that Soviet youth are disillusioned with the political regime and despair of working effectively through it or of finding any alternative, and that they seek compensation outside the system, i.e., material comforts, rewarding personal relationships, etc.
- B. Polish and Yugoslav youth already have rioted against the Gomulka and Tito regimes--demanding that they live up to the promise of a better life and that marginally qualified party stalwarts relinquish managerial and government posts to university-trained specialists who

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are capable of administering expanding economies.

C. Finally, we should mention China and Mao Tse-tung's Red Guard. Superficially, there are striking parallels between the Red Guards and the student militants elsewhere. In actual fact, the Guards were brought into existence and are protected by the highest levels of the Chinese regime. Except for a brief period, the Guards have been kept alive by Mao and the radical clique about him despite the damage they have caused to the economy and to orderly administration of the state. Their targets have been chosen by Mao and his extremist advisers. In short, the regime uses the Red Guards to strike down or intimidate officials it considers unreliable.

X. The children of a generally affluent generation-- West or East--are less concerned with matters of economic livelihood, or the challenge of building a revolutionary state on the ruins of autocratic rule than were their parents and some, at least, are deeply engrossed in the search for some newer means of arriving at moral values. For the moment,

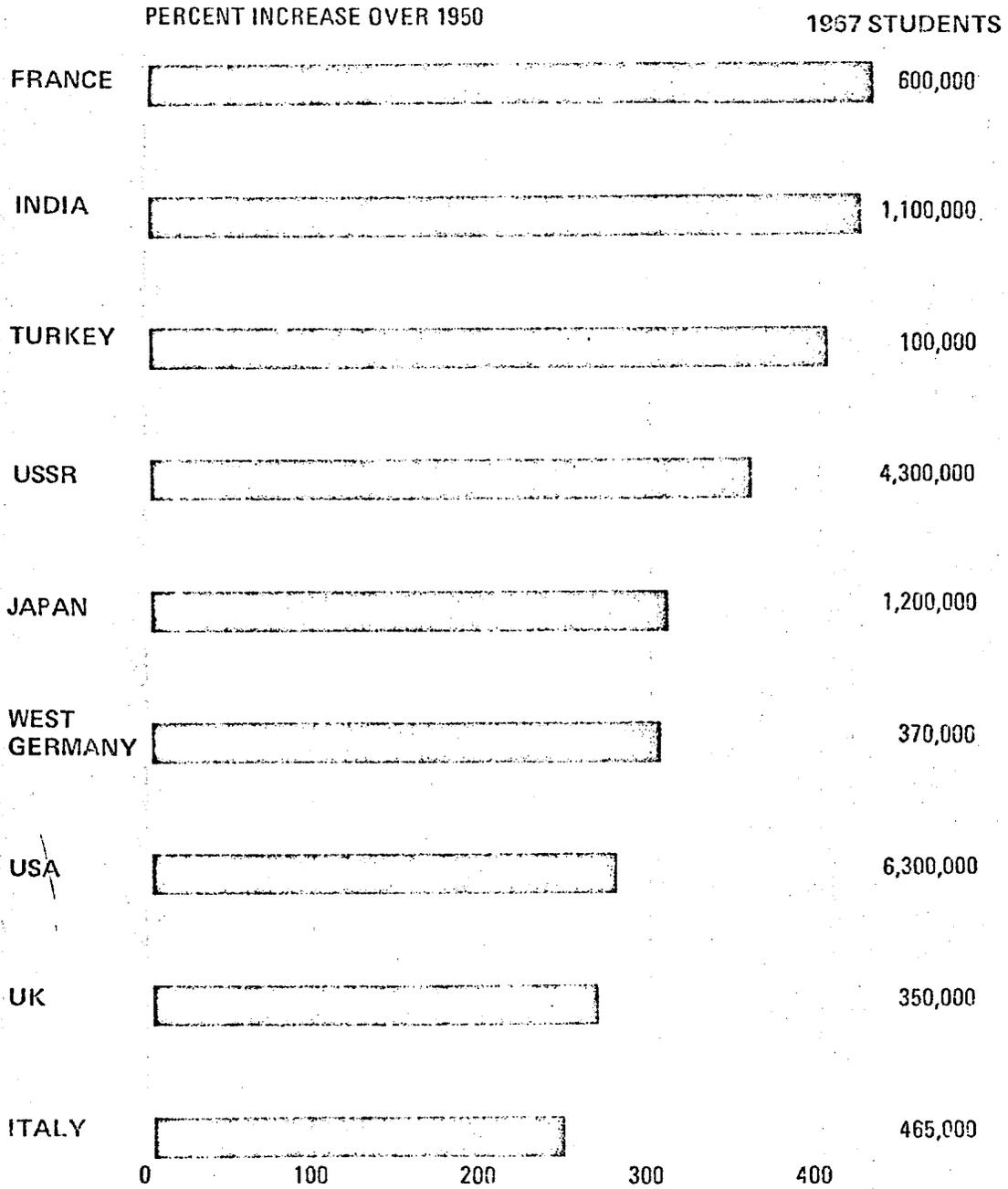
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they seem to have settled on a reaffirmation of the dignity of the individual. Most commentators agree that Society's values are in flux; if this is so, restless youth are symptomatic of a deeper current than their numbers alone suggest.

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# THE STUDENT EXPLOSION



## ESCALATING TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES OF YOUTHFUL ACTIVISTS

