

**The Troubles at Essex:**

**A Case Study of Student Unrest**

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## Preface

This is an account of the disturbances which occurred at the University of Essex in the academic year 1973-74. As we finish writing this account (in January 1975) it is clear that the conflict is not entirely over, either at Essex or at other British universities. We have chosen to end our narrative in the summer of 1974 because this constitutes a self-contained story with a moral, unaffected by whatever events the latest week or month may bring. For the period that we cover we have unusually good sources of information gathered from all sides in the dispute, and we are writing in the hope that we can change popular images of the nature of university conflict. Our main purpose has been to set out the true facts of the events and to convey their flavour -- to tell it as it was and as it appeared to the participants<sup>1</sup>. Such a baring of the breast is especially necessary for the University of Essex, which more than any other British university has suffered from damaging stereotypes held by the outside world. We believe that the only way to meet these stereotypes is head-on. Universities in general, and Essex in particular, will not be able to realistically face up to their problems as long as they attempt to sweep conflicts under their carpets. We believe that universities today contain serious problems caused by recent social changes, and we hope that institutions dedicated to learning, to discussion, and to argument will attempt to meet these by public debate. Essex has much to teach about these problems. We hope that this account will contribute to the debate.

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The academic year of 1973-74 at Essex University was fairly normal in many respects. Its expansion still continuing, it granted more degrees than ever before. The distribution of degree classes was normal and seen to be normal by external examiners. Graduates laboured away at their researches and Essex's list of Ph.D. and MA degrees continued to grow satisfactorily. Publications and research grants accrued to the academics in the required quantities. New departments of Biochemistry and Philosophy were started. The students' sports teams maintained their prized low level, while their theatre and their political groups kept up their higher standards. In their social as well as their academic lives students matured suddenly while the academics slowly aged. Perhaps working conditions had been somewhat unusual during part of the year. A substantial number of administrators were suddenly deprived of their offices and had to adjust to crowded makeshift arrangements, and processes such as admissions and the planning for new departments were impeded. Fuel supplies diminished until finally there was no heat at all. The bar was open only sporadically and the restaurants offered highly restricted fare. Finding the odd cup of tea became a fine art. People gradually became accustomed to these conditions, as they did to the presence of a large number of policemen and journalists. Universities can get on with their normal activities in the oddest of circumstances.

The oddities were the result of political disturbances which hit the national headlines throughout the year. The autumn term saw a student strike and an occupation of much of the University. The University administration retaliated, and throughout the Spring and Summer/terms students were hauled in front of a Disciplinary Court, charged with disruption. Three of them were at first expelled from the University. But the students, disputing the legitimacy of this court, hit back by blockading the University, depriving it of

oil, food and other vital supplies for several months. On March 18th and March 20th, 1974 this brought them into head-on collision with the police. After repeated clashes between 250 policemen and over 500 students, 105 students were arrested, but the blockade remained. Not even Essex could continue such intense drama, and in the Summer Term the student movement began to lose momentum. The Disciplinary Court ground on, and defeat for the students seemed imminent. Then, suddenly, not one but two dei ex machina, one a Professor and the other a Lord, descended from the heavens, put their little spokes into the wheel, and converted near-defeat into a partial but rather unclear victory for the students. The dénouement stuttered on, becoming more and more obscured behind the closed doors of authority, yet losing none of its drama. A palace revolution is the latest although perhaps not the final development.

The most difficult thing for the university insider to convey to the outsider is that these two levels of reality, the academic and the political, do manage to co-exist. Despite all the events described in our second paragraph, the university nevertheless manages to fulfill the educational functions expected of it. Indeed, as in most political conflict, the majority of students and academics went on about their normal lives with only minor adjustments. But even for the activists, political events generally have a less grave air on campus than outsiders realise. There is more irony, self-mockery, deliberate role playing and vivacity in university conflicts than there is in industrial conflicts, for example.

This distance is possible because for both side political roles are subsidiary. With the exception of the V.C. and the Registrar the "administrators" involved with policy making identify themselves as academics. The roles of Dean of Students, Deans of School, Proctor, even the Pro-Vice Chancellor are temporary and are usually defined as such. They are filled by

men who identify themselves primarily as academics. Their rewards are based on their contribution to their discipline. "Student" is also a temporary role. This can result in enormous freedom to try out different roles. The spectacle of thousands of French students chanting "We are all German Jews" in protest at the ousting of "Danny the Red" in the events of 1968 was a clear example of this. But the freedom is conditional on the fact of remaining a student, and that depends on much more prosaic tasks like essays and exams. So political activism in a university is a "luxury" that must be paid for in hard currency and this knowledge complicates the action of students and staff alike.

This story contains everything that the vicarious reader might reasonably expect from a narrative about an ivory tower. There was no actual bloodshed, and we have expurgated the sex, but we hope that excitement remains. Yet our story does have a serious aspect, not only because of the severity of the conflict but also because vital education and political issues were at stake. At first it was our intention to write a straight narrative, starting with the strike of November 15th, proceeding through the occupation that began on the 19th, and continuing to the somewhat anticlimatic end. This is still the main part of the book. Yet we soon realised that to plunge straight into the events, might leave many readers baffled - why, right at the beginning of November 15th did students take the extreme step of disrupting lectures? Why did the University respond immediately to the occupation with the fateful High Court injunction of November 20th? Why did so many ordinary students deliberately break the law? Universities have undergone so many changes in the last decade that they must often seem like another planet to the outsider.

The most misunderstood area is undoubtedly student politics. All reports on Essex use labels like "militants" and "moderates" that obscure more

than they reveal. The students' own labels - Communist Party, International Marxist Group, Anarchists - do not help much either. As insiders, and as sociologists, it seems to us that we have a duty to try to unravel the complexities of student politics, as well as other aspects of the background to the events themselves. So we begin with an introduction, to Essex University itself and also to the recent transformations in the universities.

As insiders, however, it is also our duty to declare an interest. We are both members of the University's Sociology Department, which tended to be sympathetic to the student side of the dispute, though not always to support its actions. One of us (Mann) was one of the more active of the "dissident staff". The other (Wolf) is a Ph.D. student doing a thesis on the socialization of first year students. Her research placed her in a unique position with access to information from all sectors of the student body. Perhaps a bias will emerge. Certainly we have definite views that students ought to have more control over their lives within universities than they do at present. However, we have been fortunate to receive the help of a great number of people from all sides of the dispute - students, staff, administrators, police. In particular, we should like to thank the University's Information Officer, Mr. Graham Green, and the officers of the Students Union. One further source is provided by The Report of the Annan Enquiry, published by the University in July, 1974. This is often inadequate on matters of both fact and interpretation, particularly in its view of student politics (which was rejected by the University's Senate), but is useful as a rival "Establishment" view to that of the University Administration. We will point out some of its errors as we go along. In putting together all these accounts, in trying to resolve their discrepancies, we have sometimes had our opinions changed, and we have also for the first time come to realise what has been at stake



at Essex, and what needs changing, not only here, but in many other modern universities. For, though Essex is extreme, the same problems, slightly less accentuated, exist elsewhere. We hope that this short book will contribute to their improvement.

## Chapter 1: The Background to the Events

### The Vice-Chancellor's Philosophy

Essex University was one of the new universities set up in Britain in the aftermath of the Robbins Report on Higher Education. Its original planning board had as its chairman Lord Annan. This board appointed its first (and, to date, its only) Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Albert Sloman, Professor of Spanish at Liverpool University, and together they were responsible for the overall design of the University.

Dr. Sloman is the tragic hero of Essex. To the outsider it may seem to be "his" university. His Reith lectures set out the principles of its philosophy; he has repeatedly re-affirmed these; and he has directly involved himself in every aspect of University development. Yet now those principles are under attack, and the besiegers make no distinction between the institution and the person. The university is occupied, and his home is daubed with obscenities. The university is blockaded, and his office is repeatedly invaded. Sections of the staff sympathise with the students, and he is threatened with no-confidence motions. Tentative moves for settlement are initiated, and a palace revolution brews. Throughout the attack Dr. Sloman remains enigmatic, a lonely man without close friends on the campus, unable to break through his isolation, unable to enthuse others with his ideals. Small wonder then that the media portrayed him as a king suffering under the curse of the House of Atreus!

He has been extensively criticized throughout this year, though not always wisely. He is not a weak man - contrary to conservative critics, he was standing up to the students, never giving them an inch throughout the year. And contrary to radical beliefs, he never resorted to devious uses of authority - never influencing university appointments in a political

direction, never interfering with the judicial process of the Disciplinary Committee. His most obvious personal failing is colorlessness: his slight, dark looks merge into his habitual dark suit, his whole person into his desk and his office. Informal conversation with him is peculiarly unsatisfying because of his unwillingness to commit off-the-cuff remarks. He is above all else a Vice-Chancellor, an official person, and no one in the University can apparently say more about him. One consequence is that he incurs no personal loyalty. Support is for the authority of his office, and we must presume that this is what he intends.

Yet the world is full of leaders without great personality, identifying totally with their office. We do not attack Queen Elizabeth or Mr. Kosygin for their lack of humanity; rather we ask whether their conception of their own authority is the correct one. So when we descend to the provincial level of the University of Essex, we must ask not whether its Vice-Chancellor is well-liked as a person - though that can matter in certain circumstances - but whether his conception of his authority is appropriate to the modern university.

Luckily for us Dr. Sloman has clearly set out his conception of Essex University in the published Reith Lectures for 1963<sup>2</sup>. The lectures exhibit a cautious liberalism in student affairs, accepting that universities have less and less of a right to play the in loco parentis role and that students should be permitted some degree of participation in the authority structure where their social lives are concerned. Indeed one lecture shows a fine sensitivity to the housing problems of students in a campus university. But the lectures were given at a time when students were still largely apolitical, when they were not pressing those in authority to define precisely what was

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1. Albert E. Sloman, A University in the Making (London: BBC Publications, 1964).

meant by "some degree of participation". When the pressure was applied at Essex, Dr. Sloman resisted. And he did so because of a central conception of the Reith Lectures, that of the academic community. This concept is vital to an understanding of the Vice-Chancellor's position throughout the years. He has unswervingly followed the belief that academics, administrators and students should be bound together in a community by an adherence to the academic values of learning, scholarship, humanitarian and social utility, and free speech. And he has persistently believed that opposition within the University comes from people who do not adhere to these values.

Dr. Sloman's principles are admirable. So might seem some of the practice that flows from them. There are no separate facilities for staff and students, no senior common room, no students union building. All facilities are common. Thus the real differences in power and style of life are masked. We must now consider these real differences.

Authority - General principles need interpreting. This is especially problematic if one principle appears to conflict with another. An example of this occurred in 1968 when trouble was sparked off by students throwing paint at a visiting lecturer from the Government chemical research centre at Porton Down. We are in favour of free speech, but are we in favour of giving university facilities for the advancement of chemical warfare? Who is to resolve this? 1968 was a simple and clear-cut dispute over this power. A highly-organized and united group of students sought to challenge the role of the University in modern capitalist society, and deliberately entered into a policy of confrontation with the University authorities. The V-C responded by summarily expelling three of the student leaders. This alienated most of the University, and staff and students were able to unite around the very moderate liberal principle of no justice without due process. The V-C was

forced to back down by Senate, the students were found guilty by a Disciplinary Committee but not expelled. This deflated the conflict without ever resolving it.

The reality of 1968 is in fact less important than the myth. The reputation of Essex as a "Red base" continues to fascinate the minds of students, staff, and journalists alike. Each sector of the University learned a different lesson from that mythical period. Even though virtually none of the present students were there, they share in a collective nostalgia for a time when the University "really was a community". There are two strands to this -- one is the rather simple solidarity engendered by collective action - the sense that direct action could be triumphant. The other, found more among staff, was the actualisation of the university ideal of rational discourse. The mass meetings of those days have been idealised into a time when all sections of the community shared enough common ground to meet to discuss their differences.

Those more conservative staff who were uncomfortable at the apparent victory for the students became convinced that the essence of authority is consistency. The university should never "give in" to the extremists -- this became their simple line in 1973-74. It was inadequate because this time the University was not faced with a highly-organised student movement, and a "hard-line" was the one University policy likely to create one.

The V-C, having burnt his fingers, learnt above all caution - he would be more likely to deal with student protest by long drawn out constitutionalism than by placing himself in the line of fire. The events confirmed his belief that student protest is better dealt with by absorption into University committee structure. This structure is so complex that it needs explanation.

The supreme body within the University, to which the V-C is responsible, is Council. This is composed of 16 outsiders and 12 academics, most of them

on ex-officio (V-C, Pro-V-C, Deans of Schools). No students sit on it, and only 5 staff are elected (by Senate). Council is somewhat inactive, though its committees are powerful in long-term planning. Beneath it lies Senate which is the representative body of staff. Its 44 members consist of 20 ex-officio staff, 8 professors and 16 other staff (who must be tenured) elected by all staff in full-time permanent positions. As most junior staff are not tenured, this is democracy tempered with gerontocracy. Students do not sit on Senate, but Senate can constitute itself as a separate body, called the General Committee of Senate, with 12 students, one elected from each of the academic departments. There is a Students Union, but its officers have no formal relationship to Senate. For all these reasons, Senate is rather more conservative than the University as a whole.

Staff do have a more representative body, the General Assembly, which consists of all full-time academic staff and all senior administrators. Its only power is to pass resolutions that Senate must consider. Its usefulness is as a talking-shop and sounding-board, and it was an important indicator of academic opinion throughout 1973-74.

Authority within the University is not confined to these bodies. We must also consider the Administrative Staff, the Senate Committees and the Schools of Study. The Administrative Staff is headed by the V-C, and beneath him the Registrar and three Deputy Registrars and consists of full-time administrators. The Senate Committees (Finance, Catering, Housing, Staffing, etc.) tend to co-opt various interested parties, including in some cases a few students. The narrower academic issues (teaching, research) are decided by the Boards of the Schools, four in all (Physical Sciences, Maths, Social Studies and Comparative Studies. i.e. the Humanities) which are elected by the members of academic departments within the schools and which in

turn elect a Dean. Even at this level there is a complicated balancing of power between the Deans and the Chairman of the academic departments.

Finally, there are two other influential officers within the University. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor deputises for the V-C, and the Dean of Students has a general brief over both the welfare and the disciplining of students - two rather contradictory roles. As the committee structure of the University is too cumbersome to respond quickly to crises, these two offices can become central in any conflict with students. At Essex they are occupied by two senior academics. Professor John Bradley, a chemist, is Pro-Vice-Chancellor, and Professor Clive Hart, English literature, is Dean of Students. It is common practice for universities to appoint academics to senior administrative positions, and we think it will reveal something of the essential amateurishness of university administrations if we describe the attitudes to their offices of these two men. We do not use the term "amateur" in a derogatory sense. They are amateurs in the sense that theirs is a part-time function, combined with the normal academic responsibilities of teaching and research. As most academics value these functions far more than they do administration, they generally distance themselves somewhat from their administrative roles.

Professors Bradley and Hart did this in very different ways. Hart made no secret of the fact that he would rather be working on the poetry of James Joyce than exercising the authority of the Dean of Students. For one thing, his fellow scholars had never thrown a bucket of water over him! And so a man who was known to be sympathetic and considerate of the problems of individual students, backed away from acting as an intermediary in the case of a collective student protest. Indeed he rejected the notion that students could form a collectivity. Prizing the complexities of individual intellect, he was repelled by the inevitable simplification and crudity that mass action generates. The Dean of Students Office made little political contribution to the events of the

year. By contrast Bradley threw his energies into the political struggles. He took the initial legal steps against the students, he was generally the link-man with the police, he was in constant discussions with the Registrar about day-to-day tactics and he was in intermittent discussions with the Vice-Chancellor about strategy. He became known as the administration's chief "hard-liner", the man who could most consider using force against the students. This was correct to the extent that he did think that no concessions should be made to the "militants" and that he seriously considered assembling a band of heavy-booted university conservatives to actually storm the students' barricades. But it suggests a more rigid and consistent set of attitudes than he actually possessed. He was capable of laughing at his own (entirely sensible) cowardice when actually faced with student aggression. He was also capable of expressing amused admiration for the eccentric qualities of the more extreme student leaders. It would not be misleading to say that he enjoyed the political struggle, the battle of wits and strength, the process of self-education that activism brings. And the sanction of political failure is not great for successful academics like Professor Bradley and Hart. If they fail or are overthrown, they lose neither their jobs nor their status - they merely move over to the "real" business of the academic, teaching and research.

The reaction of these two key figures typified those of most academics at Essex. About half retreated from the action and half plunged into it. The activists might be conservatives, like Bradley, or they might be "dissidents", but they shared the same experience of being caught up in something far removed from and more exciting than, their ordinary routines. They felt they should "stand up and be counted", they made speeches full of enunciations of general principles and short of facts, they were better at outwitting the enemy than at finding grounds for compromise. And nobody was going to be forced to carry



the can for his or her actions (given that academics are less likely to actually break the law than almost any occupational group!). Only the Vice-Chancellor, and his senior civil servant, the Registrar, are really accountable for their actions. Perhaps it is more than coincidence that they were the most cautious actors in the drama

We will later impute the same quality of irresponsibility to the students. But this is not a very serious criticism. The fact that it could be leveled at all universities shows that it stems from structural features of the modern university, and not from any peculiar inadequacies at Essex. And it is counter-balanced by the fact that clashes between universities and students are themselves part-time conflicts. They are actually less serious than the outside world realises, precisely because of this element of role-playing on both sides. While students protest, they usually also study; while academics deliver impassioned speeches, they also give their monotonous lectures.

The power structure of the University is complex. This is because it is a compromise between oligarchy and democracy. Some attempt has been made to allow elected staff and students a voice, yet they are usually in a minority. All are not equal members of the University community. The University is not a democracy - it is not even intended to be one. The democratic elements have been added onto an oligarchical structure in an ad hoc, pragmatic way. The justification of this proliferation of authorities must be a pragmatic one - that it is able to respond swiftly and flexibly to grievances wherever they arise.

Secondly, the very complexity of the structure works against democracy and gives rise to what many campus veterans term "the vanishing centre of power". To those on the bottom looking up, at such persons as the Deans, at the central committees like Social Policy or Finance, at Senate, these might seem immensely powerful institutions. But as Professor Atkins' study of the University power structure points out,<sup>1</sup> the committees are pseudo-committees reporting only to

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<sup>1</sup> Urban Structure Research Project, Research Report IV. Dept. of Mathematics,

each other. Their powers tend therefore to cancel each other out. Above them sit Council, which has been largely inactive, and the V-C. The V-C chairs virtually every meeting of any significance and thus is the only actor in the system with total access to information. Thus an extraordinary degree of power is vested in the V-C. The formal structure is incapable of making decisions - inevitably they are seen to be made informally in corridors - and in secret. Perhaps the most salient fact about these committees is their own feeling of impotence. We will see that student grievances at the beginning of the year appeared to "get lost" in the structural complexity. And from the V-C's point of view, the one rival to his authority is Council. Hence it is perfectly logical of him to spend so much time on the University's relationships with outside bodies (to the detriment, so his critics say, of relations within the University).

Of course, this is not one-man rule. The V-C could not rule Essex University against the wishes of the great majority of its staff (though he can overrule students). And indeed in this year he generally enjoyed majority support among them. Yet it is difficult for opposition to make itself clearly felt, just as it is difficult for the V-C to know where to go to consult opinion within the University. The performance of the Staff General Assembly and Senate this year were unsatisfactory because of the powerlessness and the ritual of the former and the conservatism of the latter. And the V-C did not regularly consult either. In practice he appears to have relied on the advice of an ad hoc group of people who came from a cross-section of the University's authorities - the four Deans of Schools, the Dean of Students, the Proctor, the Registrar and the Pro- V-C. In practice, these individuals, or some among them, were what we shall term "the Administration" throughout the dispute.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note, therefore, that by "the Administration", we do not mean the full-time administrative staff of the University but rather academics playing administrative roles.

This is the structure. It is complicated and it only allows students - or, for that matter, most staff - a rather subordinate role. Should students go outside of it, they are infringing University regulations which all must sign on entry to the University. If they do, they are subject to a trial by a Disciplinary Committee whose workings we will explain later when they become the principal focus of the action.

Much of this is fairly typical of the modern university - a complex and pluralistic structure of formal power, a minor role for students and junior staff, and disciplinary codes and procedures are found at most universities. The degree of centralization of real power is perhaps not so usual, though we assume that other small campus universities tend in the same direction.

So far we have discussed the internal distribution of power in the University. Yet Essex is not an entirely independent educational unit, and outside influences are strong, especially upon the administration. These influences are felt in various ways. The most important come from the government, both the Department of Education and Science and, in times of trouble, from the Home Office. Though these departments are interested in all universities, Essex seems to be singled out for special attention. Indeed we have been informed that over the last few years three universities or colleges - Essex, L.S.E., and Cambridge - have been marked out by the civil servants as likely indicators of the eruption of serious problems within British universities. The Essex Pro-Vice-Chancellor, for example, can expect to receive advice in times of trouble from the Home Secretary himself. The force that ministers can exert over a university is somewhat indirect, however. The formal autonomy of the universities is highly valued in Britain and powers of direct intervention are severely limited. Yet the government is the ultimate paymaster and ministers must be humoured, if not obeyed. To the extent that a university has real autonomy, this arises because ministers do not have much knowledge of its internal work-

ings and because they do not have a coherent policy. In recent years, the government has pressured universities into following two, somewhat contradictory policies. One is to end troubles as swiftly as possible, for no minister wishes to be forced to justify state expenditures on "trouble-makers", either to his cabinet colleagues or to other politicians. But the other is not to "give in" to student militancy - or at least, not to be seen to do this. The only way to combine these policies, and actually satisfy the government, is to try to sweep student troubles under the carpet, to stall, to absorb, to sit tight. This fits the Vice-Chancellor's style perfectly.

The actual paymaster of the university is a nominally-independent dispenser of government funds, the University Grants Commission. This is composed almost entirely of senior academics from other British universities and thus constitutes a kind of "establishment" of the university world. As middlemen between government and universities, they are obsessed by the difficulties of preserving university autonomy. Thus they respond to troubles in the same way as ministers - sweep it under the carpet and don't give in.

But unfortunately for the university authorities they must also deal with more conservative outside powers. Relations with the local community in which universities are situated are generally mediated through local worthies of the type who at Essex sit on the University Council -- Lord Lieutenants, businessmen, aldermen. At Essex the Council is a distinctly conservative body. The university authorities thus form the impression that local people are fierce advocates of a hard-line against student militants. It is really impossible to say in the case of Essex whether this is true. For what it is worth, the handful of street interviews conducted by "The Colchester Express" produced equal criticism of students and university authorities during this year. And the Colchester Trades Council supported the students from the moment that the

Students Union began to lead the protest movement. This reveals a more diverse spread of local opinion than the administration believed existed.

But the most important outside conservative influence is exerted by the schools. In Britain there is still a marked contrast between the educational methods used at schools and universities, presumably reflecting the view that "adulthood" is reached at the transition point between them. The schools will put the screws upon any university with a reputation for student troubles in the most effective possible way: they starve it of pupils.

The screws have been tightening on Essex. All over the country some headmasters and headmistresses are trying to dissuade school children from coming to Essex. In the humanities there are still sufficient applicants of good quality to fill every university, and so Essex survives there. In the social sciences the reputation of its departments is also sufficient to fill its places. But in the sciences the national shortage of applicants is distinctly threatening. Given Essex's unfavourable image, its science departments would need to be extraordinarily distinguished to attract students. They are not, and so there is a shortage of science students at the University. It survives only because it offers good specialized courses like Electrical Engineering and Computing Science. Elsewhere on the science side there are numbers of chemists and physicists who have virtually no students.

Nothing is so demoralizing to the academic as to have no students register for one's courses. Nothing is so infuriating to the Essex scientists as to see the university incurring yet more publicity that will ensure that no one registers next year either. The only acceptable publicity would be that of firmness, of the University showing the outside world that it was "standing up to student militancy". The scientists' penchant for firmness has other causes

too, of course, for scientists are generally more conservative than humanists and social scientists, but the peculiar grimness of the Essex scientists this year, their fierce loyalty to the Vice-Chancellor until the precipice was actually reached, must be attributed to their cramped academic position.

Publicity about universities is largely purveyed by the newspapers, and so finally in this discussion of external influences, we must consider the attitude of the press. All these outsiders - and, for that matter, the insiders too - are influenced by what they read there.

Perhaps the first thing to be said is that most people who live or work in universities know that the popular press's treatment of the universities is scandalous. To a large extent, the reality reflected in their reporting is of their readers' needs rather than of university life. In a country in which both sex and violence are highly repressed, the press use the universities to satisfy a mild voyeurism among their readers. Essex has grown used to headlines about orgies and bombers. We will discuss the hoax of the "hooded bombers" later in our narrative. Universities have also grown accustomed to seeing their politics portrayed in "High Noon" style, where a lawless gang (of anarchists/communists/mindless militants/wreckers) terrorize a decent but gutless community until a Cary Cooper strongman arrives to shoot them down. How disappointed the press was that Albert Sloman was not such a man! The constant editorials - and here we include the "quality" press, too - about the need for a firm hand at Essex had more relevance to the cinema column of the newspapers than they did to their educational column.

Why do they give so much publicity to Essex? There is some substance to the notoriety of the university - in 1968 Essex was in the vanguard of the student troubles, along with L.S.E., and two of the six convicted for the "Angry Brigade" bombings were veterans of that campaign (but then two were also from

Manchester University). Indeed Essex has probably had slightly more trouble than any other university. But most universities have by now had periods of severe conflict -- remember Stirling, Warwick, Cambridge, L.S.E., Birmingham, Kent, York, East Anglia, Oxford? Essex's unique reputation probably has as much to do with the structure of newspapers as with its own structure. Newspapers, especially popular newspapers, have the task of packing a great deal of meaning into a few words. Therefore the words should have as much resonance as possible, allowing the readers to associate and remember other pieces of information. Faced with a choice between trouble at two universities, the press will go for the one that allows them continuity of association: Essex - the Red Base - the Angry Brigade - drugs and sex; Albert Sloman - the Reith Lectures - tragic collapse of ideals. There are also more mundane considerations - Essex is an hour away from Fleet Street, and it is a small, highly-centralized university. The journalist can hop on a train confident that within hours he will have found enough people to provide the material for a story.

The attention of Fleet Street has not gone unnoticed at Essex and over the years both the administration and the student leaders have attempted to damp down its ardour. The University appointed an Information Officer whose function is to soothe as well as to inform. And this year the Students Union went to some lengths to give its view of the situation to the press (and to scotch the wilder rumours). Yet this is often negated by the attitude of the students at large. If the editorial staff of the press are hostile to students, then the students equally reciprocate with the actual journalists. The press is viewed as irredeemably hostile, biased and tied to capitalist vested interests by the majority of active students. Journalists visiting the campus are almost invariably excluded from student meetings by popular vote. They are intermittently abused and hoaxed. Yet the journalists can always get a story: because of the diversity and disunity of student politics, someone will talk to them and claim

to have the full inside story. The mutual contempt is very noticeable. A situation in which neither side holds the other in much esteem is not one to produce responsible actions. The journalists pander to sensationalism. The students pander to this. For in a peculiar kind of way student activists derive a kind of pride from their reputation as "militants" and "wreckers". They know the labels are misleading, they know the analysis is superficial, but at least it shows the world that they are a force to be reckoned with. It is rather like the pride that some football players derive from a "hard man" image.

This is not a very healthy situation. It is not confined to Essex. Of course, a few journalists fight against it. In their reporting of Essex we would particularly praise, for their calmer reporting, John Fairhall of The Guardian, Laura Kaufman of the Times Higher Education Supplement, and Peter Wilby of The Observer. But until journalists in general and students in general do give a damn about each other, attempts in books like ours to give a more detailed and analytical account of student troubles will face an uphill struggle to make converts. For the stereotypes are now well entrenched, and not just among the general public. Most of those concerned with fundamental university policy do not have close contact with students. The outside interest groups we have named, and many of the most senior persons within universities, receive these stereotypes, too. We will say it again: the main point of this book is to show to outsiders and insiders alike that student politics is not analysable in terms of a militant-mass model.

The Issue: Academic or Social Community?

One of the most important, and certainly the most visible, aspects of the planning of Essex University is the fact that it is a campus. Over half its students live in tower blocks on the campus in Wivenhoe Park, about three miles from Colchester. The campus provides an even higher proportion of students'



social life. Its shops, restaurants, bars, sport, clubs, dances provide for needs other than academic ones - and being realistic, we must recognise that academic pursuits will generally come at least a poor second. To be a true community, a university must somehow integrate social and academic lives.

The planners of the new universities were aware of this problem, and designed what they thought were campus communities. Kent and York attempted to form academic and social communities by copying the collegiate system of Oxbridge. Sussex pursued inter-disciplinary studies in an attempt to intellectually unite its members. Essex attempted to interest its students by "specialised excellence", setting up only a few but large departments, some of which, especially in the social sciences, have developed international reputations. But this specialisation was to be countered by residential arrangements that bring together students from diverse disciplines.

But all of these plans were subverted by major contemporary shifts in outlook among both staff and students. We will deal with the students later, but much of the subverting of the academic community has actually been carried out by staff. Staff, unlike students, do not live on campus; their domestic and social lives are usually separate from their academic ones. Moreover, in the 20th century their academic lives have been becoming more specialised and more research-oriented. Their basic loyalty is not to the University that employs them, but to their discipline, for that is the source of their rewards. These trends have ensured that academics have a less-than-wholehearted commitment to the community ideal.

Now, in a sense, Essex made the worst decision - at least, from the point of view of the academic community. For while the campus ensured that students' whole lives revolved around the University, academic specialisation detached staff from it. The excellence of the departments is based largely on re-

search, and this tends to isolate them both from each other and from their students. The style of life of students and staff is now very different. We are not saying that this specialisation is necessarily undesirable, merely that this form of excellence cannot easily co-exist with a university-wide community. And it does not at Essex. Everyone would accept that there is a dearth both of interdepartmental contacts and of general intellectual activities embracing both staff and students.

This is a problem that academics are conscious of, and most feel vaguely guilty about neglecting their general educative role. At Essex many academics blamed the troubles on an emphasis on research to the detriment of teaching, especially in the larger departments. It is also a persistent student moan. Despite this it was never raised as a grievance throughout the year - except, significantly enough, by the campus trade unions and not by students. The reason is probably that the issue is rather more complex than it first appears. In highly-specialised curricula, teaching and research are not necessarily opposed interests for the academic, who is likely to be teaching in the same area that he does research. But do students want more attention paid to them over this specialised terrain? The difficulties arise because what turns the academics on is not necessarily what turns the students on.

There is a way of formulating this which is less sympathetic to students. It is a kind of "Black Paper" lament that standards are slipping, that the modern student is anti-intellectual. There are two replies to this. Firstly, to say that students are not particularly academic is not to say that they do not have intellectual interests. Secondly, there is no evidence that students in any profound sense are less intellectual than they used to be. Rather, as with so many aspects of university authority, they are less inclined to ignore and more to reject what does not interest them. At Essex, unlike the

traditional university, we have few students spending their time playing sport, acting, and eating and drinking. Instead, we have highly intellectualised politicians who explicitly reject many aspects of the academic, and we have a minor "drug scene" whose culture tends, more implicitly, to do the same. We believe that this change has occurred at other universities. The ideal, and much copied, form of academic community is generally the Oxbridge College. Yet in its traditional form this is now in decline. In any case, the integration which it provided was not academic, and indeed only partially intellectual. Dons and students shared more in a common cultural and social milieu than they did in the tutorial system. And the institutions of that milieu - the sherry party, the college sports, the dining clubs (like the Shakespeare Club, whose only rule was that the works of the immortal bard be never mentioned) - are all in decline now. The cultural and the intellectual life of the specialised academic is not necessarily the intellectual life tout court.

Research-orientation has another unhappy consequence among the academics themselves. It leads them to neglect administrative responsibilities. This shows both in a reluctance to sit on committees and accept offices and also in a lack of general interest in the affairs of the university. If they show a great deal of interest, they will be punished, because promotion is through research. The level of staff ignorance of student affairs is quite remarkable. We have subsequently found that at the time of the initial student occupation in November, there were at least two rival plans for an occupation. Despite the notoriously garrulous nature of student politics, we would doubt whether a single academic was aware that such things were brewing. Furthermore, any reader of our narrative must be impressed by the lack of staff initiatives, the failure to emerge of mediators - or even of the eccentrics for which universities are renowned - with their own distinctive line.

One frequent rationalisation for this neglect is that administrative or civic commitment is a waste of time at Essex because of the "vanishing centre of power". Boards of Schools, Senate and committees waste one's valuable time because the V-C really runs the University. Among senior staff there has been a retreat into research because of frustration directed at the V-C's omnipresence in administration. At the end of our narrative they will once more stir themselves into action. Among junior staff, there is a sense of alienation from the administration which is all the greater for the apparently participatory structure. Among some members of staff, therefore, there existed a distrust of the administration which is a simple gut reaction. In a dispute between administration and students there was, always likely to be a trahison des clercs among academics.

### The Students

It is well outside the scope of this book to provide an explanation of the major changes in student politics and style of life which have affected all Western countries in recent years. We will confine ourselves to commenting on those changes which are particularly visible at Essex.

Our students do not come from privileged homes; they do not enter elite occupations afterwards. They are mostly middle-class in both origin and destination, but the middle-class today is large and heterogeneous. In particular, middle-class occupations as a whole do not have a very close relationship to higher education. The two most important examples of close links are the largely Oxbridge connection with the traditional elite - the city, the administrative civil service, politics, the army, the church - and the vocational degrees like medicine, law, engineering. Apart from these, most students must raise for themselves the questions "What am I, and what is my education for?" No clear social and occupational identity is provided for them,

and so higher education becomes a time for questioning, of oneself and of society.

Essex lacks any elite ties. It has few vocational courses - only Computing and Electrical Engineering could be so described. Moreover, Essex has chosen to specialise in the area where the critical questioning has gone furthest - the social sciences. All over the world it is social science students who lead university protest movements. Research shows that they tend to be radicals on arrival at university (i.e. that they are not corrupted by subversive academics!). But their academic experience does not dissuade them from radicalism, for the social sciences, on the horns of a major dilemma, do not provide a clear lead for them. Within every social science degree course, two of the basic academic principles we referred to earlier are in perpetual tension: narrow social utility, and general humanitarian concern. Money from government, the military, and big business dominates the funding of research, and so most social scientists are uneasily aware that their expertise may be used to exploit the powerless. The causes celebres of social science keep the issue alive - the discovery by many American social scientists involved in "Project Camelot" that they were being used by the U.S. military to combat Latin American radical movements; Professor Samuel Huntington's notorious advice on "relocating" villagers and rigging an electoral system in Vietnam; the recent controversies surrounding the racial inheritance theories of Jensen and Eysenck. In recent years, this self-questioning has spread to the natural sciences with the increasing domination by the U.S. military of research funds. With the social sciences in the van, the academic community is less sure of itself, less capable of providing authority than it has been in the immediate past.

At Essex, social science means predominantly sociology. Three-quarters of social science students choose it in preference to economics or government, and sociology students form the largest group in the University. Naturally,

they provide most of the student activists. Of course, we are well aware that sociologists are blamed in certain sections of the community for "stirring up" trouble in universities. But it does not happen like that. If we had to summarise the result of our teaching rather crudely, we would say that our unintended effect is to encourage the conservative students to be more critical of society, to convince the moderate left of the difficulties of radically changing society, and to alienate the extreme left from what they call "bourgeois sociology". In short, we would argue that the problem of sociology is that it is saddled with the conscience of a society which is growing unsure of its values and purposes.

One important aspect of this crisis of values is the decay of the two Western philosophies that have been the traditional homes of middle-class idealism - liberalism and democratic socialism. After liberals bombed Vietnam, the word became more suspect to university students. Now "liberal" is a term of abuse - it means "one who publicly wrestles with his conscience but acts in an authoritarian way". Similarly, Western social democratic parties have lost some of their ideological vigour. In Britain, as elsewhere, the Labour Party has lost the support of most of the radical youth, and there has been an upsurge among them of Marxism. Essex has shared in this movement.

#### A Guide to the Sects

There are small Conservative and Labour Associations at Essex, but the bulk of the organised politics is provided by competing left sects, and by the Students Union Executive, which is partly recruited from the sects. From the left, we can number:

The International Marxist Group (IMG) - Trotskyite sect affiliated to the 4th International. Conspicuous for its tight organisation (not difficult when you only have 7 members) and lack of humour. Believes that progress towards socialism cannot be made within capitalism. Its main tactic is to reveal the

true nature of capitalism by making demands on which the ruling class cannot possibly negotiate. Made the running during the first term, but then lost support. Two of its supporters, Will Rich and Ronnie Munck were among the three at first expelled from the University.

International Socialists (IS) - More idealistic Trotskyites, who failed to provide the leadership that their larger numbers (about 25) would suggest was possible.

"Essex Independent Activists" - Not a real organisation, but a label given to a loose grouping of students who are radically anti-authority, and therefore distrust the socialist sects almost as much as the Administration. Centred on the charisma of Halford Hewitt (the third expelled student) who typified its boldness, humour, but almost complete political incompetence. Alternatively, and aptly, labelled "Apaches".

Communist Party (CP) - As in many industrial situations, the CP acts as a restraining influence on the student movement. Believes in orderly, responsible negotiations. Came to the fore in the second and third terms, and in the Student Union elections at the end of the year put Colin Beardon in as President and Ken Spours as Secretary.

The Students Union - Affiliated to the N.U.S. All students are members. The Executive is elected by all students at the end of each year, and the leading officers become full-time by obtaining sabbatical years. A larger body, the Council, is elected on a constituency basis by departments. The President during this year, Rusty Davis, is known for her moderate leftist opinions. During the year, she and the Executive gradually assumed undisputed leadership of the students. But their major problem, and one of the most explosive issues of the dispute, is that they had no clear relationship to the University Administration. They do not share formally in any of the student participation in authority. In April, the Executive numbered 3 people describing themselves

as Broad Left (an alliance of CP, IS and Left Labour) 3 Independent Activists, 1 liberal and 2 independents.

#### Moderate Alliance

A group of conservative students that first emerged in April. While careful to support the aims of the student movement it opposed the tactics of direct action which had brought the University to a standstill.

"Moderate" is one of the most over-worked terms in modern political usage. At Essex, and we suspect in most contexts, it could mean either the small group of active students on the right of the political spectrum, or a larger group of students whose opinions ranged across the spectrum but who were reluctant to engage in political action. If the latter were actually mobilised by the pressure of events there was thus no guarantee that they would be any more "moderate" in the sense of conservative than the activists. Indeed the experience of the year was that the activists had substantial passive support.

This might seem an extraordinary political spectrum to the outsider. However, except for the relative weakness of actual Conservatives, Essex is not untypical of NUS politics. Student politicians almost everywhere talk in leftist, often Marxist, rhetoric. This seems to be genuinely popular among students. So does this make them political extremists or "wreckers" (to use Lord Annan's term)?

When the events of this year began, the left had no coherent purpose in mind for either "wrecking" or restructuring the University, simply because they had never seriously talked about it. Rather they concentrated on the un-revolutionary issue of the grants campaign. Here was a real trade-union issue, which resolved a certain guilt at not being working class. For students were becoming impoverished. Between 1962 and 1974 the real value of the max-



imm undergraduate grant had declined by about 20%. In the process of making ends meet, collective living has been encouraged and this increased students' sense of collective identity. Over the grants issue, the NUS appeared to be moving away from being a mixture of a travel agent and a denouncer of oppression in Chad or Cambodia to being an actual trade union. And over the previous two years Essex students had been brought into closer contact with the trade union movement. They provided considerable help to the miners in the 1971 strike, and some of the activists had established strong links with the Colchester Trades Council.

So far then, we could have been describing a state of student politics not dissimilar to that in, say, the National Union of Mineworkers, where socialists of varying persuasions press the rank-and-file material grievances. Yet there are two further reservations to be made about the student movement, its organisational fluidity, and its cult of collective action as a goal in itself.

Even to identify the sects as we have done is to reify them. In normal times they are largely ignored by the student body and talk only to themselves, their lack of power facilitating sectarianism. This is a relatively recent development and dates from the collapse of the united left after the heady national and international events of 1968. When a mass grievance arises the activists naturally come into prominence but not popularity. They commit the cardinal sin of taking themselves seriously. Furthermore, in a university more than virtually any other sector of society leaders will be distrusted. "The IMG is doing its usual adventurist thing", "the CP are faceless bureaucrats", "the Executive is trying to sell us out again". Many students are reluctant to speak at meetings - they are too inexperienced to know that most speakers in any sphere are fairly inept, and too insecure to be tolerant of each other. They are glad that the IMG and the CP will fight out their conflicts for them, but pour scorn on them both, and readily vote them down.

This does not fit very well with the media image of the militants manipulating the student mass. Indeed the reverse may be truer. The activists, encouraged by mass student moaning and groaning, place themselves at the head of a movement. But when they look round, everyone has gone. We shall see this particular scene repeated several times over the course of the year. Where neither activists nor rank-and-file have any very clear idea of where they are going, the opportunities for "manipulation" are extremely limited. The characteristic vice of the student movement is in fact anarchy, and its main virtue is a level of openness and democracy which is very rare in our society. Leadership is weak, not because of any personal defects of the would-be leaders but because they are more accountable to their fellows than any trade union leadership is.

If one were interested in denigration, the correct adjective would be "irresponsible". We have already noted the tendency to play at politics among the academics. But it is heightened among students, who have not been given any responsibilities by the university authorities. Though they can all vote, though many are in fact older students with family responsibilities, they are junior members of the university. Clearly subordinated in their academic work, they are supposed to "enjoy themselves" in their non-work lives. In virtually their whole lives on campus, they are subordinate to the University authorities. We quote from a statement of Colin Beardon, then just elected as the Union President for 1974-75. Noting that the worker is finished with his employer at 5 p.m. he says

"If you have a problem with rates or prices you take it elsewhere. Not so a university, where Senate plays the role of employer, local council and shopkeeper. Whilst I might accept that members of academic staff may have a leadership role to play in academic matters, I fail to see why their opinion carries so much weight when it comes to the prices of peas or the provision of amenities. To stress that it is an academic community implies a denial that it is a social community. An accurate observation, perhaps, but not a desirable state of affairs."

The peculiarity of the university as a social community undermines the trade union analogy. Even in a company town workers do not live in their factories. So even bread-and-butter issues like the grants level cannot be confined to the cash-nexus relationship. Students spend a fair proportion of their grants in university-run housing, catering, shops, and social facilities. Almost every aspect of their lives are determined by University authorities - which for students are almost invisible. They experience the impotence of the committees on which they sit as their own - power is always elsewhere.

Supposing that students wish to change this situation, what tactics are they to use? Here we encounter yet another peculiarity of student politics, the elevation of what is normally a means - collective action - into an end. If students wish to control their own social lives, all they have to do is to occupy the university as a body, exclude all others, and stay there. In an occupation, they are actually free from university control. And an occupation is quite easy for them to mount and sustain for they, and they alone, live on the campus. Of course, students do not often occupy just for the hell of it. They usually present some other demands. But more so than among workers, the means can become more attractive than the demands. Obviously, it is peculiarly difficult to settle demands backed by an occupation, because the underlying demand - the desire for control symbolized by the occupation itself - is rarely voiced explicitly. This is what we shall see happen at Essex.

All this makes for a peculiarly complicated pattern of conflict within universities. Unlike the industrial situation it is not a head-on conflict over scarce resources valued by both sides - or at least, this is only a part of the conflict. Grants are not awarded by the university authorities, but by the government - though if the university sets the level of prices and rents then clearly there can be a direct material clash. Furthermore, there are academic areas of the relationship between staff and students where students rarely voice collective grievances. But this leads to an infinite

capacity for self-delusion among the academics. All year, many of the Essex staff continually and confidently asserted that the majority of students could not possibly support "the militants" because the "moderates" did not see the University in conflict terms. This was almost invariably accompanied by personal anecdote - "my students share the same values as I do". It is characteristic of paternalism that the father deludes himself about his children. In this case the academics were not even aware of the fact that there were two competing conceptions of the academic community. In times of crisis, the students clearly rejected that held by the academics. The conflict at Essex is so difficult to understand precisely because it is based on a misunderstanding - about what an academic community is. But, nonetheless, it is a real conflict of power and can only be solved politically.

#### Is Essex Peculiar?

It will be obvious by now that, though there are some Essex peculiarities; many of these problems are shared by most universities in Britain. Similar administrative structures, complex and cumbersome, are found elsewhere. Everywhere, academics are feeling pressured by the dominance of research in their profession. Everywhere students are less inclined to accept previous disciplinary codes. It is worth noting that this does not always take political forms. In Britain many academics are concerned that cheating in the examination process is increasing (in the United States this is very strikingly so). And students are feeling greater financial pressures, pressures which will certainly continue over the next few years despite grant increases and which in 1974-75 are already leading to rent strikes in many universities. The material grievance is more important than it might at first appear. Because the "enemy" is not clear - should students attack the government or universities - the conflict is not always focused on this issue. But it is an ever-present encouragement to student cynicism about the academic community:

"your so-called community ignores our exploitation!"

We would prefer to look at Essex, not as either typical or idiosyncratic, but rather as exemplifying in extreme form genuine difficulties faced by the contemporary university. The isolation and claustrophobia the Essex campus for students, for not for staff, exemplifies the collective social life of students. It is obvious that the academic and architectural planning of Essex does not provide for intermediary social groupings between flat-mates in the tower blocks and the whole collectivity of 2,000 students. The academic specialisation and research-orientation exemplifies the very different academic community. The Vice-Chancellor has made conflicts more evident by his very determination to integrate student and staff communities through the traditional, pragmatic oligarchy of the British university. All these Essex peculiarities affect the processing of disputes more than they do the level of initial discontent. That is, Essex students are more mobilizable than are those in most other universities. We believe that their grievances are shared, perhaps less articulately, in most universities today.

Not only Essex experienced trouble in 1973-74. Kent, Oxford, East Anglia and York (all campus universities) had occupations. At almost every university there were vigorous demonstrations about the grants campaign. But at Essex alone was there a year-long war. What elsewhere were problems, tendencies, here became battle cries. This was not because of the malevolence or anarchism of its student radicals or because of the incompetence or bloody-mindedness of its administration (though perhaps all of these qualities were intermittently perceptible). Rather its conflict was deeply embedded in the structure of the modern university. We hope that other universities, as well as Essex itself, can benefit from this narrative.

## Chapter Two

### Events prior to November 15

The University of Essex is at its best in the autumn. Students lounge around the sunny squares giving life to the austere architecture and exchanging news after the long summer vacation. There is always a sense of excitement in the first few weeks of term. Students are preoccupied with the renewal of old friendships and the forging of new ones, with the intricacies of class schedules and housing. Politics, especially student politics, are the last thing on peoples minds. October of 1973 was no exception. Yet the preceding summer term had not been uneventful - a seminar on Chile had been disrupted by some left-wing activists, and students in Latin American Area studies had staged a protest against the scheduling of their exams. But these had been small ripples, most students were not even aware that they had occurred, and there was no hint that the coming year was to be the most disruptive in the short history of the University.

There was potential for trouble at all universities this year. The National Union of Students had called for a strike and a day of action on November 15th as part of its grants campaign. In the last weeks of October the Essex Union Executive began to discuss its plans for the day. The choice seemed to be between an occupation of some part of the university and a demonstration. The more militant students argued strongly for a demonstration as a way of extending the struggle beyond the walls of the University and after some debate the other activists agreed.

From the very beginning it was possible that the Essex grant campaign would be turned inward against the University. This was so for reasons that were both external and internal to the University. In spite of a massive organizational effort by the NUS, increased student grants was an increasingly unpopular political issue nationally. Times were hard, with the prospect of harder times ahead. To many taxpayers students seemed the least deserving of the groups competing for a share of the shrinking public purse. Perhaps the

tactics of "Trade Union type" negotiation that had been followed so far were in need of re-evaluation. Throughout all universities the union activists were talking more of strikes and occupations. But there were factors internal to Essex itself that made the University a possible target for grants activity. In a campus university rents and prices are an important item in most students budgets. Student grievances concerning these can get lost in the elaborate committee structure of the University. The feelings of frustration and impotence that committees tend to generate were heightened by the Student Union conviction that the University was unwilling to release adequate financial information. Residential universities are not unlike company towns. When ones' living and working conditions are seen to be directly attributable to the same source, the possibilities for conflict are infinite. They are cumulative as well, for dissatisfaction experienced in one area will spill over into another. Thus conflict that does erupt has a far greater resonance than the specific issue might seem to warrant.

A small yet resonant issue was in fact beginning to rise up. The Social Policy Committee had fixed the rents at the few University-owned properties off-campus in the summer, when student participation on the Committee had been minimal. The rents were fixed at £7.50 a week and when the residents complained, the matter was referred to the Finance Committee who were still deliberating at this time. The Finance Committee was obviously central to the whole range of students' material grievances and it was felt by the Students Union that the Committee was highly secretive. Accordingly, when the first plans for an occupation began to circulate among the students they were aimed at the Finance Office. It was to be occupied for a 24 hour period so that the University's accounts could be combed. But these were merely rumours, and most of the activists' attention was directed to plans for an academic strike and demonstration.

November 15th

Th N.U.S. "day of action" took place at all British universities, though

with varying degrees of organisation and turnout. At Essex the academic strike was well organised and few attended classes or lectures that day. Almost all staff and administrators were privately expressing sympathy with the aims of the grants campaign though not necessarily with its methods. But there was no formal support by the staff and the V-C made no statement of support. Only a handful of staff cancelled or re-arranged their classes in sympathy with the strike. At the Lecture Theatre Block a strong picket was present. Not many students tried to get through it, but most of these were physically obstructed. A few scuffles occurred on the picket line, though the most serious allegation of violence was only a jacket torn as one student tried to charge through the line.

Inside the lecture rooms the pickets twice attempted to prevent staff from beginning their lectures by making speeches about the strike and in one case this was reinforced by a certain amount of banging on desks. In one incident, the lecturer eventually decided to abandon his lecture; in the other, an acrimonious dispute ended with the pickets leaving. For the vast majority of academics, disruption of lectures had placed some students quite outside the boundaries of permissible behavior in a university. The students involved were clearly rejecting as an absolute value the ideal of academic freedom as traditionally understood within universities.

At this stage the Students Union had no clear, detailed policy about the limits of picketing. The disrupters were motivated by a simple sense of outrage, that academics should be so little concerned with their material grievances as to ignore the strike. Despite the low level of physical confrontation actually involved, these incidents became renowned for their "violence". Academics and students show their basic intellectualism in their equation of an affront to principles with violence. This would not pass for violence in an industrial dispute.



After a march around Colchester about 90 students attended workshops set up by the Student Union to discuss the grants campaign. The demonstration had not been a success -- attendance was low, the planned marching route had been blocked by police, scheduled speakers had failed to arrive and the students had wandered back to the Workshops frustrated and angry. The failure of one tactic made them turn to another and they voted in favour of a brief occupation. This was proposed by a sympathiser with IMG and seconded by an actual member, which led the Administration to over-estimate the role of the IMG in the occupation itself. A committee was elected to decide the time and place of an occupation. The committee, though diverse in its policies, was united by a belief that direct action was the only way to make the Administration respond to student grievances. (1) Though often cloaked in anti-reformist political rhetoric, this was also based on what these students felt to be their experience of the powers of absorption of the University committee structure. In fact some form of direct action was generally envisaged by student activists at this time, whatever their politics. We do not know the extent of the planning but some keys were acquired.

#### November 19th

Around 7:30 P.M. the fire-bells sounded. This was the signal for the activists to assemble. A group of about 40 students entered an area consisting of a large public room and several administrative offices. This attracted the attention of the Dean of Students, who came to look around, as well as of a (1) large but fluid number of students from the University Bar. The mood was one of excitement and power. After the debacle of the demonstration the experience of asserting physical control over alien territory was exhilarating. The Dean

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1. Contrary to Lord Annan's assertion (para. 55), members of the Student Union Executive were involved in this committee.

of Students was asked to leave, "or we won't be responsible for the consequences". Not surprisingly, this was interpreted as a threat by the Dean, who beat an angry retreat. Organization was low and excitement high and in this first period most of the vandalism occurred. The occupation was extended to include various administrative offices and keys to the whole University were acquired. The University later estimated the damage at \$4,000. Worst affected was the Dean of Students Office. There was some ransacking of files, though this was not systematic or organized, except that everyone was sure to look at his or her own personal file - and was usually disappointed by the contents. The damage was largely the result of a lack of organization. In hierarchical institutions, if those at the bottom experience an unexpected sense of freedom from constraint they will often turn nastily against the symbols of authority, sometimes in quite a childish way. It is not difficult to imagine the atmosphere in the Dean of Students sanctum that night. But it was unfortunate that the administrator whose room suffered the most, the assistant to the Dean, had always been very sympathetic to students. This naturally hardened his feelings against the students as it did those of other administrators and academics. As the occupation gradually extended to about half the administrative offices, it would naturally encounter the implacable hostility of the dispossessed administrative staff. As the lecture disruption had already antagonized the academics, the students were in danger of losing all sympathy.

After midnight, the numbers were maintained at 50-100, though with a high turnover. Many brought mattresses for the night. During this first night, there was no clear structure, whether democratic or manipulated. It is inappropriate to look for leadership at this stage of the events. The position and organization of the sects had not yet tightened, and the occupiers were mostly drawn from uncommitted activists. Though a few already had political attitudes on occupations, and a larger number thought that it was appropriate to the situation, we think that no one had any clear idea of what they would

do in an occupation, or what they would do with it. The initial intention seems to have been to occupy only a crucial "cross-roads" in the system of offices, but acquiring the master keys changed that. The students could now freely penetrate all the "secret files" and mysteries of the University. They gained possession of offices and files almost by accident. In fact they discovered no dark secrets, and no personal "political" files later than 1969. But they did find memos from security guards reporting on Student Union meetings and chits for expenses from administrative officers that from the perspective of a student's grant of £465 a year were staggering. Many of those who entered the occupation after it began were casual and curious bystanders, susceptible to the mood generated that at last students were doing something more "real" than political speeches and meetings, and were occupying "their" University. This mood was very attractive to students.

#### November 20th

The occupation had caught the Pro-Vice-Chancellor off guard. The V-C was away, and he had no prior warning of the students' plans (though there are indications that the Dean of Students Office had an inkling of the students' mood). By opening personal files the students had violated the principle of privacy, and he thought that immediate action was called for. Consulting the Registrar he learned that in other universities a legal injunction had been used with some success against occupiers. After telephoning the V-C he notified the occupiers at 11:15 A.M. that legal action would be taken against them if they did not move out by noon. They did not do so, and the University moved swiftly that day to obtain a Court summons. This was obtained and served at 9:40 P.M. All that day it was clear that the University was taking a firm, legal stand. Among the students rumours about imminent police intervention grew.

That morning the occupation issued a broadsheet with its three demands:

- "(1) An immediate 15% reduction in ALL catering prices, with no staff redundancies
- (2) Firm guarantees that catering and accomodation facilities will be expanded to cope with the expected increase in student numbers (over the next quinquennium).
- (3) An immediate 55% reduction in rents, backdated to October 1st at Cambridge Road and The Avenue, Colchester (the off-campus University properties)".

These demands were almost too moderate.

The first demand was something all students could immediately respond to, the second showed that the occupation had a genuine social concern about those students to come, and the third pointed to a particular and undeniable injustice (which the University had already partially recognised). While virtually all students appeared to think the demands were legitimate, not nearly so many appeared to agree with the tactic of an occupation. It did not at first arouse great interest, and few visited the occupied area that day. Though obviously no precise estimates can be arrived at, it was common among first year students spoken to that day to say "I agree with their goals but not with their tactics". Many did not know that an occupation had occurred!

Sorting out precisely what the tactics were is difficult. Some of those involved specifically designed the demands so that the University could not meet them within U.G.C. regulations. Their intention was to force the University to put pressure on the Government to change U.G.C. regulations and/or increase grants. There was also uncertainty about the extent to which the University actually could meet the demands. The case of the University of East Anglia, where the V-C was believed to have flouted U.G.C. regulations in order

to keep catering costs down, was continually referred to.<sup>1</sup> And even within those regulations (that both catering and housing accounts should breakeven), there was thought to be considerable grounds for manoeuvre. There were two grounds for this. Firstly, it was generally believed that the restaurant and bar at Wivenhoe House (a "stately home" which lies within the University park) was subsidised from the total catering account, and these are used primarily by members of staff. In fact it is subsidised, but from the University's general account not the catering account, and it is counted by the U.G.C. as part of the University's amenity space. As Wivenhoe House can hardly be demolished, the University is forced to subsidise it. Secondly, within the catering account itself, the facilities most used by the students (the bar and the coffee bar) make a profit, while the two other restaurants both make losses. So the student-used facilities in effect subsidise the staff-used ones. But as the overall catering account makes a small loss and receives a subsidy from the general University account, the situation is more complex.<sup>2</sup> As none of these is separately itemised on the University accounts, students (and indeed staff) were unaware of the precise details. Though students exaggerated the situation, they had got hold of a real problem of internal University financing in which they had a definite interest in change. This was a real, though minor, material conflict. As neither side ever did publicly present the problem in all its complexity, we are unable to say how many of those students involved would have accepted a compromise on this issue with the administration.

The officers of the Students Union were in an awkward position. Though some of them were involved in the initial planning of an occupation and in the

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1. There was some substance to this, and at the end of the year East Anglia turned in a catering deficit of £10,000.
  2. Lord Annan (para. 70) is again inaccurate here. He briefly dismisses the "subsidy" charge completely.

occupation itself, they were unable to assume leadership of the occupation that actually took place. The newly elected President of the Students Union, Rusty Davis, was at home ill and she had not even been informed of its advent. The Executive prepared, somewhat uncertainly, to support the occupation at the Union General Meeting called for 8 p.m.

For the first time that year the General Meeting had no difficulty in gaining a quorum. Anywhere between 700 and 900 students were present. The V-C had been invited but had declined. Instead the Assistant Proctor, Keith Ovenden (Lecturer in Government) and Clive Hart, Dean of Students, attended. Ovenden gave his personal views, sympathising with the demands but saying they had to be directed against the Government not the University. He was sure, however, that something could be achieved within the University if the proper constitutional channels were gone through. It would have seemed a good speech in another environment, but quotes from Lytton Strachey and echoes of a Government Department lecture on constitutional and unconstitutional action seemed patronising to many students. Though he was received politely, it was easy for subsequent speakers to evoke titters at this style. Even more significant from the student point of view was the silence of the Dean of Students. For a time the meeting seemed to turn into a dialogue between Ovenden and activist students. Uneasy at the prospect of a lecturer dominating a student meeting, the students asked both Ovenden and Hart to leave. Almost all the student speakers supported the occupation, many speaking <sup>in</sup> quasi-Marxist terms about the links between the University, the Tory Government and Capitalism. There was no abuse directed at the V-C; indeed, some thought that the immediate recourse to legal action could only have been taken because of his absence. Every speaker was operating with an "us-them" dichotomy - the occupiers should not be left to "their" mercies. "They" had already shown

their hand with the legal action. When the vote was taken, only eight voted against giving the support of the Students Union to the Occupation. Furthermore, powers of decision-making were delegated to general meetings of the occupation that would take place daily. The occupation and its demands were now official.

The students emerged from the meeting to find the notification of the writ posted on a locker that served as part of a barricade for the occupation. Their sense of a community under siege was thereby ratified by the administration and a court of law, and large numbers of students began transforming the bare corridors and tidy administrative offices into "Essex Free State". Signs and slogans appeared on the walls, and a colour television and table football game mysteriously appeared. Specific areas were designated for different activities - special quiet spaces were set aside for those who wanted to sleep or study. The arrival of students with books as well as mattresses seemed to indicate that they were now prepared to settle into their new home. So that no leadership would be identified, and to ensure mass participation, a rotating committee was appointed, elected afresh each day by the general assembly of the occupation. This tried to institute discipline, divide the area into social, sleeping, meeting, and study rooms and organize rotas to guard the barricades and clean the occupied area. There were also important decisions to be made.

Thus far both sides had committed themselves to a policy of intransigence. The Administration had only resorted to legal action: no attempt was made to contact any student group until the next day. Keith Ovenden was the only staff member to attempt contact and he was not very senior in the University's hierarchy. The students found the silence of the Dean of Students far more ominous. For their part, the students had overwhelmingly ratified an occupation that had preceded the actual statement of demands.

they did not know the precise information. When the Union Executive raised this matter with the Administration, the result was the amended statement of December 3rd referred to below. Incidentally, it is indicative of both the poor flow of information from the Administration and the low level of administrative commitment of academic staff, that most staff remained ignorant of the U.G.C. plans until February when the visiting U.G.C. informed them.

The blandness of the response infuriated the students. The Administration had offered to "talk about talks". What the students wanted in response to their demand for a 15% reduction, for example, was an equally simple counter-offer from which actual bargaining could begin.

The students now put forward a fourth demand, "no victimisation". The writ had named nine students and it was obvious to the students that they were under surveillance, most notably from the Dean of Maths. Studies, Dr. Ian Cook, whose burly, bearded presence conspicuously graced most student activities through the year. The wheels were set in motion for bring disciplinary charges against the occupiers. Members of staff were being pressed by the Proctor's office to make statements identifying students in the occupation. Over a drink, the Pro-V-C and the Registrar casually discussed the possibility of some kind of amnesty, but this was never made public, and the students were on the contrary convinced that the administration would not compromise on the issue.

#### November 23rd

1 P.M. Student General Meeting - A large meeting of 700-800, including a sprinkling of staff (who had all been invited). The V-C had been invited but neither he nor any representative of the Administration attended. The Administration's letter of 22nd was discussed and regarded as inadequate. This was seen by many as necessitating further direct action, and indeed the occupation was now extended over the Registry (this time in an orderly fashion without



damage and with a record kept of files). The meeting clearly supported the occupation, and overwhelmingly passed motions making union funds available to the occupation and refusing to accept legal liability for damage incurred in the sit-in. Direct action was left for the occupation itself to determine.

It is possible to see in retrospect the beginnings of sectarianism that was to finally destroy the essentially democratic spirit of the occupation. All members of the Union Executive were highly suspect after their meeting with the V-C and had been subjected to scathing abuse at every opportunity. The major recipient of the attacks was Colin Beardon, a soft spoken graduate student in Computing who was Secretary of the Union. (He later assumed the vacant post of Vice President). It was generally assumed that he was the eminence grise of the Executive and that the rest of the members, particularly Rusty Davis, were his dupes. It is difficult to know how much objective basis there was for this judgement. The Executive was united only at times of the most acute crisis and there was a good deal of jockeying for power. Certainly the mere fact that the President was a woman made it easy for students and staff to assume that she was being used by Beardon. There was another factor as well, Beardon's membership in the CP. The CP had the reputation for many left-wing students of being irredeemably reformist and therefore highly susceptible to co-optation (more commonly known as selling out). The fact that the CP was to staunchly support the Executive throughout the worst of its trials only increased the suspicion of many students. Fundamentally, Beardon was vulnerable simply by virtue of his membership in a political group. The occupation had been dominated by an anarchic ideology that had little patience for left wing politics. The members of IMG had capitalized on this situation, underplaying their own organizational commitments and leading the abuse of "CP bureaucrats". It was at this meeting however that IMG was seen by some to overplay its hand and sectarianism was brought out into the open.

During the meeting Beardon's small children behaved in a way that many students found disruptive. It was requested that the children be removed from the hall and an argument broke out. Beardon, angry at the student's intolerance and weary of abuse, impulsively resigned his Union post. So much for the theories of ruthless and calculating bureaucrats!

Bob Findlay who was already establishing a reputation as one of the most effective spokesmen for IMG policy suggested that in light of Beardon's resignation a new delegate should be selected for the NUS conference in Margate that weekend. This was seen by some students as a clear power-play. (Beardon in fact attended the conference and his resignation was not accepted.) The unity of the "will of the occupation" was showing signs of strain.<sup>1</sup> But there was no disagreement on the validity of the demands or the unacceptability of the V-C's response, and tensions were directed toward the formulation of strategy and tactics.

The V-C reported to the General Committee of Senate giving an account of the events until then and discussing the three demands (this was later circulated to all staff).

He repeated the Pro-V-C's assurance on expansion: it "presents no problem: Government policy has been to relate provision for catering and accomodation directly to student numbers". He concluded "Only the last demand (re rents) had been made to the University before the sit-in, and none of the demands is a reason for any confrontation whatsoever with the University." Referring to the fourth demand for "no victimisation" he said:

"The University has a duty to ensure the essential conditions of an academic society and these include the holding of lectures and classes without disruptions, the unobstructed conduct of administrative work and the confidentiality of personal files. The University also has a duty to invoke its disciplinary procedures when, through the conduct of its members, these conditions are jeopardised."

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1. The curious concept of "the will of the occupation" was often referred to by the activists. Perhaps Rousseau was as important in their political education by Marx!

He concluded that he was prepared "to discuss at anytime with the Officers of the Union any of the matters which have been raised".

This day heightened the confrontation. The students rejected the Administration's position; the latter, because of the extension of the occupation, responded with a further rejection of the students' "no victimisation" demand. This was now the major issue at stake in which neither side would compromise. Both sides thought that basic principles were being challenged. We will comment on these principles at the end. Neither side was prepared to negotiate fully. It is important to make clear that at this stage that contact between the side was confined to meetings between the Administration and the Union Executive, who were distrusted by the bulk of the active students at this stage. Furthermore, both parties to these meetings report that no genuine dialogue took place, and that the atmosphere was bitter and unconstructive. The V-C refused at this stage to have anything to do with the occupation or the Students General Meeting. During the whole year no member of the Administration followed Keith Ovenden's example and addressed a student meeting. In 1968 when the V-C finally had agreed to address a meeting, he had been distressed by heckling. He did not wish to repeat the experience. The V-C did not apparently realise that in these early days by refusing to deal with the two student assemblies (of the Union and the occupation) and by being obdurate on the crucial issue at stake, his every contact with the Union Executive actually weakened the position of the Executive among the students. The Union Executive was, of course, completely tied by the students' policy of no victimisation as a pre-condition of negotiation on other issue. This was unrealistic - the only solution through negotiation would have been to include no victimisation in the negotiations themselves. As the V-C himself had pointed out, the original three demands presented no insuperable difficulties. In fact there was a genuine air of puzzlement in the Administration -

why were students responding so aggressively over trivial issues? But these scarcely mattered any longer. Victimisation or disciplining (according to one's point of view) was all that was now at stake.

On Saturday morning the V-C offered to meet with Rusty Davis and agreed that she could bring other students with her. It is indicative of her position at this point that she then went to the occupation to ask them to hold a General Assembly. At this meeting she insisted on her right to meet with the V-C. This was agreed to with the important provision that she be accompanied by a member of the occupation who would ensure that she not discuss the occupation itself. The discussion would be confined to the closure of services that had occurred in the last week. It seemed clear that no progress could be made so long as the V-C insisted on confining discussions to the Student Union and so long as the Executives of that Union were held in such profound distrust.

The actual physical arrangements for Rusty's meetings with the Vice-Chancellor are worthy of some note. When she wished to get in touch with him she would relay the message to a Security Officer who would in turn transmit it to the V-C. When a meeting was actually arranged (and in the first term this was frequent) she would not be told where it would be and would be escorted there by a Security Guard. The comparison with a Palace Guard is irresistible.

#### November 25th

A quiet weekend in the occupation. Maintaining numbers over the weekends was to become a continuing problem for the occupation. The university's proximity to London is seductive and on most weekends the campus appears to be deserted. This appearance is in fact exaggerated by the tendency of the students who remain to stay in the tower flats. Indeed, there is little to tempt them out after the ritual of the Friday night movie. The occupation saw its problem as providing an effective social center for weekends and to a considerable ex-

tent it succeeded. Almost three hundred students were estimated to have spent the weekend - a movie, "The Scars of Dracula", attracted a capacity audience. Even the IMG workshop on the grants campaign drew about 20 students. For the rest, they ate, slept, worked and listened to music. There was a curiously puritan strain in the social patterns. Sexual activity as always remained intensely private, but drinking and smoking dope - the traditional forms of relaxation for students everywhere-were discouraged. There were some deviations - there was sometimes a small group to be found sharing a joint, and a group of five did what they could with a bottle of Jonny Walker found in a desk. It remained to be seen whether the occupation could continue attracting students in the absence of external threats and internal puritanism! Although this weekend was successful from the occupiers' point of view it was also clear that student support and, more important, student participation would not be automatic. A significant number of the most involved students began talking about the necessity for negotiation.

The offices now held were the Registry, Admissions, Examinations, Vacation Grants, Timetabling, Catering, Housing, Estates and Planning, Personnel and the Dean of Students Office. The extent of disruption of administrative work was now severe. The Administration closed the Bar, blaming the occupation but the latter denied responsibility and offered to help re-open it. The launderette was closed as well. The occupation was beginning to make its impact on the mass of students as well as the administrative staff.

The vital action this weekend was at the NUS Conference at Margate from which the Student Union gained official backing. The Conference also voted to back direct action as a tactic in the grants campaign everywhere. Back at Essex, about 200 students attended the evening assembly of the occupation. Much of the discussion centered on plans for a demonstration in support of the occupation. An elected committee was contacting other universities for support.

A room with paper and poster paints was to be set up so that students could make posters when the mood hit them. For the rest, discussion revolved around the problems of a new community-defense (the establishment of workable rotas for guarding the barricades) and sustenance - should payment for food be on an honour basis or should the meeting appoint a cashier?

Tensions within the occupation had clearly emerged. While few students argued for negotiation there was an underlying dispute about both tactics and principles. Some students, notably those close to IMG, felt that the object of the occupation was maximal disruption. Therefore they were not inclined to cooperate in the opening of the bar and the launderette and strenuously objected to staff members visiting the occupation. A larger group had an ideological commitment to openness. For them the value and power of the occupation depended on the quality of the political and social relations that it created. There was a genuine lack of hierarchy and real sociability that was felt to be rare at Essex. It was this that the jockeying of the left political groups and the Union Executive threatened to destroy.

#### November 26th

"The Guardian" reported that the V-C was considering closing down the University. This was true, though this course of action was not actually taken. The occupiers received this with mixed feelings - part exultation at having forced such an extreme move, and part nervous at how to deal with it. The immediate response was to treat closure as a lockout and mobilize all available resources to keep the University open.

A group of staff who, in varying degrees, had some sympathy with the students, met to discuss the possibilities of putting motions to the General Assembly of Staff to meet on the 28th. All wished to express criticism of the Administration's handling of the issue, but there was disagreement about the

picketing issue (i.e. the incidents of November 15th). Should an amnesty to the occupiers also be given to those involved in that? The majority thought not. But would the students accept a proposal which distinguished between different types of disciplinary offence? The group realised it had no idea and deputed about eight members of staff to go over to discuss the situation with the occupiers. They were greeted with a mixture of suspicion and enthusiasm. One staff member said "they applauded us simply for coming".

This was probably the first proper contact other than at an individual level made between staff members and the occupiers. Some students were reluctant to let the staff in. In the discussion the staff asked two questions - would the students accept collective financial responsibility for damage caused? and would they accept an amnesty for the occupation in general coupled with individual responsibility for damages and disruption to lectures? The meeting of 50-100 students had no formal status and no votes were taken, but those who spoke answered clearly "no" to both questions. The staff felt rather depressed at the lack of progress.

This meeting showed how isolated even sympathetic staff members were from the students. At this time, discussion among the students about the possibilities for negotiation and compromise was growing. Both the Union Executive and the CP were openly proposing compromise. Yet the influx of staff members who were in favour of compromise closed the ranks at this meeting. This was unfortunate because the staff members who were in favour of compromise now had little to offer the University. (However, in the next two days they learned that collective financial responsibility for damages was probably acceptable to the occupiers).

#### November 28th

The lack of external threats had begun to take its toll and since the weekend the permanent population of the occupation had diminished steadily. It was now clear that the occupation must live from crisis to crisis- this

was provided first by the writ and then by the spectre of the Union Executive talking to the V-C. The general atmosphere of crisis made the occupation an exciting place to be. Without this threat, it became boring and just another place to go between classes, like the coffee bar. Indeed, the continued closure of the launderette and particularly the bar was beginning to provoke some student hostility.

Sparks of excitement could still be raised. The Dean of Students was standing next to the occupation barricades, noting the names of the students who clambered in and out, when a bucket of water was thrown over him by a student in a gorilla mask. Within minutes almost a hundred students rushed from the coffee bar and towers to the scene of the crime in case of immediate retaliation. There was none, but the event did add to the emotionality of the administration. This was violence indeed!

2 P.M. Staff General Assembly - A large attendance of over 150. The Students Union Executive had asked to send observers, but this had been refused by the Administration. The V-C (the Chairman of the Assembly) made a long speech defending his actions so far and speaking against a motion on the table which criticised the hasty resort to legal action and proposed an amnesty. He expressed sympathy for the problems of the students with inadequate grants. The original three issues posed no problems for the University: they could be discussed without any occupation. In an extraordinary inflammatory statement he said he had it on good authority outside of the University, from a source he could not reveal, that the occupation was taken as part of a national decision of a left wing political group to single out Essex in the grants campaign. It was the attempt of a small group to hold the institution to ransom. He then concentrated on the disruption of the lectures and the present disruption of the Administration. Important personal files were in the possession of students, and (sarcastically) "Some of you think that this behaviour is reconcilable with a university community". He said that the Administration had



been in continual talks with the students, and hopefully he detected signs of change in their attitude. Members of the General Assembly should take no stand on the issues but should discuss them. He concluded with a warning to take precautions in view of the students' demonstration planned for the next day. Guard your equipment, your data, and perhaps your daughters!

The critical motion was proposed by one of the present authors (Mann). Concentrating on the practicalities of getting out of the confrontation, he argued that negotiation was possible, certainly on the question of financial responsibility for damage. Compromise was essential if it was to end short of violence.

Other speakers put forward diverse views. Several supported the Administration fully, and the fairness of the disciplinary procedures to deal with the victimisation issue. The proposer was asked if he intended that the picketers should be excluded from the amnesty. He replied "no". About three speakers indicated a desire for compromise but said they could support the amnesty. Others supported the motion, and the seconder, Mr. Joe Foweraker, Lecturer in Government, said that as a newcomer to the University he was appalled by the alienation among students that the dispute had indicated - there must be negotiation. For this he was abused as a "sociologist" by a Chemistry lecturer - this became the honorary appellation of dissidents throughout the year, just as dissident staff seemed to assume that their opponents were inevitably chemists.

The motion was voted on in three parts. All three were lost, by 95 votes to 58, by 115 to 44, and by 133 to 43. A counter-motion, proposing simply that "We call upon students to end their sit-in" was passed by 124 votes to 26. One noticeable feature on all motions was the number of abstainers. Though they were not counted, they must have totalled between 50 and 70.

Neither side emerged particularly creditably from this encounter in the

sense of being able to find common ground or convince the other. The V-C had made his unsubstantiated "Reds under the bed" allegation which had an enraging effect upon his critics, and especially on students when it was reported to them. The dissidents were probably the best informed staff on student politics, and they were not even sure to whom he was referring. With reflection, they assumed that he meant IMG. This was to greatly exaggerate the IMG role, and indeed their organising ability. No evidence was ever produced for the V-C's allegation, and it seems to be simply false. The V-C himself seemed to regard this as a political gesture. A well-placed informant advises us that the V-C regarded the statement as an attempt to help the Student Union President overcome her adversaries on the left. The assumption that the Union President's troubles came from a sinister source was one that she, perhaps unconsciously, had helped to foster. Inexperienced and isolated in the beginning of term she had increased that isolation by insisting on her right and obligation to negotiate with the V-C and by initiating talks without the knowledge or consent of the activists. This view of her role prevented her from gaining the support of her own constituency - the students. Without this support any negotiations she engaged in were bound to be meaningless. In interviews with the press at the end of term she was very open about the isolation of the Students Union from the bulk of the militants. There is no reason to suppose she was less so in her talks with the V-C. While there is a time-honoured tradition in Trade Union negotiations for leaders to refer to irresistible pressure on their left there is a fine line between this and the impression that one's members are out of control! Davis is slight and soft spoken. While possessed of a firm clear intelligence, she lacked the skills of rhetoric that were so important in the mass meetings of the first term. This was abundantly clear to the Administration and the V-C's statement may well have reflected his understanding of the situation. We can only speculate on his motives, but the effect was the reverse of any such intention.

The V-C had also overstated the degree of negotiation that was going on, and when asked directly whether he was prepared to also negotiate with the occupation, replied only that it would not negotiate with him (which was true, of course). It was a speech from an entrenched position. It did not offer any new openings and its crudities (the outside leftists and the warning of danger to staff) was not likely to remove such opposition as already existed.

Yet his critics may also be criticised. No decision had been taken about the extent of the amnesty before the Assembly, because the intransigence of both sides made it unclear what way forward there could be on this issue. The proposer was vague on the issue until challenged, when he opted for the "hard" line of a total amnesty, on pragmatic grounds. In fact at this stage this group of staff did not know precisely what "violence" had occurred, though they thought they had not yet heard of any conduct which merited expulsion and it was expulsion that was being talked about. Yet this pragmatic line appeared like fudging the issue, and led to the impression that those who opposed the V-C were "in favour of violence".

The voting figures were not depressing to the dissidents. As expected, the 40 or 50 administrative staff voted solidly with the V-C. They never really had the option of doing otherwise, having a firmly hierarchical work situation. Among the academics, about a quarter had revealed themselves as firm opponents of the V-C, and about another third had switched their votes at least once, or abstained. These represented the chances for a "centre". However, one incident relating to this group was noted. The Chairman of the Government Department, Mr. Anthony Barker, had made a rather idiosyncratic speech in which he said that the disciplinary procedures might not be appropriate for dealing with the mass offenders from the occupation. It was not clear from what position he was arguing thus, nor did this emerge, for the V-C

promptly browbeat him until he sat down. As those potentially in the centre would probably show more deference to the V-C than the leading dissidents, it was clear that they would have to be rather courageous to put themselves forward. This did depress the dissidents.

#### 8 P.M. Student General Meeting

A large meeting of about 700-800. Reports were made on the reaction of campus trade unions. A motion of support from NALGO had been defeated and the representative from ASTMS had written to the V-C saying that his initial statement of support for the sit-in had been misused and that he wished to disassociate himself from the irresponsible action of the occupiers. This was disappointing, but not unexpected. What was more important was that for the first time the explosive issue of negotiations was brought out in the open. The first motion was from the right-wing, proposing that the Union be given a mandate to negotiate for all the four demands (i.e. including no victimisation). As it did not mention that the status of the occupation, and as the speakers to it were felt not to be in favour of the occupation, it was heavily defeated procedurally with only seven voting in favour of putting it to the motion. Then the "constitutional left" proposed a declaration of support for the occupation and suggested forming a negotiating committee including a significant number of members of the occupation. This split the meeting and a good deal of rhetoric flowed. The split between IMG and CP had surfaced and their speakers dominated the discussion. The proponents argued that the occupation had definite aims that could only be achieved by negotiation. What was the opposition proposing - that the occupation should go on and on and on? This line was hampered by an inability to breathe the dirty word "compromise" or to respond when the opposition claimed that negotiation must mean a sell-out compromise, as at this stage the Administration was obviously in no mood to give in. Simple fighting-talk received most applause. The motion was thus lost by a large majority.

The Administration felt that the opening of files necessitated some form of visible action. All of them thought that the students had violated an important point of principle in a university. The students were more confused. So why had they also taken up a hard line? We believe that there are two reasons.

- (1) The experience of large meetings in themselves - We referred in our introduction to the growing sense of collective identity among students. Normally this sense of "being a student" is latent and only shows in style of life, ways of talking, etc. But large meetings run by students force realisation of who is part of "us". This is made easier by the under-representation of conservative students, who would pose problems of the diversity of the student body. We are not suggesting that this meeting was either coerced or blinded by the rhetoric of the left. What needs explaining is why such a large meeting spontaneously, and virtually unanimously, supported the occupation. And the explanation is simple: "We are doing something at last".
- (2) The University's resort to legal action - The students' sense of collective identity needs a "them" to feed on. The legal action preceded the student vote; it provided the perfect foil. This is the more important of the two reasons. The occupiers were "students like us", they simply could not be deserted in the face of the enemy. The Administration's use of the law-courts and the expected arrival of the police was seen as similar to, and even part of, the Tory Government's offensive against trade unions. The University had recently experienced a spin-off from that offensive in a police investigation into a coachload of demonstrators from the University and the local Trades Council to the Shrewsbury trials. In style of life the upper reaches of the University hierarchy seem to be "the same kind of people" as Establishment politicians and capitalists. Here was evidence that their

tactics were the same.

November 21st

The occupiers had grown in numbers over the night, and for some days there were usually over 100 and sometimes up to 400 students present.

Professor Eric Hobsbawn, visiting the University to give a lecture on "Grass roots history", included some pointed and witty remarks about peasants' revolts - how they illegally occupy land and pretend they have been there all the time by carrying on their normal social life (singing, dancing, eating, etc.). His audience, which contains people from both sides of the dispute, are at least briefly united in laughter.

The Administration continued with its legal moves and obtained from the High Court an order for possession. The writ named nine students who would be in contempt of the High Court if they remained in occupation. The nine had been identified by members of the Administration from windows across the square. Naturally, some of those identified tended to be those active in the sects. Some, but not all, of the nine had been prominent in the occupation. The writ was now served and the students closed ranks. That evening the occupiers (150-300 according to time) took the precaution of covering up all windows through which they could be identified. For all of them, and not just those named in the writ, were now potentially in contempt of court. Underestimating the time that it takes to serve a writ, they were convinced that the police were about to arrive to forcibly eject them. The occupation was extended to further rooms for tactical reasons. This time it was orderly. There was much talk about resistance and a mixture of exultation and sinking stomachs characteristic of an army before battle. They were going to fight -

there was no question about that. Around 8 P.M. a false alarm went out to the towers for reinforcements. One lecturer met a group running down the stairs of one of the tower blocks seriously discussing whether the perennially broken lift was an attempt by the administration to isolate the rebels!

The paranoia towards the external world was complemented by extreme openness and trust within the occupation. Theoretically the occupation elected a smaller committee to assume leadership, making their headquarters in the Dean of Students Office. In fact, students wandered in and out at will- decisions were made by whoever was there at the time. If the IMG did try to dominate decision making, they were effectively prevented from doing so by the involvement of a very wide group of students in the decision making process. In fact the politically affiliated students were remarkably reticent. They found themselves involved in a mass political movement rather suddenly and needed some time to catch up. It was understood that the members of left wing political groups would see the conflict in rather different terms from the mass of students involved and the discussions proceeded on the question of how, in spite of these differences, the factions could work together. Perhaps the most impressive display of openness was the acceptance of one of the authors in the tactics room. Many of the students knew that she was a sociologist engaged in participant observation of first year students but at no time was her presence challenged.

The V-C had now returned to the University. We believe that he regarded the writ as a mistake and that he now prevented its enforcement, against the advice of the Pro-V-C.<sup>1</sup> He now attempted to make contact with the students.

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1. We must admit that the one failure in our data - collecting was to persuade the Vice-Chancellor to reveal anything which had not already been made public.

Both the administration and Students Union Executive later claimed credit for the initiation of contact between the two sides and it is impossible to know the facts (which is itself depressing). Both sides do agree, however, that originally the V-C was willing only to speak to the President on a one-to-one basis. When he was told that she was ill he agreed to speak to the Vice President. This was unacceptable to the Executive for a number of reasons. As the newly elected officers of the First Student Union in Essex in several years, they were acutely conscious of their own inexperience and of the almost mythical skill of the V-C in negotiation. They were reluctant to let any of their members face the V-C on their own. There was also the problem of trust, for the political spectrum ranged from a member of the CP to a member of the Tory party (who later resigned). They therefore insisted that several members of the Executive meet with the V-C. He in turn gathered his aides behind him. Meetings between the two sides would become crowded and highly ritualized events.

The problem was not helped by the Executive's tenuous relationship to the occupation. Union officials were aware that the occupation had a strong sense of its own identity and an even stronger aversion to hierarchical control. They fought bitterly over whether or not to consult with or even inform the occupation. Later that night the President returned from her sickbed and managed to persuade her colleagues that a meeting with the administration was necessary. The Vice-President, Chris Hotham, insisted that the Occupation be informed and he was given the thankless task of informing the Occupation that a meeting was in progress. The occupation responded to this news with outrage and a bitter personal attack on the Executive. Hotham, shattered by their reactions, resigned shortly after this meeting.

At midnight the executive and the administration met. There was "an exchange of views". Almost incidentally, and as a minor part of the exchanges, the



students raised what was to be the major stumbling block of this term and the next, "no victimisation" - that is, the possibility of an amnesty from both legal and internal disciplinary procedures for the occupiers. The V-C replied non-committally and the issue was not pressed. No progress was made at this meeting. The Executive pleaded for a concession that they could take back to the occupation to justify the talks and legitimise their own position. A concession was not forthcoming.

At the General Assembly of the occupation that night the Union President and her Executive were roundly abused for going behind the students' backs and betraying the populist commitment of the occupation. Rusty Davis was unable to counter this by pointing to any concessions gained and the "Victimisation" issue was now clearly raised. It was decided not to permit the Executive to return to the V-C the next day. Rusty Davis had seriously damaged her position. For the next few weeks she was placed in the position of having to request meetings with the occupation committee. Given the ever-shifting composition of this committee and the commitment to decision making by the General Assembly of the occupation, it was inevitable that she would be told to come to the General Assembly like everyone else. The risk that the Executive took in meeting with the V-C might have worked if they had brought back concessions. As it was, they were completely discredited and with them the idea of negotiations. This stifled for another few days the voices of those students who were arguing for negotiation.

But at least the V-C had not brought in the police. Actually, he probably could not have done this very quickly, for after the securing of a writ there must be a "reasonable delay" before the tipstaff or sheriff arrives and, if necessary, calls the police. To call in the police would have been disastrous, though as this was to happen later in the year, a short sharp encounter between students and police at this stage might have been no worse an outcome. In all

probability, the students would have lost this encounter in the sense that 50 arrests would have sufficed to clear them out. What would have happened next is anyone's guess, but it would have alienated a large number of students. Advocates of a "hard-line" do not generally worry about this.

The occupation was now at the height of its popularity. Each evening several hundred students would congregate there, and well over a hundred would sleep there. Remember that Essex is one of the very few universities without any union building or student-controlled area. The occupation was therefore a very tangible way of escaping from the University's control. It was also the only major student social centre. This made it especially attractive to first-year students, and afterwards it was common to hear them saying that the occupation gave them their first chance to meet friends (after five weeks of university life). They would then often go on to say that after a week of the occupation they no longer needed it.

#### November 22nd

The occupation did not permit the Union Executive to return to the V-C. An initiative was made through a staff petition circulated that day. Sixty-three members of academic staff (about a third of the total) signed a petition to the V-C expressing sympathy with the student grievances and expressing the view that they were not so non-negotiable as the University appeared to be maintaining. They made the further request that the University should not institute disciplinary procedures against "those involved in the present conflict". The petitioners constituted a majority of those contacted in a couple of hours, mostly in Art, Computing, Government, History, Literature and Sociology, the departments whose students were principally involved in the occupation. A majority in other departments would probably not have signed it, and indeed conservatives within the University were incensed by this staff disloyalty. The V-C was rattled by the petition, and now regarded those who organised it as "saboteurs" (as Lord Annan, para. 68, reveals).

We know of at least one professor who was contacted by a senior member of the Administration and persuaded that he made a serious mistake in signing the petition because he simply did not know the facts of the matter. The chairman of another department who had not himself signed was called to account for the signatures of a significant number of his department. He then proceeded to chastise the lecturers involved. The exertion of influence from the top down is common to all institutions in our society. It is perhaps unfair to criticise university administrators for behaving in this way. But the ideal of a community of minds unfettered by hierarchical differences is very strong in academia and particularly so at Essex. The inevitable deviations from this ideal generate a kind of bitterness that is almost inexplicable to those who have never been seduced by the ideal. The expression of sympathy with students was, from the start, defined as a breach of loyalty. The possibility of a dialogue, even between members of staff, never was considered.

The Administration now responded to the three demands. On the question of the rents of The Avenue and Cambridge Road, the response was constructive. It was generally agreed that the rents were unjust. This had been discussed already through the constitutional channel of the University's Social Policy Committee, and now that the Administration's arm was jogged by the students it was prepared to move further and recommend a substantial rent reduction to the appropriate committee. Undoubtedly, this issue could be settled. On the 15% catering reduction, the Administration was also prepared to discuss, though this was somewhat vaguely formulated and had to overcome the obstacle raised by the occupiers' discovery of files relating to (what seemed to them to be) excessive catering expenses of staff and furnishing expenses of the V-C's house.

On the general issue of expansion the Administration gave rather misleading reassurances which obscured the fact that the U.G.C. considered the existing catering facilities (used by 2,000 students) adequate for the total of 3,927 students in 1976. This seemed "suspicious" to the active students, even though

Once again a large student meeting had overwhelmingly supported the occupation. Any negotiating students would have to recognise its status. Yet negotiation at this stage had been defeated again, though the argument for it were not being heard properly. Support for the occupation was less a demand for the remedy of specific grievances than a generalised sense of alienation from the University. The threat of victimisation gave this definite content. The confrontation was maintained, and both sides were seeking only to increase their strength.

An interesting element was the students lack of interest in the events of the Staff General Assembly. This was reported on only at the end of the meeting by a staff member who had been present. The students, at this point, did not see the staff as a potential source of any real help or support.

The demo planned by the occupation was, from the beginning, viewed by involved students with a sense of foreboding. It was clear that the occupation needed an event that would lift spirits and reinvigorate the students. It was also clear that if the demo was unsuccessful in attracting large numbers it could prove totally discouraging. The day began with a picket line at the Lecture Theatre Block. Few students went to lectures and there was one brief physical confrontation between a picket and a lecturer. In the afternoon the campus was quiet and deserted, the rather ominous feeling intensified by the eerie music broadcast across the Squares by the Campus radio station. Staff had been warned that there might be violence and although most denied credibility to the warning there was nevertheless some apprehension.

The demonstrators met in a park in Colchester and after a brief rally marched to the campus. The turnout was disappointing - around three hundred when the predictions had been for over a thousand. The marchers returned chilled by a gentle drizzle and the mood of depression deepened when it was dis-

covered that a fire had mysteriously started in one of the rooms of the occupation and that the microphones for the rally were not working. (Either broken down or sabotaged by the administration, depending on who you talked to! )

The rally adjourned to the Lecture Theatre Block where students from other colleges and universities gave messages of support. The Hexagon Restaurant had been occupied earlier in the day as a way of providing sleeping space for the visitors but most of them left early. The meeting held in the Hexagon that night was largely confined to Essex students who were confronted with the necessity of reexamining their tactics. Feeling was now growing that the split was dangerous and the roles of the political groups were not helpful - IMG seemed to be arguing automatically against negotiation, the CP automatically in favour, without considering the content of those negotiations. The sects were clearly losing popularity. Nobody was in control and people were beginning to question the effectiveness of a policy of total resistance.

#### November 30th

At an impromptu Saturday night meeting (and when the strongest supporters of the CP, IMG and IS were at parties) the General Committee of the occupation decided to seek negotiation on the three original demands and from the premise of no victimisation. Simultaneously, the Union Executive decided to see the V-C. Both wrote to the V-C who agreed to see the Executive, but he replied to the Committee of the occupation that talks with them could not take place on a pre-condition of no disciplinary action. At 4 p.m. the meeting took place between the V-C, the Pro-V-C, Dean of Students and Registrar, on the one side, and the President and ten members of her Executive on the other. The Administration made clear its attitude to the three demands and agreed to put this in writing to the Union by December 3rd (see below). No agreement was reached on points of substance but it was agreed to meet again on December 2nd. The Committee of the occupation now withdrew its pre-condition of "no victimisation" and agreed to combine with the Executive for the December 2nd meeting. This

meeting did not take place - as usual it is impossible to state with any certainty which side was responsible for the cancellation.

The students' shift on negotiations had been steadily coming. The Administration, after its early legal initiatives, had in effect been inactive since. Most students and staff now believed that the V-C was merely waiting for the end of term, confident that the students could not sustain their occupation over the vacation. The students were aware that this was probably true. The occupation had thrived on the Administration's aggression. Indeed the Pro-V-C was still in favour of aggression. His solution would have been to assemble about 20 determined members of staff to take the occupation by storm. Had this been done at the right strategic moment - late on a Sunday night - he feels that this would have worked. But then what? We feel sure that this would have led to further direct action, perhaps more violent than hitherto, from the students. But in the absence of such threats the feeling grew among students that it was better to negotiate before the occupation began to decline further. So the initiative came from the students, and, like most attempts at compromise in this whole dispute, it came from a sense of weakness.

#### December 3rd

The Registrar communicated the Administration's position on the three original demands to the Students Union. It was more precise on the discussion offered on the first demand for the 15% price reduction, offering to meet with the Union Executive. On the third issue of the rents at The Avenue and Cambridge Road, the Registrar suggested appointing an independent assessor to fix rents using the existing Tower study-bedroom rent as standard, and back-dating any reduction to 1st October 1973. On the University's expansion, the Administration's line had changed, admitting that no new catering facilities were proposed until after 1977. However, it claimed that "alterations to existing facilities" would improve the situation.

8 p.m. Student General Meeting

The CP had issued a leaflet arguing that negotiation should proceed on the three original demands and dealing with victimisation when it occurred, rather than making it a principal condition of negotiation. This was now a clear compromise position.

The meeting was smaller than most - only about 200. Exact counts of votes were made for the first time, because of their closeness. The meeting agreed unanimously to send an apology to the lecturer involved in the scuffle with pickets on November 29th. The union was now much clearer in its attitude on "violence" than at the beginning.

A N.U.S. official reiterated official union support and made practical suggestions about the negotiations. As an "N.U.S. bureaucrat" he was received with some hostility, but his practicality won over the meeting and he received warm applause. Rusty Davis, then spoke for the main motion, that the Executive was bound only by the decision of the General Meeting and not by those of the occupation. For the first time there was no controversy about this, and debate centred on amendments she had added: that negotiation should start on the three original demands, leaving action on victimisation until after the holiday; that the negotiating committee should be three from the occupation and two from the Executive; that the occupation should end on December 7th. The amendments were now defeated by 104 to 77. While formal support for the Occupation was still strong participation was diminished and after the vote stalwarts of the Occupation begged the students to vote with their feet as well as their hands. This plea was unsuccessful. The original populists had disappeared and in effect the mass of students while still making decisions at General Assemblies had delegated responsibility for their enactments to a small group.

The negotiating position was now rather complex. The Executive was still entitled to negotiate provided its decisions were ratified by the General Meeting. So was the Committee of the occupation, provided its were ratified by its General Assembly. Presumably neither could go ahead on precisely the format just defeated. But this is rather legalistic. The motion as amended contained two items that should not have been put together. The meeting was probably in favour of this format for negotiation but against the ending of the occupation. The narrow final vote was emotional rather than rational, for the occupation would probably not survive the end of term anyway.

#### Night-time at Wivenhoe House

A group of "apaches" raided Wivenhoe House, broke into the Finance Office, and took away files which the V-C was to describe as "important". The University's secrecy about financial matters was one of the main background grievances in the dispute. It appears that none of the political groups was involved in the raid. Its results are unclear - no subsequent financial information seems to have circulated among students. We would guess that even its perpetrators would regard it as achieving nothing.

#### December 4th

For the first time, the W-C made an initiative, visiting the Union President and expressing willingness to discuss all issues, including amnesty. He agreed to a meeting with representatives from the Executive and Occupation. This lifted the student leadership up from the depression engendered by the evident decline of the occupation and by the Wivenhoe House raid (seen as counter-productive by most of the leadership). At this meeting, the students' case was presented very ably by a mature student, an ex-Ford's covenor, <sup>(1)</sup> who (significantly) had been seen as too conservative by the students earlier on. Discussion centered on victimisation.

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<sup>How</sup>  
(1) In ~~the~~ Beynon's book Working at Ford he is described as the "armchair strategist" of the Dagenham workers.



According to the student negotiators, the V-C first denied the existence of a list of students against whom disciplinary charges would be preferred, and then admitted there was a "strong possibility of such a list". No progress was made on a compromise and it was agreed to adjourn the meeting until 6 p.m. This meeting was not held. / V-C cancelled the meeting - we do not know why, / the students attribute it to their success at this meeting. Success seemed to be measured by the extent to which they could rattle the V-C, hardly a constructive way to approach negotiations.

The V-C made his report to the General Committee of Senate (circulated next day to all staff and senior administrators) on the recent events. He gave his views of the attempts at negotiation and of the last Student General Meeting stating "A motion that the occupation should cease was defeated after a recount". Then he turned to more general comment. We should like to quote this at length as very revealing of his position in the dispute.

"However encouraged or depressed you may be by the events of this past week it is clear that increasing numbers of students are opposed to a continuation of the occupation. At the same time, as might have been anticipated, the behavior of a small number of students is becoming much more extreme. On Thursday of last week there was a fire in the storeroom of the Academic Section. On Monday night the Finance Office was broken into and important files stolen. On the same night, the general store was broken into. Last night four students gained access to the Library. A barrier on the Boundary Road was let down and as a result a member of the security staff was involved in an accident. There is also the seriousness of the continued occupation of important administrative offices. The Dean of Students' Office is occupied and effectively no welfare work can at present be done. The office of the person responsible for printing is occupied and no composing work can be done for the Printing Centre. The Office of the Estates and Planning Officer is occupied and, for example, the preparation of working drawings for the new Department of Biology has been held up. The office of the Security Officer is occupied and keys to all University doors are in the hands of those in occupation. The office of the Personnel Officer is occupied and appointments of secretarial, technical and other staff cannot go ahead. The office of the Housing Officer is occupied and little assistance can be given in respect of accommodation. The Club Bar is closed and there has been a substantial loss of profit. The office of the Admissions Officer is occupied and some 900 UCCA forms are held up. The direct and indirect costs to the University will be very substantial: to take one example

only, there are 1000 doors within the academic buildings, and the lock on each will need replacing, at a cost of several pounds per lock.

I should like to repeat what I said at the special meeting of the General Committee. Responsibility for order in the University is mine and it is a responsibility which I have to the Council of the University. I am meeting constantly with the Pro-V-C, the Deans of Schools, the Dean of Students, the Proctor and the Registrar, and we are doing all that we can to take the necessary security and preventive measures. We are also doing every thing we can to keep discussions going. But I must emphasise the responsibility of all members of the University, staff and students alike. What is vital is the establishment of the right climate of opinion. An academic community must be, and be seen to be, one which not only actively promotes debate and rational discourse, but which also condemns, and condemns unequivocally, what is violent and coercive. Not is it enough simply to condemn. Members must be willing to co-operate with the officers in seeking out those whose conduct infringes the regulations of the University. Far too many members of the University, finding business very much as usual, are doing little or nothing in this respect. And there are a few, fortunately only a few, who intentionally or not are by their words and actions encouraging those in occupation. In the present situation I ask members of the General Committee of Senate to do everying possible to mobilise the support of the moderate majority of members of the University. I ask them to do everything possible to expose and discredit the irresponsible few."

(1) The V-C was ill-informed about student politics. He appeared to have misinterpreted the votes at the meeting of December 3rd as indicating a growing opposition to the occupation itself. In fact the vote defeated after a recount was to end the occupation just before the end of term, for tactical reasons, and options for further direct action next term. No direct vote against the keeping open the /occupation was ever put before any general meeting of students that term. All through the year the Administration and the staff who supported them referred to the supposed "moderate" students who were apparently opposed to the official student union actions, and yet these never really emerged. From time to time there was a growth of sentiment against "the extremists" - as in the last few days here - but this never took the form of support of the Administration. Alienation from them, and increasingly from the V-C personally, appeared to be almost total at all student meetings. Was he aware that the standard speech on both sides of student motions had by now obligatory, derogatory references to himself and his colleagues?

(2) The listing of incidents attributable to the students is contentious. The students deny all knowledge of the incident concerning the Boundary Road barrier. (1) There is disagreement about responsibility for the closure of the bar, and the occupation offered to take whatever steps were necessary to have it re-opened. And the fire within an office in the occupied area did occur but it is a complete mystery to the occupiers. (The room had been locked for some time.) They suspect an agent provocateur - conspiracy theories were prevalent on both sides! that it was The more probable explanation is/the kind of accident which could have occurred anywhere in the University. The other cases are probably correct. In this list we have the mixing of information and propaganda of one of the parties to an inflamed dispute.

(3) The V-C simply contrasted the "rational discourse" of his own position and the "violent and coercive" actions of his unspecified opponents. We wonder in which category he would have included the court order and the ongoing disciplinary moves (not to mention the police numbers of the following term). Such language infuriated his opponents and was counter-productive.

(4) The conclusion seems to be/<sup>a</sup>reference to members of staff who were "encouraging" the students. Here again the V-C seemed to associate them with "violent and coercive" actions. As can be seen from the above narrative, staff involvement was neither great nor effective. The students probably derived encouragement from the sympathy of staff, though this was never unconditional. Insofar as actual advice was given by staff it was (a) that if they simply gave in, they would be victimised, but (b) they should actively seek negotiation and be content with some form of compromise. The first seemed to be a true factual statement and the second was constructive

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(1) Lord Annan (para 80) nevertheless attributes it to them.

advice. Intermittently through the year this charge of "incitement" was raised by the Administration, but never with any actual evidence. Again its effect was to infuriate. The next day the occupation issued a bulletin describing the results of the meetings with the V-C. The main issue was seen as victimisation, and by their obduracy the Administration "are creating an extreme state of aggression and frustration". This is true, but is it also a threat? In the occupation and the Coffee Bar there was in fact a great deal of strong language used against the University. The University intensified its security operations, expecting trouble.

December 6th

The Telephone Exchange Incident - At 3.15 a.m. a security man saw three students acting suspiciously outside the telephone exchange. They ran away. At 5.40 a.m. the security man inside the exchange manning the switchboard heard lockers being pushed around outside. He informed his office who sent three further men to the exchange. They pushed their way through about a dozen students who were erecting barricades outside the exchange, prior to occupying it. The security men thwarted this plan by stationing themselves at the door of the exchange. The tactical dispositions were now rather comic, for the students had let the enemy inside their lines and were unable to reach their target, the exchange itself. Their powers of political rhetoric and persuasion were exercised for an hour to no avail, and the security men would not leave. The students bravely manned their barricade nevertheless. At 6.30 a.m. a party of a dozen consisting of the Registrar, the Pro-V-C, the Proctor and Dr. Cook, the Dean of Maths, together with several security men, proceeded to the area. They first encountered a small group of students out foraging for materials for their barricade. These were dispatched. Then the remaining students were herded behind their barricade, and the Administration party began to dismantle this from the outside. When the

barricade was half down, suddenly Halford Hewitt leapt over, shouting and waving his arms "like a Dervish". This terrified everyone, authorities and students alike. Like magic the ranks of the Administration melted away in front of him. The Registrar, slower to react than the others, received an accidental cut on his hand from the screwdriver brandished by Hewitt. As no one interfered with Hewitt he walked calmly off. The remaining students, showing less imagination, quietly surrendered, though they did have the presence of mind to give false names.

Later that day both sides put out leaflets describing the incident and exaggerating the violence of the other side. It is ironic that their customary language was now reversed. The students complained of the numbers and the violence of the Administration, the latter proudly proclaimed a victory. The elements of pure nastiness and farce seemed rather mixed to the onlooking University.

#### Students' General Assembly

An attendance of about 250. Support for all actions of the occupation was re-affirmed. (It was not clear whether the raids on Wivenhoe House and the Telephone Exchange were part of this.) An amnesty was demanded for these. The occupation would end before the end of term but precisely when a tactical decision to be taken later.

#### December 7th-14th

The occupation was clearly winding down. The CP and "The Broad Left" (constitutional leftists) issued statements criticising the original decision to occupy before any grievances were presented. There was no serious contact between Administration and students, and it was clear that disciplinary charges were almost ready. Student action hung fire until the nature of these was clear, and that would delay things until next term. The atmosphere was so unreal among the students that serious discussion was not popular. A whimsical, even self-mocking, tone entered the rhetoric: "We plan over the weekend to drain the lakes, occupy the boiler house,

blockade the computer, and undertake numerous other activities too secret to mention." Needless to say, nothing like this happened.

On the 10th the V-C kept up the propaganda war by sending round a letter to all staff and students composed of pieces of his earlier statement. The occupiers cleaned up in preparation for moving out. A Student General Meeting made no reference to the occupation, and instead passed motions supporting a rent strike for the next term in support of a rent reduction.

At 9 a.m. on the 11th the occupiers moved out. Appropriately, this coincided with the communication of disciplinary charges to students. The number charged was large but unclear. Prestige was attached to receiving charges. A number of students were saying they hadn't bothered to check their pigeon-holes rather than admit they hadn't got a letter. The list of those charged gradually became clear. (The eventual total was 36.) Most were charged only with presence in the occupation, but a few with individual acts of disruption, on the picket lines, in the occupation, and at the telephone exchange. A large proportion of the former were politically active students, and this added to the indignation of the "no victimisation" cries.

#### Conclusion - Term I

Although the occupation was planned by a small group of activists, it very quickly attracted the interest and participation of a much larger population. The firmly anti-authoritarian bent of the occupiers gave the appearance of chaos. Leaders were to be formally elected on a 24 hour rota but in fact important decisions were made by whoever happened to attend the general meeting. Certain students were more influential than others but their influence ebbed and flowed with the passage of events and was constantly undercut by the suspicion of

"ego-tripping". This profound distrust of hierarchy made the Student Union and the Administration equally suspect. Had both groups been willing to abandon their positions of authority and argue their case in the General Meetings we suspect that agreements could have been reached. We believe that a majority of students would have been disarmed simply by the Administration taking its case to the sometimes unruly but intensely democratic forum.

The students offensive had failed. It had been exciting in itself and no doubt educational, but it had not achieved any of its stated goals. For many students disillusion began with the emergence of political sects competing for power. But this emergence was closely linked with the inability and unwillingness of the occupation to make real contact with the hierarchical structures of the rest of the world. All factions now recognised that to occupy before making the demands was a mistake. Many also realised that the demands themselves were at best tangentially related to their needs. The occupation was only superficially pre-meditated - it actually emerged out of the alienation and frustration of student activists at the authoritarian nature of the "academic community."

Now the Administration would take the offensive ...

### Chapter Three

#### Spring Term and Vacation

Although there had been disruptions at dozen of universities and polytechnics during the year, only at Oxford, Essex and Kent had they reached serious proportions. There was little in common between the students' formal grievances in the three places. The Essex dispute was supposedly about rents and prices, at Kent the issue was the suspension of one student on academic grounds, and at Oxford the demand was for a Student Union building. We know something about the Kent and Oxford disputes but not enough to give the kind of authoritative analysis we feel able to give for Essex. Therefore we will not comment on the "rights and wrongs" of these issues. But one point is clear about all three disputes: that in each case the nominal issue got lost when "victimisation" followed an occupation. In fact all three were student assertions of their collective rights and identities against pre-existing authority structures in universities.

Should universities recognize the implications of the threat of a collective student identity (and they usually do!) they have a number of options for defense. One of these options, chosen by both Oxford and Essex, is to deny the collective basis of the actions by invoking their traditional mode of defense - disciplinary procedures. These procedures, designed to deal with individual infractions of the laws of the community, are ill-equipped to deal with situations in which large numbers of students are challenging the legitimacy of these laws.

This is both their strength and their weakness. Their strength from the administrators point of view/<sup>is</sup> because such procedures do not even allow discussion of the problem of students collective identity. Thus in a highly decentralized institution like Oxford, where it is difficult to mobilize large numbers of students, the disciplinary procedures may succeed in picking off the most notorious "trouble-makers" and in defusing if not resolving the issue. But in a centralized



campus University like Essex mobilization of students is far easier. Disciplinary procedures no matter how scrupulously devised will be seen as unjust because they focus on the acts of the individual, and deny all legitimacy to the student claim of collective identity. Thus disciplinary procedures become by definition, victimization and can act to increase the students sense of collective identity. We are arguing that if University administrations choose to defend their notion of community in a way that denies consideration of the student claims and should the students be in a position to mobilize their troops - then the battle is well and truly joined. This is what happened at Essex.

Disciplinary charges mounted through/<sup>out</sup> the Christmas vacation. The mood of the activists was glum. The occupation had withered away, much to most students' relief, and the activists felt isolated and vulnerable. The list of those charged was still incomplete by the end of vacation and there was endless speculation about its eventual composition. By the end of the vacation 28 of the 36 students eventually charged had notified the Student Union of their position. The administration, convinced of the importance of protecting the privacy of individual students, refused to make a list of those charged available to the Union. Most of the students faced three basic charges:

- "(i) conduct which unreasonably obstructs the satisfactory conduct of the administrative work of the University;
- (ii) conduct which obstructs the holding of a class given by the University;
- (iii) conduct which obstructs the holding of research in the University."

These three charges amount/<sup>ed</sup> in effect to participation in the occupation. A few students were additionally charged with infringement of specific University regulations of varying degrees of severity - refusing to give their names and addresses to University officers; refusing to withdraw from a lecture, laboratory or class

when asked; moving furniture from one room to another (an obvious violation of the academic community!). And a very few faced more ominous-sounding charges - "conduct which does, or is liable to cause" (a) "violence to persons within the University" and (b) "damage to property within the University".

The procedures of the Disciplinary Committee had been largely worked out since the 1968 events on the campus. An attempt had been made to secure NUS approval for them, but this had been thwarted by a leftward move within the NUS at the time. In some respects the Committee followed public courts of law in its procedures, and this gave it much support among the staff of the University. The prosecutor was separate from the judges; the defendant was entitled to be represented by a solicitor or barrister who could cross-examine all witnesses. In one respect, the defendant was better placed than he would be in a proper law-court, for all prosecution evidence was communicated in writing to him in advance. Yet the composition of the "judges" deviated from the legal pattern. Without calling in outsiders, the University could not ensure independent judges, so instead it sought a balanced judicial panel, consisting of two student members from the Students Union Judicial Committee, and three members of academic staff of whom one is the chairman. The academics were chosen by the Registrar from a panel chosen by Senate.

During the vacation, executives of the Union had contacts with students at other universities as well as with a barrister and a solicitor in an attempt to gauge the nature of their situation. Many of the students charged held sporadic meetings to decide on some kind of common strategy, especially whether to participate in the hearings at all. Both within the executive and the large mass of students there was deep disagreement about this issue. Rusty Davis was strongly influenced by the experience of the students at Stirling University. "They boycotted their hearings and by the time it was over they were begging to be let in." A

crucial problem was the mobilisation of broad student support for those charged, and she felt that this could best be done by participating in the hearings. A fairly significant number of students strongly disagreed. They felt that to participate in the hearings would simply lend credibility to a procedure that was basically illegitimate.

None of the student activists expected the hearings to be fair and impartial. Even those who argued in favour of participation did so on the assumption that the hearings would be biased - they simply saw participation as the more effective political strategy. There were a number of factors that contributed to this feeling. A majority of the panel was senior academic staff, hand-picked, so the students thought, to do the liberal thing - agonise a little, and then back up the authorities. Another problem was the peculiar composition of those charged. While many of those most involved in the occupation had been charged, other had not been and still other students who had merely wandered in for a look, or even had not been present at all, found themselves facing disciplinary charges. For those people who were knowledgeable about the occupation, the emerging charge list made very little sense. Given the students' information at the end of the vacation it seemed that a disproportionate number of those charged were members of left wing political groups. (In fact, of the 36 eventually charged, a third were members of political groups.) Many students concluded that the administration was attempting to use the hearings as a way of ridding the University of its activists. But this was precisely what the University had not done. It had not attempted to isolate "militants" from the students but charged all those it could identify. As evidence was gathered by a few security officers (and a very small number of academic staff), they were able to charge only those students who for one reason or another were already known. Inevitably this meant that the more active students in the University community, but not necessarily in the occupation, were charged. The proctors office had attempted to defend itself from charges of political bias by strict legalism without recognising

that this legalism would be seen itself as "political". The piecemeal way in which charges were issued, the delaying of any evidence supporting the charges, and the possibility that there were still more students who had not yet been charged or who had not yet informed the Union of their charges, created uncertainty and encouraged an atmosphere of speculation. Implicit in the administration's actions was the unwillingness to accept the Union as the legitimate representative of students. They felt it would be an invasion of the individual's privacy to inform any group of the actions taken. Whatever the merits of the principle of individual privacy one could question the applicability of the principle since no one bothered to actually ask the students involved whether they would in fact object. In the event, all but one or two students charged voluntarily notified the Union.

Disciplinary proceedings did not start until well into the Spring term. Student activists suspected that this was a deliberate strategy to allow a "cooling of" period after which it would be difficult to mobilize support. We have evidence that this was in fact the case.

By the beginning of February certain basic issues had been resolved. The Disciplinary Committee had provided the individuals charged with the evidence against them so they could prepare their defence. The more moderate activists had prevailed and those charged had decided to participate in the hearings. They had also agreed to be defended by a solicitor hired by the Union.

The Union had selected the two student members of the Disciplinary Panel (staff members had been appointed in December) and the entire panel began its preliminary hearings. Perhaps most importantly from the students' point of view the Union Executive had begun to assume leadership and established its ground in a way that, for the short term at least, was not dependent on continuous mass support.

February 6

This was the day of the first formal meeting of the Disciplinary Committee. It had been preceded by an informal meeting the week before. Perhaps the most salient thing about the informal meeting was that due to an administrative error the two student representatives had been informed and learned of it through a message on the urgent notice board later that day. This was, to say the least, unfortunate. Given the already existing atmosphere of distrust they interpreted this as deliberate exclusion and became even more convinced that their membership on the Committee was only a token one. Their suspicions were confirmed that the academics, judges, and prosecutors alike, had social contacts, from which they were excluded. As one said "They all stand around drinking sherry, for God's sake!"

This sense of the academic and administrative staff being unalterably "other" inevitably leads to the notion of "victimisation." The students argued that the individuals charged were merely carrying out policy that had been approved by successive general meetings of the Student Union and that therefore every member of the Union was responsible for the actions taken. This ideological position was buttressed by the perceived reality. A very large number of students had entered the occupied area at some time or other or voted approval for it. It seemed unfair to single out 36. The Disciplinary Committee took the view (by 3 to 2!) that one prosecuted those against whom one had evidence - you don't let one thief go because there are others you haven't caught. Moreover, the academics strenuously objected to the notion that an individual can abdicate responsibility for his actions to a collectivity. They argued that if a community cannot enforce a certain code of conduct then the community itself ceases to exist. This issue surfaced in the early meetings in the form of/acceptability of a collective defence. Not surprisingly, the issue was never actually dealt with and both sides had to satisfy themselves with a vaguely worded compromise,

i.e. that a collective defence prepared by the Union would be "taken into account" in the hearings of individuals. Wrangling over these issues was to last almost academic - the Students Union had made the decision that it would withdraw its two weeks. In a sense much of it was purely members from the Panel after the first verdict of guilty.

In setting in motion the Disciplinary Committee, the University was totally committing itself to a non-compromise position on certain issues of principle.

It is an occupational hazard for universities that conflicts about power are quickly elevated into conflicts of principle - and therefore become absolute. One doesn't compromise on principle, one defends it or abandons it completely. The notion that the university would somehow cease to exist if the disciplinary procedures were not enforced was pervasive and prevented consideration of the appropriateness of the procedures for the particular situation. It also cast the students in the role of the barbarians about to destroy civilisation. This image does much to explain the administration's subsequent intransigence - one does not negotiate with or justify oneself to barbarians - one defeats them. This image of the student activists was reinforced in a number of interviews that the V-C gave to the press and in his statements in Senate and General Assembly when he described the conflict as one between force and reason.

In retrospect, it might be argued that the V-C made the mistake of assuming consensus where non existed. But in this he was not alone. As we have argued, consensus is the model on which the British University is based. Changes in British education and society have struck at the roots of consensus in universities everywhere. It was the misfortune of the V-C that the students at Essex were in a position to articulate and defend an emerging alternative model. Legal systems are buttressed by force and consent - consent by the mass of citizens, and force against deviants. The University did not have such consent, and as the deviants constituted a large proportion of its citizenry, it had ultimately to rely on force from outside the University.

Most of the student activity centered on the forthcoming routine visit of the University Grants Commission to the campus. The Union Executive had rejected the invitation to a 45 minute meeting with the UGC as inadequate but had delegated a committee to plan a series of counter-activities that would state their case. The actions considered, while embarrassing to the administration, were basically good-humoured. Students dressed in rags would seek alms. They would appear with their sleeping bags in the most unlikely places. A parade of mothers and children would hold a picnic in Wivenhoe House as close as possible to the restaurant in which the UGC would be dining. In fact there was little or no organisation, and the night before the visit the members of the Committee panicked. Late that night, Security Officers discovered "UGC fuck off" painted on the V-C's house and noticed Halford Hewitt driving off. The officers gave chase on foot. Unbelievably, his car ran out of petrol almost immediately and they caught up with him! Accounts differ about what happened next but he was eventually charged with assault before the University's Disciplinary Committee. If these students are the "revolutionaries" the press makes them out to be, one might doubt whether they could bomb the skin off a rice pudding - England is secure!

On the 19th, the visitors were met by official University cars at Colchester station. The students had planned their own welcoming committee but typically arrived just as the UGC were leaving. Halford Hewitt flung himself on the bonnet of the departing car but was removed very quickly. At 10:30 a.m. the committee, pursued by a few students shouting and throwing stink bombs, met with the top administrative officers, the V-C, Registrar, Deputy Registrar, Finance Officer and Estates and Planning Officer. Twenty or so students, some masked and some with placards, milled around the entrance to the meeting room and were chagrined to find that at the end of the meeting the UGC had been spirited out another way.

Frustration increased when it was noticed that the Security Officers had removed all posters students had prepared to remind the UGC of students' financial plight.

The one student event that did come off as planned was the children's picnic at Wivenhoe House - and even that assumed a slightly different shape under the press of events. About 20 mothers and children marched up to Wivenhoe House with balloons, placards and streamers. There was a good deal of confusion and when the UGC actually arrived for their lunch only half the group was on hand to greet them. The entire group then gathered in the room next to the restaurant to eat their picnic of marmite sandwiches and orange squash. The visiting dignitaries could neither hear nor see them. They had been whisked around the campus with the minimum amount of visibility (indeed, they had arrived at Wivenhoe House in maintenance vans) and the students were increasingly frustrated. At some point, three of the male students hurled themselves at the door and after some struggle (and more stink bombs) gained entry to the restaurant and insisted on joining the party. Some students witnesses to this informed the President of the Students Union and she succeeded in persuading the three students to leave. Upon seeing the Students Union President the understandably irate V-C allegedly said to her: "What the fuck are you doing her?" - a welcome sign of humanity from him! This marked the end of student activity for the day, and the visitors continued with the rest of their schedule undisturbed.

In the afternoon the UGC met with representatives of the academic staff who were not members of Senate (i.e. relatively junior staff). This group argued that the University was sorely in need of extra funds for the creation of some sort of Social Centre. The UGC, however - after a day of harassment - was thankful the discomfort somewhere else. It pointed out that the University had turned to be able to turn down an opportunity to press for a social centre by asking for a new administration block as its first priority. This was now about to be built.



built. This news burst upon most of the academic group for the first time, and they were both angered and embarrassed by their prior ignorance. The UGC clearly took the message that internal communications within the University were bad.

In the course of the grants campaign the UGC has grown used to rough treatment from students on its visitations. Its members said they thought they had escaped rather lightly at Essex. They were rather amused at the apparent incompetence of the protesters. This was the lowest ebb of the students' movement - the Union had failed to grasp its opportunity to organise an impressive peaceful protest and the "apaches" had behaved with their usual gay abandon. The UGC were more disturbed by the obvious signs of disunity among staff and administration. We can only surmise that they left with a pretty low opinion of all parties within the University. Their hurried and closely guarded entrances and exits resembled a visit to a battlefield; their glimpses of the sides may have convinced them that no-one deserved the victory.

#### February 21-22

The disciplinary committee heard its first cases on 21st and it was announced that Heather Dale was acquitted but Fred Ball found guilty of disrupting a lecture. Sentences were not yet announced. The Executive had decided several weeks previously that at the first verdict of guilty there would be a peaceful, 24 hour occupation of the V-C's office suite. This was duly agreed to by a General Meeting later that evening and elaborate precautions against vandalism were taken. About 150 students spent the night and vacated the office around two the next day having been given the nod by the V-C that the Security Officers would not take names ostentatiously. As an extra precaution the students vacated the office a few hours earlier than they had announced. No damage was done and the office was cleaned before the students vacated. The V-C agreed to meet with members of the

Executive later that day and according to Rusty Davis, he expressed his surprise and relief at the good state in which his office was left and indicated that it was likely that no charges would be pressed. The students made two more demands: that the Disciplinary Committee would issue daily reports and that the Proctor would issue a statement as to why 400 students had not been charged. Both of these demands were rejected, of course.

This occupation was largely taken as a way of pre-empting more extreme action by more militant students. The demands were purely ritual ones - their fulfillment or rejection would have very little impact on the course of events. It was meant as a purely symbolic gesture and this seems to have been understood by the V-C and his colleagues. It indicates a degree of political understanding between the two sides that was to break down almost immediately.

#### February 26

The first sentence was announced. Ball received an expulsion which would be suspended until he committed another serious breach of the disciplinary code. This was in a sense the moment of truth for the activists. For most students the term had been very quiet - about 150 students had involved themselves in political activity and not much more than twice that number were even well informed about what was going on. The Union realised that the strength of its position ultimately depended on its success in mobilizing mass student support. By lunch-time the campus was plastered with posters proclaiming "student expelled" (though only 200 people gathered in the square for a rally). It was at this point that a Union member who had been present at the hearing explained that the expulsion was in fact "suspended". But this did little to clarify the situation as most students were unclear as to what suspended expulsion actually meant. Given the prevailing atmosphere it is not surprising that the students suspected that the expulsion would be invoked for the most trivial offence.

The Students Union Executive met throughout the day in an attempt to work out a response to the news. The peculiar architecture of the University made it especially vulnerable to a picket. All supplies must be brought through one road running up through the bowels of the University. After consultations with the secretary of the local Trades Council <sup>fateful</sup> / decision was made. A picket was proposed and accepted overwhelmingly by a General meeting. The student judges withdrew from the disciplinary hearings.

The disciplinary hearings themselves had thus provided the means by which the issue of "collective identity" was transformed into victimisation and into a rejection of the legitimacy of the academic community. It was predictable that the students should attempt to make political capital of every move that the disciplinary committee made. It is perhaps less predictable that the committee should have proved such an easy target. A factor that worked to constrain the Disciplinary Committee throughout was its insistence on a limited and legalistic view of its role. They felt it was vital to refrain from any acts that could be construed as politically motivated. "Otherwise we would become the kangaroo court they all think we are", said a judge. They therefore refused to provide any interpretation or clarification of their decisions. Nor did the administration attempt this, always taking the line that the committee was quite independent of them.

The three remaining academic judges obviously tried hard to be fair, though their differing positions on matters of university politics would be clearly seen in their lines of questioning. The major legal difficulty they had to contend with was the lack of clarity about what the law actually was. Lord Annan (para. 104) is quite right to criticise the University for having no clear idea of either what constituted an offence or what was an appropriate level of punishment.

Vice-Chancellors throughout the country have admitted that their disciplinary procedures are in disarray. It may well be that having emerged from the flames of 1968, Essex's procedures are more carefully worked out than most. But at Essex, as at other Universities, the disciplinary procedures are devised and executed by amateurs, by men (inevitably, it seems) who know far more about Yeats or Locke than about legal practice. They will inevitably make blunders. Blunders that, in an atmosphere of consensus, might be reasonably overlooked. But when the very legitimacy of the hearings is questioned as it inevitably will be in any student revolt, these blunders only add fuel to the flame. The Committee's difficulties were mostly of a political nature. They were faced with a complete lack of trust on the part of the students, who did not always behave honestly with them. And the academic advisers of students often took a view which concentrated not on the narrow legal question of whether the offence had been committed but on a general feeling that "if this kind of ordinary decent student is involved, then there is something wrong with the whole business." They gave evidence on the students' behalf on this supposition.

#### February 27-8

The fateful picket was instituted early on the 27th. Variable success in getting lorries to turn back angered the pickets and by evening they had erected a chicane that functioned as a blockade. During the day the head of the Computing Department came down to speak to the picket. He informed them that an important consignment of equipment was due and that if it was not delivered by the end of February the University stood to lose £70,000. This was confirmed by the Pro-V-C and Registrar in their discussions with Rusty Davis during the day. This was giving state secrets to the enemy! At 8 p.m. the students prevented this consignment from arriving. They had now made themselves the focal point of the University.

Once the picket was instituted it was bound to bring the students into head-long confrontation with the University authorities. As a reaction to the disciplinary hearings and the verdicts passed thus far it seems a little extreme. One student had received a suspended expulsion and one student was acquitted. For those who basically accepted the legitimacy of the process the acquittal seemed to demonstrate the fairness of the hearings. The students' response was, for many staff and administration, evidence that the troubles were being caused by a small group who were committed to creating havoc within the University.

The students' assumptions were quite different. Their actions were political actions taken in support of certain goals. These goals had been in no way acknowledged by the administration and disciplinary proceedings seemed only a further denial of their rights to fight for their own interests. Indeed, the way in which the proceedings were conducted seemed to be a denial that students as a collectivity had interests in common. In fact, the whole impact of the disciplinary proceedings was to shift the central issue to one of their responsibilities as collectivity. Ironically the committee did a good deal to make the students' conscious of their existence as a collectivity. The first term's activities had been marked by a kind of modified anarchy. Leadership, to the extent that it existed was momentary, events were shaped by people "doing their thing" much as during the UGC visit. When that spontaneity ran out, there was very little left to the occupation. The disciplinary hearings would be prolonged and dull, they could not be subverted by a series of "happenings". The Union Executive took the leadership by default in the second term, for there was no other political group with the resources necessary to fight that kind of battle. With the Union's assumption of leadership the issues were bound to change because they were not only fighting the administration, they were fighting the political groups on their left. Their very real problem of gaining and maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of the student body was mirrored in their relationship with the administration. From the beginning the Union framed the

issue in terms of collective responsibility. A few people could not be punished for an action that had become Union policy through the assent of hundreds of students. The Students Union Executive saw the problem as one of their survival as a Union. The activists saw that picketing was a real way of exercising control over the University. By now everyone recognised that the real issue was one of control.

#### March 1st-5th

Now that the Students Union was in control, an attempt was made to make contact with staff. After a series of discussions between members of the Executive and a few of the dissident staff, it was agreed to press for an independent enquiry into the dispute. This was seen more as a way of getting both sides off the hook than as a genuine resolution of the dispute, but was a move toward compromise nonetheless. A Student Union meeting overwhelmingly accepted the proposal for an enquiry. The actual motion stated that the pickets would be withdrawn if disciplinary hearings were suspended pending the report of an independent enquiry. The scope of the enquiry would include the disciplinary proceedings. The suggested composition of the enquiry included an outside chairman agreed to by both the V-C and the Students Union, two non-academic members of Council and two members from an outside organisation such as the NUS, NCCL or CAFD. The Executive did not believe that the proposal would be immediately accepted by the administration because of its demand that disciplinary hearings would be suspended. Rather, they hoped it would function as an issue on which students could unite and which might attract staff as a way out of the confrontation.

That day Senate also met. In his opening remarks the V-C described the University as having three options; sit it out, engage in confrontation, or capitulation. For the present it was wisest, if most difficult, to "sit it out". He described the situation as the "hooliganism of a few" and stated that "the price of peace today is anarchy tomorrow". (He obviously needs a speech-writer!)

There was then a vote on whether to continue the disciplinary hearings with 24 in favour, 3 against and 2 abstentions. There was from the student point of view only one promising move from the V-C and that was the suggestion that the acquittal of Heather Dale might be used as a basis on which to dismiss charges against students in similar positions i.e. those charged with simple presence in the occupied area on the evidence of only one witness. But nothing more was heard of this for some time and students did not learn of it.

Heather Dale's case had attracted a good deal of attention from the beginning of the hearing. Cases like this - students who had been charged on the basis of simply being present in the occupation at one time or another - generated a good deal of the hostility towards the hearings on the part of both students and sympathetic staff. Feelings were very divided about those students who had actually caused damage to property, and it might well have been possible to prosecute those individuals without incident. Just before they resigned, the student members of the committee had pressed it to accept Dale's decisions as a precedent. The committee had refused and the V-C's statement at Senate was the first indication that there might be some movement on this issue. It was an indication that reached very few students however - it passed from staff informants to the Students Union Executive who had no particular interest in disseminating this information. The Union would not publicly support any initiatives which <sup>were</sup> divisive i.e. which distinguished between categories of student offence.

The administration issued its second statement of the term, again through a special issue of the University magazine "Nexus". The statement described some of the consequences of the picket. Catering services were restricted (the coffee bar and the bar were both closed within days of the institution of the picket, depriving the students of their two main social centres). Fuel supplies were nearing exhaustion. The coffee bar remained closed for the entire term, the

bar would open and close sporadically as supplies were available. If the weather stayed cold, the University would finish its oil supplies by 9th March. The heat levels in the main buildings had been reduced to 50°. Nobody needed to be told this! Problems about refuse were referred to and paper supplies were described to be at risk. Academic activities had also been seriously affected because of the non-delivery of supplies.

This was an accurate description of conditions. The University was an increasingly uncomfortable place to live and work and this was a direct result of the student picket. But the issues that the pickets supported were ignored. In the absence of an emerging collective identity this tactic might have worked. It is not difficult to imagine that Towers students, deprived of heating and hot water, forced to trek into Colchester for groceries, might mobilize against their peers in defense of creature comforts. This did not happen and is extremely unlikely to happen in any University conflict, unless the administration shows itself to be prepared for a serious discussion of the issues involved - as defined by the students. Talk about law and order cuts very little ice.

It is appropriate here to discuss, very briefly, the whole problem of communications throughout the crisis. The simple transmission of information was a longstanding problem at the University and this was exacerbated by the crisis. Students used two major means of communication: posters were put up announcing meetings and agendas, and mimeographed flysheets were distributed by all of the political factions to the major student gathering places. Frequently there were four or five such flysheets in a single day. Both the bar and the coffee bar had been closed by the end of February, and <sup>a</sup>room off the square given to the Union by the Senate became the "alternative coffee bar" where one could always be certain of picking up the latest student handout. This was not the case for communications from the administration. The only publication directed to the entire university community was Nexus - a magazine that was issued once every fortnight under the



supervision of the University Information Officer, Graham Green. In spite of the editor's efforts this was read largely by administration and staff. Student contributions to it were almost non-existent. This problem in content was reflected in a distribution policy that was strongly geared to administrative and academic staff. 1100 copies were printed - five hundred of which were allocated to the student population of 2100. Three to four hundred were placed on top of the student pigeon holes and twenty each were placed in the various common rooms and restaurants (both used mainly by staff) and the bar. Both the Students Union and the University Radio received copies. Distribution to academic and administrative staff was through the post. It was this distribution system, slightly expanded through which the administration issued its statements. This meant that while those students who were knowledgeable and concerned with the situation could probably get hold of a copy, the great majority of students didn't even know that a statement had been put out. If it was the purpose of the administration to state its case to the students (and it is not at all clear that it was) it could have chosen a more effective means of distribution. In most disputes each side talks mostly to itself, but at Essex this was quite literally true-- the administration communicated through Nexus to staff, while students' flysheets were distributed to students. These separate media of communication meant not only that very little was actually communicated but that each side was able to withhold information from one side that was common knowledge to the other side. The fact that this ploy was used with some success by both sides says a good deal about the kind of community that existed prior to the troubles.

March 6th: General Assembly of Staff

In his opening remarks the V-C stated quite firmly that he was opposed to a policy of confrontation with the students. He repeated what he had earlier said to Senate, that he was sitting out the dispute. The disciplinary committee would continue its hearings, he was convinced that its fairness would become evident to

sufficient numbers of students to end the confrontation. He treated the call for the enquiry as a vote of no confidence in his handling of the dispute and strongly asked for support. It was an effective speech, firm yet seemingly moderate. But he had rejected a proposal which had been seen by both students and critical staff as a compromise, a way of getting both sides off the hook on which they were now well and truly impaled. A motion identical to the one passed at the student emergency General Meeting was put calling for the suspension of hearings and the suspension of the picket pending the report of an independent enquiry. This motion was lost by 123 to 56 with 37 abstentions. A Students Union spokesman bitterly told the "Colchester Evening Gazette": "They have consistently ignored the views of the student union. They have still got their heads in the sand".

For the picket was bound to escalate. An effective picket could only be an illegal one. If a driver was only mildly restrained from crossing a picket line, the pickets were liable to prosecution. Incidents were bound to occur. Indeed, earlier that day an engineer who had tried to make a delivery claimed that he had been harassed and assaulted by the students meaning the picket, and had made an official complaint to the police. The police had visited both to the University administration and the Students Union Executive to talk about the situation. In their talks with the Executive the police stressed the illegality of the picket as it was presently constituted and warned them that they could not ignore violations of the law. At the meeting with the University administration University officials advised the police that they were expecting delivery of the computing equipment that they tried to get in on 27th February and asked for police assistance.

At this point our sources disagree about what happened next. The administration say they asked only for police to be present. They themselves would bring the equipment through, and as they expected a breach of the peace, would the police come on as onlookers? According to them, the police said no - if anyone was to break

the picket, it should be the police. So, in this story, the police insisted on coming in. However, according to a well-placed informant within the police force, the police were at first reluctant to intervene. They had attempted to scare the students and wanted the dispute settled from within the University. However, the University authorities, making no moves for settlement, put great pressure on the police threatening to go to higher levels. The police were trapped within their own duties of enforcing the law, and gave in. What the real story, arrangements were made for next day. The final escalation was now imminent, but in a real sense the University had already lost. The involvement of the police was prima facie evidence of the inability of the established University authorities to keep their own house in order.

But the defeat of the Administration in no way implied the victory of the students.

#### March 7

At 7.30 in the morning the computer equipment was delivered accompanied by the police, the Pro-V-C and senior members of the Computing Department. Students watched quietly as the barricades were dismantled and the lorry came through. News of the police visit spread quickly and with it, anger. A student leaflet was issued in the afternoon stating that the object of the picket must now be to close the University. The head of the Special Operations Squad of the county police force visited the President of the Union and asked her to attend a meeting with the Assistant chief Superintendents for Essex County in the late afternoon. The Student Executive spent most of the day working on a motion to put before the General Meeting that night. The motion would call for increased militancy.- strengthening the barricades, occupying the nearby ballroom as a base and occupying the telephone exchange. The Executive also spent some time talking to their lawyer. There was a meeting with the V-C in which the Union President warned that temperatures were very high and that if forced to return to a 6 man legal picket she could not

guarantee that the next 24 hours would be peaceful. At her meeting with police officials later, they detailed the list of charges on which she and other Union officials could be charged. They included obstruction, theft of University property, and conspiracy. They also advised the Union that if the students attempted another occupation of University property the police would see it as their responsibility to intervene. As the police had hoped, the students emerged from the meeting frightened and chastened. It seemed clear that legally they had no choice but to remove the barricades and institute a legal six person picket. They were worried, not only because of the threat of police action but because the mood of the students. The nature of trade union support was problematic and the students were well aware of the University's ability to hire non-union drivers to make any necessary deliveries. They had tried a legal picket on the first day and had found it ineffective - to return to it now would seem a clear defeat. Nevertheless, at a crowded General Meeting that night, the notion was passed to remove the barricades and return to an official six person picket. To this motion was added other proposals, to (1) call an academic strike from Friday, March 8th; (2) increase attempts to get support from the Trade Union Movement; (3) hold a rally to dissuade any potential students from applying to Essex; (4) continue pressure for an independent enquiry and (5) contact the local and national press "to show them that we ... are not prepared to see continue a University controlled by Albert Sloman". These proposals were merely gestures, giving the sense of action without being actually realisable.

The mood of the students after the meeting was despondent. In the early hours of the morning several students - estimates range from ten to twenty - roamed the campus breaking about £6,000 worth of windows and engaging in some theft (a tape recorder and a typewriter were stolen). While it cannot be ascertained exactly who did the damage indications are that it was a remarkably mixed group -

members of all the main political groups (though the Union officially and forcefully condemned the vandalism) and several first year students not previously involved in political action. This was the most sickening point in the year. When political activists turn to vandalism in their anger and in their frustration there is little hope of a solution. For how can the authorities include vandalism in any compromise? Predictably this was the first time during this term that Essex rated headline treatment in all the national press: "Essex Students Go on £6,000 Wrecking Orgy" "£5,500 Damage as Students Riot"

The students' sense of powerlessness had been steadily increasing. Although they had voted for an academic strike, few were under any illusions that, even if totally effective, it would affect the life of the institution in any real way. Many students felt that a strike would simply enable academic staff to go on with their "real work" - research. The student activists were not only limited in their tactics - they also had no real idea of how much student support they could mobilize. Most of the General Meetings had been well attended by between 500 and 1,000 students and the votes had been overwhelmingly in favour of the activists' positions. Yet there were a relatively small number - perhaps 200 - so far willing to take political action. The "militants" at Essex as elsewhere, characteristically devoted enormous energy to framing proposals and devising procedural strategies for "crucial votes" but in the last analysis, the success of any measure no matter how overwhelmingly approved, depends on the actual physical support of the larger student body.

The students were saved by the Administration, itself now in serious trouble. It had requested police intervention within two hours of a Staff General Assembly in which the V-C had rejected a policy of further confrontation. How could the Administration avoid the charge of double-dealing? This was certainly the feeling

of many moderate students and staff, and support now began to ebb away from the administration. Furthermore, by calling in the police the administration had lost control of the situation. Clearly, once in, the police would have to stay until illegal acts were stopped. The police can turn a blind eye to politically delicate situations, but they cannot appear to play politics themselves. As the Administration's stand through the dispute had been based on enforcing the law, police intervention was the logical development, and arrests and prosecutions the logical outcome. But even the administration was later horrified at this logic.

#### March 8-12

The damage of the night before had transformed the University - always stark in winter - to a scene of devastation. The students living in Towers had already spent a few weeks virtually without heat and hot water. Only the ovens were able to provide heat, and the kitchens were crowded with students warming themselves before the open ovens. The restaurant meals were monotonous and the choice severely limited. There was nowhere to go for a drink. Only the Union Shop and the alternative coffee bar functioned and students and staff alike were feeling the hardships. For the first time that year there was no twinge of pleasure at seeing the University in the National Press - even the most uninvolved students were beginning to take the situation seriously.

The first official acts of right-wing student opposition to Union Policies surfaced. A petition against the academic strike was circulated, and attracted 600 signatures - including some of the left activists. A statement was circulated signed by two students calling for the suspension of the picketing and strike and requesting the "silent majority" to attend union meetings. A leaflet was circulated to foreign students encouraging them to attend meetings, and reminding them that their University careers might be at stake. In response the Students Union issued

its most militant statement thus far. "The V-C is out to stop all forms of collective student action...he will never do this. If there is to be no organized student union then there will be no university."

On the 12th a Union General Meeting served only to confirm the feeling of acute depression. The events of the past few days were summarized--mention was made of attempts to get Trade Union support, disciplinary hearings at other universities and of discontent among the academic staff. The motions passed by the students called for a boycott of the Wavy Line supermarket on campus, and ended the academic strike in recognition that few students were actually participating and even fewer were in real agreement with it.

A personal statement was issued to the members of the staff General Assembly by a physics lecturer, Dr. John Reissland. It provided the first public statement of arguments against the independent enquiry. It argued that a few trouble-makers were to blame, that it was the University's responsibility to maintain law and order, and that the existing disciplinary procedures were fair. An enquiry would give students an incentive to "rampage after any disciplinary action". These arguments were widely heard among conservative scientists whose views were now being quoted in the newspapers, supporting police intervention to defend order and blaming the troubles on a few "agitators" or "militant extremists". But the fact that Dr. Reissland had previously enjoyed a fairly liberal reputation showed the extent to which the science departments had been generally alienated by the student action. They were very sensitive throughout the year to the possible effect of student troubles upon admission figures. Like science departments across the country, they had been experiencing a fall-off in university applications, and feared that adverse publicity would place them in a real crisis. They had also been hardest hit by the picket, for their teaching and research was dependent on regular supplies of equipment. In the past, relatively few of their students had been involved (though this was beginning to change), and so they were

able to operate with a conventional stereotype of "a few trouble-makers". They were also unaware of the considerable head of steam now building up among the student body - shortly to explode.

It is indicative of administration policy throughout the crisis that it was not until 6 days after an independent enquiry had been proposed (and at that period 6 days was a very long time) that any arguments against it were produced, and then by an independent member of the academic staff, and in a message directed only to members of the General Assembly, thus ignoring students altogether. In Dr. Reissland's statement the activists were still being described as "a small group with vested interest". This description might have had some meaning in the first weeks of the occupation; it had none at this point. It is quite true that just as no more than 200 students were consistently involved in the occupation and the events of first term, not many more took active part in the picketing. But, interestingly enough, the stalwarts of the picket line differed from those of the occupation. Fewer were affiliated with IMG and CP (although these groups were still represented) - less obviously political, less flamboyant, less well known. There were now more scientists, involved, more mature students - more students who were willing to fit political activity into their daily routine of lectures and classes. All the glamour of the last term had gone - replaced by the dreary routine of a job that must be done. At last the frivolity of student politics had been left behind. Moreover Students Union meetings had been well attended consistently throughout the term. If many of them had no love for their fellow student activists, they nevertheless shared their distrust and fear of the administration and provided the Union with a large measure of passive support.

#### March 13-14

The last few days of legal picketing had seen the delivery of oil, and food, and the activists, by now committed to closing the University, were despondent. The Disciplinary Committee announced that they were recommending the expulsion of



two students (both identified with IMG), Will Rich and Ronnie Munck. They had been found guilty of obstructing a lecture and classes on November 15th, and the penalty for these offences was expulsion. They had also been found guilty of the three basic offences, for which they were fined. It was also recommended they be excluded from all parts of the University pending their appeal. This was the full "victimisation" that had been long awaited.

That night was an eventful one. There was a march to the V-C's house and a window was broken. There was a small fire in the Maths. Building. Senate met and authorized the V-C to appoint a working party representative of all interest involved to make arrangement for adequate discussion on the issues - it was made clear that this would in no way inhibit the conduct of disciplinary hearings. To the students this seemed laughable. The Union began its preparations to take the matter to court and to try to obtain an injunction against the disciplinary proceedings. A student meeting the following day decided to use the only two weapons left: they reintroduced the barricades, and occupied the ballroom as a convenient social centre. This was within easy access of the picket line should the police come. Just as the occupation of the first term had done, the occupation of the ballroom provided a link between political and social needs. A group of 12 students (mostly women) began a hunger strike in protest, and there was yet another mysterious fire. "The fire brigade and the police have expressed the view that this fire was caused deliverately." "Maintenance men informed the students that it had been caused by an electrical fault." The first quote is from the Registrar, the second from a student handout.

Mick Blank, the Colchester Trades Council Secretary, had provided important encouragement and advice to the students from the beginning. At this point the Trades Council felt it necessary to make a public statement condemning both the window smashing and the presence of police on the campus. They offered to act as mediators but this seems to have been ignored. The Council also stated that they supported the decision of the T & GWU in blacking the University. The support

of the T & GWU was a matter of contention throughout the troubles. In the first week of the picket the NUS officer was requested to negotiate for that union's support. He called the T & GWU and received confirmation of their support for the picket which was passed on to Union Officials at Essex. In fact that T & GWU had not given the students any kind of official backing - the confirmation received over the phone was merely that of an individual. The students did not realise their mistake until well into the term and so continued to insist that they did have Union support in the face of administration denials. When they began to negotiate support for the second time it was clear that the T & GWU was somewhat ambivalent about the issue - students were repeatedly assured that support would be forthcoming and then told that the crucial meeting had been unavoidably postponed. Not surprisingly there was enormous confusion about the issue on the campus. But the students certainly had received many expressions of sympathy from trade union branches, especially those in Essex and Suffolk - and also from the miners, repaying the students' aid in the previous miners strike. They were beginning to feel entitled to a place in the trade union movement.

#### March 15

There was a meeting of the staff General Assembly of which, for the first time, two student observers were permitted to attend. A group of perhaps 30 sympathetic staff members had begun to caucus before each General Assembly to try to plan how to present their views most effectively. Much of their effort was concentrated on the framing of motions and the selection of appropriate people to actually present and second them. Almost from the beginning it had been clear that certain departments were more sympathetic to the student position than others - the stereotype of sociologists on the left and scientists on the right had enough truth in it for the caucus to try to choose its speakers carefully. In fact a little less than half the group was composed of sociologists, slightly fewer people from the literature department and a sprinkling of staff

from politics, computing and economics. They framed the motion that the University should drop disciplinary hearings against students charged with offences of a general nature and proceed only with serious cases. This was as close as the staff had come to a discussion of the students' distinction between collective and individual responsibility. This motion was defeated, but by a smaller majority than the equivalent motion at the last General Assembly - 114 to 74 with 21 abstentions. The academic staff were now completely split, with the administrative staff, numbering about 40, guaranteeing a majority for the V-C. Then a motion was passed condemning the use of physical force, asking the students to desist from the blockade and endorsing the proposal for a working party. A pattern seemed to be developing for General Assemblies - a motion from the left for compromise was defeated, and then countered by one from the right asking the students to "stop it" on the basis of a general principle that few could take exception to.

Earlier that afternoon the police had visited the ballroom and informed the student occupiers that if they stayed they might be subjected to police action. The students stayed. They were nearing the point of no return.

The new Labour government was appearing in a hopeful light to students. Reg. Prentice, The new Education Secretary, promised a review of student grants and a decision within two months. "The Guardian" editorialised that the occupations at Oxford, Kent and Essex should not be rewarded with higher grants, though 99 students out of a 100 - those who want to work hard and get on with their studies - have an unanswerable case for higher grants.

#### March 16-17

The University was the site for a national student conference on "victimisation". About 200 students were present representing Oxford, Kent, Leeds, Leeds Poly and Thames Poly - all contesting disciplinary charges within their colleges. The students excluded the "Colchester Evening Gazette" reporter from the con-

ference in retaliation for an (uncharacteristically) slanted report on how the students were manipulating the local Trades Council. A reporter for "The Observer" walked out in sympathy with him. Relations with the press were already strained. On Sunday the police reported finding an explosive substance on the floor of a chemistry lab and that fact was duly reported in the Press. In fact this substance was one that simply made a crackling noise when stepped on. This appears to have <sup>been</sup> the result of a student grievance internal to the Chemistry Department.

On the night of the 17th, a few members of the major political groups received mysterious anonymous telephone messages warning that there might be some trouble on the picket line early next morning. The Students Union Executive was unaware of this warning. Essex had now reached the point at which its "subversive activities" had received official notice. The Special Branch was now active, posing as press photographers, interviewing activist students in delicate immigrant statures and committing who knows what other undercover activities. The telephone messages were interpreted in this light. We must confess that our techniques of mere sociological journalism cannot penetrate such cloak and dagger stuff!

#### March 18

Early in the morning a sizeable force of police arrived, and after removing the barricades, arrested twelve men and three women on the picket line. A very high proportion of them had been active in the movement and because of the warning were also members of the major political groups - the CP, IMG and IS. Had they been cleverly picked off? The students were subsequently charged with obstruction, and were barred from participating in the picket. After a pause, the picketing resumed. Greatest success was achieved as usual with oil deliveries. After long discussions with students and the administration, the driver told the picketers: "I'm going home. Good luck with your cause."

The Emergency General Meeting of students held that night in the occupied

ballroom was crowded and tense. No new ideas were presented, indeed the students had already been desperately fighting on several different fronts.

The students voted to increase their efforts in strengthening the barricades; mobilizing the larger student body in times of need; contacting other universities for help in maintaining the picket over the vacation; strengthening contacts with staff and unions; planning a demo for the 21st; blacking of applications to the University. Unlike the first term, there was no question but that the action would continue over the vacation. Last term the students had been aware of the irony of stopping political action for Christmas vacation but there had been no hope of maintaining the necessary student support. Now the situation was quite different - the students as well as the administration felt themselves to be at war. Perhaps the most important issue to be decided at the meeting that night was control of strategy during vacation. The increasingly heavy sentences passed by the disciplinary hearings and the ineffectiveness of a legal picket had forced the Union Executive further to the left but they were dominated by the "spineless CP bureaucrats". A motion was made to place all responsibility for decisions made over the vacation on those people actually present, rather than allowing the Union Executive complete power. In a sense this was an attempt to resurrect the democratic General Assembly of the occupation that had dominated the activities of the first term, and appealed to those students who distrusted the secrecy with which the Executive made decisions. The IMG and IS had less obvious considerations in mind. It was clear that many if not most of the pickets during the vacation would be from other colleges and universities and therefore almost by definition, more politically committed than the average student and more likely to be members of the left political groups. The Executive saw

the proposal as an attempt at a left wing putsch and argued strongly against it. It was a measure of how far the executive had come to gain the trust of the student body (or perhaps a measure of how far the IMG had lost it) that the Executive won the vote overwhelmingly.

The students now knew exactly what they were doing and what this would inevitably lead to. Their vote to strengthen the barricades was a direct challenge to the police. Since the arrests of the previous day, they knew that the police must accept the challenge. But this time the students would be present in force, for the arrests had galvanised large numbers of students into action for the first time this term. Many had learned of the arrests from newspapers and radio and television - now they flocked to the ballroom to await the call. Their motives were simple: if the administration would not compromise nor would they. Force would be met with force. Perhaps out of this a solution would have to emerge, but they concentrated on simply showing the university that they would not be beaten.

#### March 19

A statement was issued by the Registrar describing the police action. "Yesterday morning the police visited the University to inspect the barricades on the service road under the podia, which were preventing free access of vehicles to the University. After pickets had been warned, a number of arrests were made as a result of incidents which occurred ... The police have made it clear that blockading the service road is unlawful and if continued they would consider it their responsibility to take action."

This was a tough statement. No regret was expressed at the arrests, only at the costs to the University. The administration had passed the point of no return, having surrendered their initiative to the police. Now all they could hope for

was that students would bow to the superior force of the police.

At this precise moment the Disciplinary Committee announced that charges against ten students had been dismissed without a hearing. No explanation was given, but the Students Union could work out that there were the "Heather Dale" type cases, in which they had hoped for leniency. Yet the lack of explanation angered them - again the university was refusing to explain or justify its actions. And the small gesture was swallowed up in the tenseness of the confrontation.

### March 20

The final escalation now occurred. Both the President and Vice-President of the Students Union had received anonymous phone calls in the early morning warning them that large numbers of police were preparing to visit the University once again. By 8.30 a.m. people were being organised to spread the word to the students in Towers should the police arrive. Shortly before 10 an oil lorry arrived, accompanied by <sup>no less than</sup> 200 policemen. The barricades were removed by maintenance men while the police and the Pro-V.C. stood by watching. The news spread quickly and within minutes at least 500 students had assembled under the podia, while another 500 watched from balconies and hills. A brief meeting was held in the Ballroom to decide what to do. The Union president requested the students to show their opposition by massing in front of the police but to give way when the lorries began to come through. The students' spontaneous reaction was a bit different, however. They linked arms and tried to resist the police and the lorries with the force of their bodies. The groups were facing each other, the students under the podia facing the rows of police behind which were the lorries. The claustrophobia of the University's architecture reaches its peak on this delivery road under the main buildings - a wide, sunken road, dark and gloomy, commanded by all kinds of balconies and platforms from which hesitant students can witness the confrontation and be drawn inevitably into it.

The police now began pushing the students back as the lorries moved through. The students pushed back, chanting, "Don't scab, turn back". The space under the podia is narrow and students were pushed against the wall and against each other as the police and lorries slowly made their way forward. The police were well prepared in their riot techniques - the maximum of organised force with the minimum of violence. Several arrests were made and the students were dragged away, sometimes with considerable force. This happened twice, for after the first lorries were escorted through, the students re-formed. Within the hour the students realised that people who they had become accustomed to look to for leadership throughout the term were gone. Only one of the organising committee was left, and he wore a distinctly hunted look, eyeing two policemen who were obviously sticking close to him. Several of the leaders had been arrested on the 18th and were therefore barred from participation in the picket, and most of the others had been taken in the two waves of arrests. It had been decided that the Union President must not be arrested and she stayed on the sidelines agonisedly watching this seemingly endless process. It later seemed remarkable that in this situation there was not more violence and panic. At 1 p.m. the Union President went to see the V.C. She entered just as two staff members left - they had been demanding that the V.C. do something and he had asserted his powerlessness. She informed him of the situation and asked him to come down. He refused, explaining that he was awaiting a telephone call from Parliament about a Question that was to be put before the House. He further asserted that he had no power to get the police to withdraw, and he refused to stop deliveries.

After a short lull, another lorry arrived and the police again moved forward in strength. There were about 250 of them by now, in impeccable military order. Their tactics were now clear to all those present. A wedge of policemen drove forward into the centre of the line, with the sole object of pulling out the stu-



dents in the middle of the front line. As the students were not offering violent resistance, this was easily accomplished. These students were hurled back through the police lines and arrested. The police moved <sup>to</sup> the second line, consolidating their territorial gain by moving up the lorry behind them so that the students could not re-form. In each of these waves about 30 students were arrested.

After each wave more students poured down. Those watching got drawn into the line, being replaced by others coming down from the University. Students do not come from violent cultures and most were clearly shocked by this struggle. It was for them a crisis of conscience, a test of character, resolved by suddenly rushing to join in. The Latin American students - there are a substantial number at Essex - were conspicuous as bystanders, mixing a fear of getting into trouble with foreign authorities, with a loudly-voiced superiority - "You call this police violence? You ought to come to Montevideo!"

For many watching staff the experience was unforgettable and unforgivable. A group of staff interposed themselves between the picket and the police - partly the same group that had formed the dissident caucus but with some very excited additions. A heated argument broke out between them and the Pro-V.C. who was there co-operating with the police. Standing calmly by in dark glasses, looking remarkably like a Tonton Macoute, he drew considerable verbal flak and retaliated in kind. Then the group tried to speak to both sides in an attempt to stop the confrontation. At midday, Peter Townsend - Professor of Sociology, and hitherto uninvolved - succeeded in arranging a meeting between the Union Executive, Officers of the police, and the administration. Present at that meeting were the five remaining members of the Executive who had not been arrested, two senior officers of the police, two faculty members who had been instrumental in arranging the meeting, and the V.C., and the senior members of the administration.

The police explained that it was their responsibility to ensure that any deliveries would be escorted through the lines - if the students withdrew, they would also withdraw. The students were on their side committed to stopping deliveries. It seemed to both the students and the police that the only solution lay in suspending deliveries and suspension of the disciplinary hearings until the 22nd - the day the High Court was due to deliver its verdicts on the legality of the Hearings (challenged by the students).<sup>(1)</sup> This the V.C. felt unable to do. Rusty Davis and Professor Townsend returned under the podia and spoke to the students. Townsend tried to represent the fact that they had met with the V.C. as some sign of progress, but the students were far too angry to accept this. 90 students had been arrested - 78 men and 12 women. This included one student who was broadcasting calls for all students to join those already under the podia. It did not include two students who had been distributing leaflets but fled when threatened with arrest. Around three it was announced that deliveries to the University would be stopped and the students and police dispersed. Police pressure on the University was probably responsible for the suspension.

It the late afternoon there was a meeting of the Language Centre - it if worth noting that this was the one instance of all the members of a department meeting together - it included undergraduates, postgraduates, teaching and technical staff. "While recognising the very serious implication of interrupting the established disciplinary procedures, this group of members of the Language Centre feels that ... continuing arrests and disruption of University life are greater threats to the survival of our institution and therefore urges the immediate suspension of current disciplinary proceedings."

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(1) Lord Annan (paras 115-6) wrongly implies that the proposal was for an unspecified period of suspension.

A postgraduate student circulated a petition among the staff requesting the DES intervene. 76 staff members signed in a space of two hours, and a telegram was hastily despatched. The reply from Mr. Prentice, the Minister of Education, was dusty - he had every confidence in the University authorities. (1)

This was a day that none of the participants will hurriedly forget. The students' behavior was deeply impressive. They were determined not to be broken by the successive police charges, yet their resistance was almost entirely passive. After each police break-through and wave of arrests, students poured down from the University and re-formed their line. At the end of the day, the front-line consisted of students who had not been hitherto involved in the events. The proportion of women in the front-line grew, as the police were reluctant to arrest them. To their credit, the police were also tightly controlled. Though all the students and staff present got very excited, there had been very little violence, certainly less than most of the press implied next day: "Students shouting obscen<sup>ities</sup>/ were carried away by policemen who had lost their helmets as they fought to get delivery vans through a mob of 500 which included some lecturers". (Daily Telegraph) "Fists flew and helmets were knocked off as the student protest against "Victimisation" broke into a running battle with police" (Daily Mail - with the Sun giving almost identical wording). This was not an accurate summation of the whole situation - and the only lecturer involved in the picket lines was apparently from a London Polytechnic not Essex.

The senior police officers also behaved constructively in supporting Professor Townsend's peace initiative and in pressurising the University to suspend deliveries. This was particularly impressive as it implied an admission of a

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(1) As Lord Annan comments (para. 129) this telegram showed a lack of understanding by the dissidents of the importance of University autonomy in national educational policy.

mistake on their part. Their show of strength was based on definite, and supposedly expert, advice that the students could not stand up to massive riot control tactics. When they were proved wrong, they realised that another solution must be found. This flexibility contrasted greatly with the obstinacy of the University authorities.

Many academics were shocked at the day's events and appalled at the administration's lack of response. A proposal to enter the V.C.'s office and refuse to leave until he came down to talk to the students had come from a hitherto uninvolved academic; a group of others had lost their tempers and shouted at the Pro-V.C. Perhaps the most distinguished scientist in the University, Professor Brook Benjamin, F.R.S., followed the arrested students down to the police station and spent four hours collecting cigarettes, clothes and parental addresses and giving advice. Staff opinion was now moving rapidly, if rather emotionally, against the V.C.

Police intervention in University conflict is always traumatic. It is experienced as a shocking violation of the integrity of the community and it therefore tends to radicalize sections of the population who were not previously involved. The ambiguities of the early conflict are swept away and both staff and students rush to join the battle between good and evil. This is the scenario for university conflicts in America and it is modified in England only because the police have a relatively favorable reputation in the public eye. The shock is nevertheless profound and it frequently can lead to unbearable degree of involvement and polarization. For example, after the riot at Columbia University, New York, in 1968, normal business all but ceased while students and staff divided into groups that held endless angry (and ultimately cathartic) meetings about the structure of the University. It might have been ultimately more healthy if something like this had happened at Essex. For a variety of reasons, not least

of which was the timing of the intervention - 2 days before Easter vacation was due to start - this did not happen and the wound was allowed to fester.

This is not to say that the institution did not respond to the crisis. Senate passed a resolution expressing deep distress, "at the events of the past few days ..." and rather tentatively accepted a share in the responsibility for compromise and agreed to the setting-up of an independent inquiry while supporting the continuation of the disciplinary hearings.

The students held a demo in Colchester that marched past the police station to the University. About 1,400 students were present, and met for a meeting in the Square where a sympathetic member of Senate informed them of the results of the Senate meeting. They were unimpressed by the acceptance of an independent enquiry, unaccompanied by suspension of disciplinary hearings. The report that the Deans of Comparative Studies and the Physical Science had expressed their determination that 100% of the student body be arrested rather than have the disciplinary hearings stopped seemed to them to state clearly the crux of the conflict.

It became known that the V.C. had asked departmental chairmen to pick six students at random to meet with him to discuss plans for a projected "teach-in," on the situation. This had been planned for over a month, before the confrontation with the police. This, the first effort on the V.C.'s part to actually meet with students, was viewed with hostility as it once again ignored the claims of the Union to represent students (a claim that by now had become widely accepted). In asking faculty members rather than students to pick their own representatives, the V.C. was once again ignoring the students' claim to be treated as adult members of the community. The students' response to this was to invade the V.C.'s office - over 100 managed to cram themselves in - and engage in a noisy and hostile dialogue. The students were particularly concerned about rumours that bail had been denied for those arrested. They said

they would leave if he called the police and requested bail. This he refused to do. At 7 p.m. the V.C. said that he had to leave and the students somewhat sheepishly vacated his office.

The academic staff were feeling their impotence as well. After the first arrests on the 18th there had been some attempt to call another general assembly --there was no prospect of one being called before the end of term and so Professors Townsend and Benjamin convened an ad hoc meeting of academic and administrative staff. It had no formal status but arose out of the urgency of the situation. About 80 staff attended, with the dissidents somewhat overrepresented. A vote of no confidence in the V.C. was passed by 56 votes to 10. It was decided to repeat this vote in a secret ballot of all staff, administered by the two convenors. In a somewhat odd concession to the more conservative academics present, it was decided to keep the result secret. The tellers would convey it only to the V.C. So far as we are aware no-one else does know the result, but we suspect that the V.C. received quite a fright from it. The academic community suddenly seemed like an officers' club which decides to leave a fellow-officer along with his suicide weapon!

The two professors seemed the ideal peace-makers. Widely respected for their personal integrity and generosity as well as their academic distinction, they neatly represented the two main sides of the university, science and social science. They had not yet been involved in the dispute and their advice could not be lightly brushed aside by students or administration. But <sup>if</sup> it was brushed aside, would they be tough enough to persist?

The staff were now demoralised. While still divided about the fundamental issues, there was general discontent with the University's handling of the dispute. On the 23rd "The Times" quoted "a leading member of the administrative staff" as saying "Dr. Sloman is a brilliant committee man, but he has not got the knack of handling personal relations. What we have desperately needed this week is a vice-chancellor prepared to roll up his sleeves, go down to the barricades and talk things out with the militants." Times must be bad when such men leak

criticism. Yet the V.C. was still talking mainly to the outside world. "We mustn't duck the issues here. The question is whether a university is a place where reason prevails. This is the crunch and it affects far more universities than just Essex." (The Observer, 24<sup>th</sup> March)

This was the last day of term, but few students attended classes and almost as few made preparations to go home. The activists finally found themselves at the head of a mass movement. The barricades were strengthened, though amended after consultation with the fire brigade about fire risk. The occupied ballroom was both the social and organizational centre of the movement, and picketing rotas were planned for the vacation. The 12 hunger strikers ended their fast, having survived 192 hours taking only liquids. The University was cold, cheerless and existing on iron rations. Were staff beginning to use student essays for toilet paper?

It had needed 105 arrests - 5% of the student body - to produce a peace move from any University authority. Senate's acceptance of an independent enquiry was a genuine move for compromise. Unfortunately, the same event that had moved it had also outraged the students against the University. The move was seen as too little, too late. The Students Union now formally stated its minimum conditions for an enquiry - that it should include in its terms of reference the present hearings of the disciplinary committee and that the hearings and any sentences already passed should be suspended pending the result of the enquiry.

#### March 25th

The University Council met and supported Senate's decision that an independent enquiry should be mounted and that hearings continue. They explicitly rejected the Union's claims of collective responsibility for damage and

and disruption and authorised the Chairman of Council to take any action necessary to end the unlawful picketing or blackades. The Chairman of Council, Sir John Ruggles-Brise, was authorised to recommend an individual to carry out the enquiry after consultation with the Students Union. It left the terms of reference of the enquiry to be determined after consultation with General Committee of Senate and the Students Union but it reiterated Senate's decision that the enquiry should not prejudice the disciplinary hearings.

The acceptance of consultation with the Students' Union was an important step towards a possible reconciliation - provided it was adhered to!



~~Bomb Alert~~

"BOMB ALERT OVER STUDENT TERROR GANG"

Under this headline, the "News of the World" on March 31st printed this story:

3/3/74

# BOMB ALERT OVER STUDENT TERROR GANG

FEARS are growing that a sinister new gang of extremist students, as dangerous as the Angry Brigade, may step up a campaign of violence which will harm members of the public.

The group, calling themselves Nihilists, are already engaged in a frightening battle with the authorities at Essex University, Colchester.

Now there are threats that the anarchy will be spread from the campus to the town—and worried MPs plan to call attention to the dangers in the Commons this week.

The small band of rebels, whose activities are shrouded in a cloak of secrecy, are alleged to have warned a local newspaper that they will launch a bombing campaign in Colchester's streets.

Already the rebels have been blamed in newspaper reports for:

- CAUSING £5,500-worth of damage to campus buildings and to the home of Dr Albert Sloman, the university Vice-Chancellor.
- WRECKING the new Woolworth's store in the town's shopping centre by starting a £3 million blaze.
- USING firebombs and explosives in incidents at the university. And trying to intimidate Dr Sloman, whom they have declared their Enemy No 1.

## Infiltrate

Undercover police ordered to infiltrate the new organisation are worried by the students' near impregnable security system. "Their efficiency startles us," said one senior officer. "They check and double-check everyone."

## News of the World Special Investigation

And another detective said: "We just can't forget that the Angry Brigade had its roots in Essex University."

Last week reporter Franklyn Wood visited the riot-torn Essex campus, where most of the 2,100 students are on holiday, to investigate the allegations. He reports:

In isolated parkland surrounding the university, I came face to face with a group wearing Belfast-type scarves and masks.

They knew I was a reporter and blocked the way. I asked them to let me through.

They said: "Who is stopping you? Walk through us." But they stood still.

I turned to walk back and found a second group behind me. I felt trapped.

For half an hour they harangued me about being a lackey of the Imperialist Press, the inadequacies of society and the university system.

No one touched me but I was frightened and I decided to leave.

They allowed me to go but the group barring my way forward stood and jeered as I went.

Colchester's MP, Mr Anthony Buck, was a press-



DR ALBERT SLOMAN

ing for a Commons debate on Friday, said: "I remain gravely concerned about the state of affairs at the university. Parliament must discuss it."

"We wish to see Essex returned to what it should be, an asset to the area, not a revolutionary centre."

He is supported by Mr Julian Risdale, MP for Harwich, who said: "My constituents are frightened of what might happen."

"The situation is now so dangerous that I think a Select Committee should inquire into it."

"I've been told explosives have been found there. The Minister of Education can't turn a blind eye to intimidation and physical violence."

"I find it difficult to explain to parents of other children why so much

money is being wasted on militant students who don't seem to want to work."

But an executive member of the Essex Students Union, Mr Jeff Bayliss, who was manning a picket outside the university yesterday, said: "The union condemns these threats in the strongest terms. They're completely counter-productive."

"The group's claim to have taken explosives from the chemistry department is unfounded. Nothing is missing."

## Campaign

"We doubt their capability to implement the threats. And we don't accept their claim to have done the damage in the university."

The man at the centre of the storm, 53-year-old Dr Sloman, said he thought less than 5 per cent of his students were causing the unrest.

"I've been subjected to an intense personal campaign," he said. "I hope reason will prevail in the end."

"Some people are suggesting the university should be closed. But I'll do my best to keep it open while the vast majority here condemns violence."

● Nihilists, who first appeared as terrorist revolutionaries in Czarist Russia, are dedicated to the overthrow of existing society.

This is not a typical press report about Essex, for the "News of the World" is not a typical newspaper, but it is only an extreme version of the general media presentation of the University. The report uses a basic technique of sensational journalism--give great prominence to wild allegations, but be careful to tuck in an official denial near the end. A certain care has also been exercised about the presentation of the allegations in this case: note that the three basic "bombing" incidents are taken from other newspaper reports, and the reporter seems wary of claiming them as statements of facts. This is understandable, given that only the first one - The £ 5,500 of damage - has any real substance, and that was the result of window smashing, not bombing (the night of March 7th). The reference to the Woolworth's fire is quite shocking. Not only have no statements ever been made by police, fire brigade or any authority, linking the fire to Essex students, but we have been unable to trace any newspaper reports blaming students for this. As for the "firebombs and explosives" used in "incidents at the university", the only possible basis of fact here is the chemistry lab incident of March 16th we mentioned earlier, which involved a substance which crackles when stepped on. Again we have not found newspaper reports alleging more concrete facts than this (which had itself been dismissed as a practical joke effect in the Colchester Express of March 25th).

But what about the so-called "Nihilists" themselves? Though each newspaper which publicised such a group gave it a different title, they did have grounds to believe that it existed. "A mystery man with a soft Transatlantic voice" claiming to represent a breakaway group from the "Essex Industrial [Independent?] Activists" phoned the Colchester Evening Gazette to say that "certain equipment" from the chemistry department had been stockpiled to start a fire campaign campus; "hooded men" threatened to use explosives at a

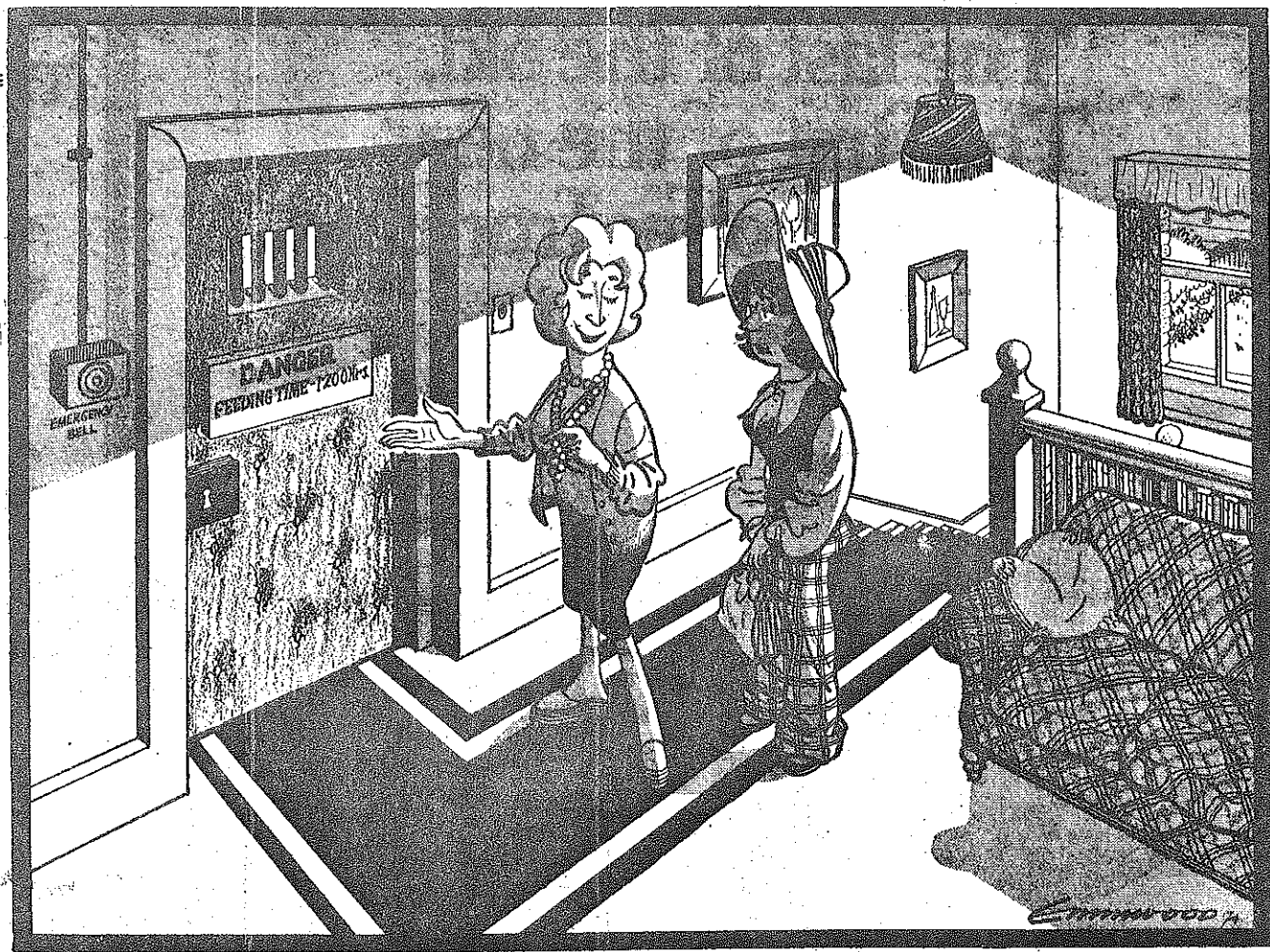
"secret press conference" on campus, reported the Colchester Express; and a similar group of hooded men have here confronted the News of the World reporter. Yet nothing was missing from the chemistry department; there were no bombings; and the fires were minor and contentious, as we have reported. So what was going on? We have been unable to trace any link at all between this supposed "gang" and the leading student activists. We have been told that the "hooded men" were students, but that they were deliberately hoaxing the press, and that they were delighted at being able to "frighten" a News of the World reporter. The Colchester Express also appeared to come to the conclusion that it was a hoax in its report of March 28th. But we have no very hard evidence on this, and it remains something of a mystery. If it was a hoax it indicates enormous irresponsibility on the part of some students. For the press either swallow the hoax and print reports which are extremely damaging to the student case, or they do not and their hostility toward students is increased.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the News of the World report is the outraged statement by the local conservative M.P. Julian Ridsdale, reacting to having been told that explosives have been found at Essex. When press reports continually exaggerate, albeit vaguely, the "violence" of the Essex events an apparent statement of fact like this (which had appeared in newspapers like The Daily Telegraph before the university denied it) can seem reasonable. The university has had to contend with various conservative politicians making angry statements about it - it seems to us that they and the press should check their facts before rushing in. The worst feature of Essex University is its relationship with the outside world. The strength of the national stereotypes about the university is revealed in this Emmwood cartoon appearing in the

Daily Mail of August 1st 1974. It is, of course, funny. But to anyone at Essex it is also tragic. For the Mail would not print such a cartoon unless it believed that its readers would spontaneously equate Essex with violence.

unless it believed that its readers would react spontaneously would spontaneously equate Essex with violence

Mail 1-9-74



'And this is Roger's little den—he's studying at Essex University !'

### Conclusion

The structure of the Spring term had been simple and stark. The administration and the students had made their demands and chosen their weapons and the battle was on. There was a curious inevitability about the events of the term. The students had made a substantial offer of compromise but only in the knowledge that the Administration would find it unacceptable. The Administration had made no compromise at all. The Administration's chosen weapon was the disciplinary committee, and this had ground on throughout the term. It was to reconvene at the beginning of the summer term. Once under way it was both formally and in real terms, independent of the administration itself. The administration would make no moves toward compromise because it would not prejudice that independence. On the other hand the administration did not want to escalate the dispute still further. That was forced upon it by the resistance of the students. The students had come upon their weapon rather later, and it took them time to make the picket potent. The fact that both weapons, the disciplinary committee and the picket, took considerable time and organizing ability to implement, had brought the Student Union Executive into undisputed leadership of the students. Now the politics of the dispute were stable enough to permit a compromise. As the Executive were, above all, politicians they were quite prepared for this and preferred an independent enquiry in return for temporary suspension of the disciplinary proceedings. But their political model failed to make contact with the administration's judicial model. The fight was still on at the end of term. What would Summer Term bring? After six weeks it would bring examinations, the most potent method of discipline universities possess. Very few student movements survive its pressures. Yet many students had apparently passed the point of no return where they valued not being

beaten more than they valued an exact class of degree. 104 were awaiting trial<sup>(1)</sup>, and the charges against them would still be increased. Anything could happen.

Deprived of any means of manoeuvre the students were forced into increasing reliance on the one effective weapon they possessed - however dangerous they knew that weapon to be. The administration, by refusing on principle to see the conflict in political terms adhered to a legalistic model that gave no recognition to the issues as defined by the students. The administration defined their task as the guardians of law and order without admitting any legitimacy to the question of whose law and order for what? The administration, like the students, felt that their backs were against the wall - they too saw no options. Given this definition of the situation the appeal to the police was inevitable. Unlike the students at Columbia and Berkeley, Essex activists were not anxious for police intervention. American radicals could rely on a minimum level of police brutality that would immediately enrage the majority of the University community. This is not the case in England and was certainly not the case at Essex. But a significant shift of opinion did occur. The events of the 20th made it clear to the community that student support for the activists, however latent and qualified it had been, was widespread and would be mobilized in any confrontation. The intervention of the police also made it clear that the ideal of an academic community based on consensus so staunchly defended by the Administration through the workings of the disciplinary committee was "inoperative". In one sense, whatever happened in the third term was bound to be anti-climactic--the students had made their point--force, not consent, was at the base of the academic community. The events had brought both sides to the edge of the abyss; it remained to be seen what use they would make of this knowledge.

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(1) The 105th was a senior lecturer from a London Polytechnic.

## Chapter 4

## From Easter Onwards

When confronted by the abyss, the most sensible, if not the most dignified, policy is to scramble backwards as rapidly as possible. The third term might best be understood in these terms. Both the Administration and the students made concessions but they were concessions designed to extricate the opponents from positions that had become untenable--they were not moves towards real reconciliation. Police intervention had convinced many on both sides of the dispute that if the conflict continued, both sides could only lose. It remained to be seen whether a serious discussion of the issues could emerge.

Easter Vacation

People had by now become accustomed to the constant presence of small groups of police on campus and for the most part, the vacation was uneventful. The students had recognised that further confrontations with the police would only result in more court cases and would lessen the strength of the picket. Already 104 (one of those arrested -- a Lebanese student -- had been killed in a car crash during the vacation) were barred from picketing by the conditions of bail. While deliveries slowly trickled in, the remaining student activists were not totally disconsolate. Hundreds of students from dozens of colleges and universities had manned the picket line, and while the NUS conference at Liverpool had refused to black the University for prospective students (arguing that this would ensure a highly conservative student entry), they were prepared to support the students with both money and manpower. This conference had also taken



the controversial step of trying to prevent fascist and racialist speaker from addressing university meetings. The press vigorously attacked this interference with free speech, and in their editorials often pointed to Essex as a university where "militants" could exercise tyranny. Those observers who dismissed the troubles at Essex as yet another instance of its unique pathology would have done well to note the strong support Essex received from the hundreds of students who gave up their Easter vacation to stand on the picket line. The University made no attempt to bring in supplies for the first few weeks of the vacation and students were relieved of the pressure to erect illegal chicanes and barricades. Deliveries were gradually resumed in the beginning of April but now numbers were on the side of authority. Lacking the numbers (and enthusiasm) for another full scale confrontation, the students behaved with caution -- erecting a chicane when deliveries arrived without a police escort and allowing the chicane to be dismantled when the police appeared. This had the effect of bringing the police to the campus on a regular basis and the students eventually decided to maintain a legal six person picket. This decision was based on a realistic assessment of resources. The five or six hundred students necessary for a physical defense of the picket were simply not available during the vacation. The removal of the barricades was also a relatively costless gesture of conciliation to the unions on campus, and if the legal picket was to be effective, support from that sphere was now more important than ever. This support, if it was to emerge, could only come as the result of prolonged and, above all, private, negotiations. Three mature students, all with extensive experience in trade

unions, conducted these rather difficult negotiations. It was largely because of their success with the oil lorries, laundry service and BRS that the picket remained effective throughout the term.

There was some indication that the academic and administrative staff were anxious to avoid further confrontation as well.

The first General Assembly of staff ever called in the vacation met on March 26th. The mood of the staff had changed--Senior professors were now leading the criticism of the Administration. The V\*C made a surprisingly conciliatory opening statement. He expressed regret for past events and assured the meeting that he was making strenuous efforts to find an appropriate person to conduct the Independent Enquiry. His moderation and the sudden attempt at compromise rather took the wind out of the would-be opposition. A motion of no-confidence had been prepared but was not put. Instead, Professor Townsend put a motion tightening up the planned enquiry. It emphasized the necessity for genuine consultation with the Student Union in determining the membership of the Enquiry and stated that the Enquiry should clearly cover the workings of the disciplinary committee. The real crux of the motion lay in the sentence that the Committee of Enquiry should be given time to report its preliminary hearings before the present Disciplinary and Appeals machinery was activated next term. This was a compromise move toward the student demand that hearings and sentences be suspended pending the report of the enquiry. The motion got the support of all but the most loyalist staff (108 votes to 58 with 26 abstentions). In part this vote reflected the degree to which many

academics in the center were simply uninformed about the issues involved. "Yes, I'm pleased it passed but I don't really understand--it only reiterated what we all knew." --said a lecturer in the Chemistry department. In fact, the administration had thus far given no indication that the proceedings of the disciplinary committee would be affected in any way by the proposed enquiry. Nevertheless, the meeting had indicated a strong move towards compromise. But given the General Assembly's status as an advisory body, it was easy for the administration to ignore the motion. The meeting, coupled with the onset of the vacation, eased the pressure on the administration. Neither of the dissident professors pressed their criticism further, and the V-C was let off the hook.

On the 27th of March the Registrar issued a summary of the verdicts and sentences of the most recent hearings of the judiciary committee. Some of the most prominent members of the occupation were either acquitted or let off with small fines. The one exception to this was Halford Hewitt who was expelled from the University and fined £ 75. This brought the total of students expelled to three.

Two of the three students, Rich and Munck, were highly political in their orientation and believed to be affiliated with IMG (In fact Rich was sympathetic to the organization but not a member.) It was on their behalf that the Union appealed to the High Court against the ruling of the judicial committee. Their appeal was rejected. While their views were certainly to the left of those of most students, their commitment commanded a certain amount of respect. Most importantly, they accepted and worked within the

framework of student politics. That is, they saw their task as mobilizing support for their views within student meetings. However Machiavellian and devious their plotting may have been, it was directed towards gaining student support. They consistently argued for particular policy alternatives and, for the most part, abided by the decisions of student meetings. Halford was another cup of tea. Flamboyant and reckless, he was at the forefront of the most daring (and ill-fated) student manoeuvres. Despite this he had a relatively conservative (in any other context, liberal) view of the aims of the student action. In his view (like that of many moderate staff) Essex had no sense of community - it was not a nice place to live and work. Unlike many of the activists, he saw no links to the struggles of the working class - he simply felt it would be nicer if students had more control over their lives. He had been committed to the occupation for the rare bit of sociability it brought to the campus, and at the end - when there was less than a dozen people left - organised the clean-up. (He also, briefly, and with less success, managed the alternative coffee bar.) At one point he was described in the media as a "situationist" and this is not far off the mark. While his goals were relatively modest, his behaviour in the event was extreme.

Interestingly, Hewitt commanded respect among some of the more hard-line administrators. While not enthusiastic at his presence at the University one man said, "But I'd have him as a squadron leader any time!" Student attitudes towards him were ambivalent and, as the situation worsened, increasingly hostile. The left-wing students saw him as incurably

liberal and irresponsible. His Etonian background and wealthy family were much remarked upon and eventually became the explanation of his irresponsible behaviour - "You know his godfather is Alec Douglas-Home -- what's he got to lose?" Perhaps his most unforgivable crime was his air of irony and distance from the proceedings. Most of his exploits never quite came off, but he had style - a very rare quality for all sides to the dispute. Most students and staff of all political persuasion were quite willing to serve him up as the sacrificial lamb. He was certainly a victim in the sense that he took extremist student rhetoric seriously, and engaged in some foolhardy action, would look round with surprise to see that nobody else was with him.

But the expulsion of the three students was not the only source of continuing student bitterness.

Throughout the vacation the Union Executive and University officials had been in sporadic contact in an effort to agree on the chairman for the Enquiry. The Union had been presented with a list of five names for their comment. It included Lord Annan, Sir Peter Venables and Lord Ashby. The five were all university administrators, men in positions very similar to that of Vice Chancellor. The Students Union responded to what they saw as a partisan list with some equally biased suggestions - Jimmy Reid, Laurence Daly and Jack Collins. The point they wished to underscore was that this was primarily a Union issue and required someone with appropriate experience. The Administration's reaction to this was silence. After some

time the Union suggested that one person from each list be chosen, plus a chairman experienced in both education and Trade unions - someone like the President of NUS, the Director of Ruskin or the President of the NUT. It is difficult to know how seriously the Union made these proposals - it is certainly true that they found the Administration's proposals insulting, and the possibility exists that they tried to construct an equally insulting list of their own. There was no contact between the two sides for several weeks. The Administration's problem was that no one would do the job. The Union then heard rumours that Christopher Price, a Labour MP interested in educational affairs had expressed willingness to chair the Enquiry and moreover was favoured by the Department of Education and Science. The issue was presented to the V.C. As he was already pressing Lord Annan to do the job, he was rather embarrassed. He advised the students that as speed was the first priority it was vital to get someone who already knew something about the University. He said "We will consult you again after the appointment has been made."

The hope that an Independent Enquiry could somehow resolve the dispute was doomed to failure. It was based on the assumption that there existed enough consensus between the two sides to allow for one individual to be acceptable to both. It was evident almost immediately that this consensus did not exist. Moreover it was becoming increasingly clear that this was not simply a disagreement over principles - the inviolability of the disciplinary procedures and the right to give and attend lectures on the one hand, and the issue of collective responsibility on the other.

Rather it was a more fundamental argument over power - the power of students to participate in the decision-making process. The Senate had stipulated that the Chairman of the Enquiry be selected after consultation with appropriate Student Union officials. It was significant that consultation in fact consisted of the presentation to the Student Union of five suggestions, all of whom occupied roles very similar to that of the V.C. When this list was inevitably rejected, the students were then told they would be consulted after the appointment had been made.

It is in this light that we must re-examine the "political insensitivity" of the administration - the early lack of communications with students, the unsympathetic nature of the communication when it did emerge, the accidental exclusion from the first meeting of the Disciplinary Committee. The political insensitivity critique is essentially one of the style of management. What it overlooks is that this insensitivity is in fact a reflection of the denial that the problems of running a community based on consensus are unavoidably political. Decisions made without the participation and agreement of the interested parties can be enforced only by coercion, and it is here that the notion of a liberal academic community based on the rational exchange of ideas rang so hollowly in the ears of most students. So long as University Administrations sees no need to involve the students in actual decision-making, the students are bound to see rational debate as a facade that masks the real coercive machinery of disciplinary action and exams.

On March 28th, the trade unions represented on campus proposed a ten point peace plan (largely written by ASTMS) to both sides. They called upon the University to give the Students' Union formal recognition as the agent responsible for student representation and bargaining. They called for disciplinary procedures to place on students the same constraints as those for all university employees while at the same time giving them similar grievance procedures. They also asked that consideration be given towards providing a Union building to be managed by the Union and towards the student feeling that academics place more emphasis on research than teaching. This was the first mention of the need for a Union building.

The document had suggestions to make to the students as well. It implied that the present Union constitution was inadequate for management responsibility. It argued that students must accept the constraints of civil law and that offences to people and property may well be cause for dismissal and that such dismissal must be contested through proper grievance procedures and the courts, and that interference in teaching and research are threats to academic freedom and are not acceptable.

Ironically enough the Trade Union statement formulated some of the students' grievances far more effectively than the students ever did. For a number of reasons, not least guilt about their privileged status as students, and their desire to assert their communality with the working class, the students had always phrased their demands in economic terms - this was one reason that Halford had little support - and yet it was also



the quality of their lives that students were dissatisfied with. This explained their eventual mobilization to political activity. Certainly students were poor and getting poorer every year, But in a sense the deprivations that were hardest to bear were very concrete social ones-- the structural loneliness of the campus, the lack of places outside the Towers to meet, the lack of a variety of available activities, and the awkward distance from a town with little to offer. These social deprivations culminated in the feeling they had little control over this environment. This was more pervasive than poverty and more difficult to adjust to. A union building controlled by the students might be a possible solution.

In the next few days, Geoff Hurst, chairman of the campus ASTMS branch, invited representatives from the unions, administration, and students executive to a meeting to discuss the ten-point plan. For the first couple of hours the discussion was in general terms and the unions formed the impression that the Administration was not sympathetic to most of the ten points. Towards the end, the unions made an attempt to offer a concrete proposal for getting out of the confrontation and they asked the Students' Union Executive whether they would be prepared to end the picketing if a Students' Union building were offered. <sup>The</sup> / students replied negatively: they did not have the authority to go back on the original aims of the protest, - to protest against the disciplinary committee. Now the campus unions became impatient with what they saw as student intransigence and they left the meeting with little achieved and less sympathy for the students. Disenchanted with both sides, the

Unions turned their attention to the very real issue of job security for their members, jeopardized by the success of the student blockade.

N.P. // Later in the year, the Unions' proposal would provide the basis for negotiations. They had made an important start in formulating the major areas of disagreement. But, at the time, both sides reacted with deep scepticism and the campus trade unions abandoned their hopes of acting as intermediaries. They wrote to the TUC:

We request your influence be used to dissuade trade unions from making statements in support of students actions when not in possession of the facts. Jobs are now at risk and uninformed intervention increases that risk. (NALGO, NUPE, ASTMS, UCATT, EEPTU).

The unions also wrote to the Minister for Education and Science:

It has become clear that the Students Union and the University have no intention of resolving the dispute except by the imposition of the will of one upon the other.

#### April 22nd

Term began with an air of uncertainty. Exams were only six weeks away and exams are in truth the University's main disciplinary force. Would students now be concerned only with revision for their exams, or would they continue their protest? No one knows of a British university

where protest had survived the acid test of exams. Yet some students and staff feared a subtle time-bomb as a result of the rent strike. No student owing money to the University is permitted to register for exams. Those students who paid into the strike fund would be able to withdraw their money and pay their debts in time to sit exams. There were, however, at least as many students who had paid no rent and who had not paid into the rent fund. Many feared that this money would have been long since spent, leaving a substantial number of students in whose interest it would be to disrupt exams.

During the vacation, the Vice-Chancellor had sent a long letter to students' home addresses, explaining his version of the year's events. Significantly he gave no explanation at all of why the students had taken the action, thus leaving the impression that the University was fighting an arbitrary and irrational enemy. There is some evidence from Dr. Sloman's interviews with the press that this is precisely what he did think. It was, however, not a view that could be expected to win over many students. Their experience over the vacation was pushing them in rather different directions. Traumatized by the events of March 20th, even the most conservative students were questioning the wisdom of an administration that had let matters reach this point. Back with their friends and families, and subjected to the hostile questions of the outside world, they found themselves staunchly defending their fellow students. The Easter vacation had made many students aware of their collective identity.

There was a student meeting that night that left few in doubt of the effects of the vacation. The abortive negotiations over a Chairman for the Enquiry were described and it was decided to boycott the University Enquiry and call for one to be conducted by the Department of Education and Science. All retail outlets would be picketed and the Ballroom would be re-occupied and resume the function as an alternative coffee bar. A chicane would be erected on the delivery road and if necessary re-erected each day until the University acceded to student demands.

April 23rd

A long-awaited "teach-in" replaced all normal University activities this day. It is significant of the lack of mutual understanding between students and administration that they had both initially regarded the teach-in (suggested by a member of the Language Center) as a cunning strategem of the other! However, now it enjoyed the backing of the administration and the reluctant participation of the Students Union. Indeed at a general meeting the night before, a motion to boycott the teach-in proposed by the Union Executive and enjoying the support of both the CP and IMG had been decisively defeated. There was a strong will to begin a dialogue. For most of the day the teach-in was divided into several concurrent sessions, each discussing one topic. The range was wide - student grants, communications within the University, academic freedom and the law, individual and collective responsibility, the conduct

of the students union, and teaching and research. Attendance varied considerably and totalled about five hundred. These discussions were reported on at a plenary session chaired by the Vice Chancellor at which about 1,000 (half the University) were present. The reports mostly bore the imprint of the chairpersons of each session, some reporting conservatively, others voicing considerable criticism of the Administration.

Rather unexpectedly, none attacked the Students Union - the conservative line was to hope that generally-phrased improvements in communications or cooperation would remedy the situation. Each of these reports was followed by a short period devoted to comment and questions from the floor. Several speakers addressed questions directly to the Vice Chancellor but he did not respond, always moving on to the next speaker. These grew increasingly critical of the Administration and the V-C. Perhaps by chance, the two most controversial (and well attended) panels - collective versus individual responsibility, and academic freedom and the law - were to be reported on at the end of the meeting. These panels raised the issues that were central to the disciplinary hearings. Indeed, the warning by the Students Union President was explicit - "Remember, while we talk, hearings go on in Wivenhoe House." The V-C now announced that there would be no time for discussion of these issues. Up until now the heckling had been subdued. Many students, normally irresponsible at mass meetings, had hoped for an open discussion on the issues. But this new evidence of inflexibility, and the assumption that

it was more important to keep to a schedule than discuss crucial areas of disagreement, outraged many students and staff alike. Dr. Sloman finally agreed to a token ten minute extension.

Students and staff of all political persuasion left the teach-in bitterly disappointed. It was from this point onwards that the personality of the V-C became the focus of harsh criticism both from the right and the left. The day had been one of personal disaster for the V-C. Before most of the University he appeared to confirm what his detractors had claimed, that he was incapable of engaging with a dialogue with his critics. By failing to give his own point of view (and no one else from the Administration rose to speak) and by ending the meeting right on the deadline, when those present clearly wanted to continue, he made the teach-in seem like a charade. This was doubly frustrating, for the teach-in had served a useful purpose, at the very least of forcing those in entrenched positions to confront opposing points of view.

#### April 24

The Students Union in conjunction with the NUS had organised a "day of action" to support their case. About 350 student delegates from other universities attended and the day saw a protest meeting, and an occupation. More serious was a break-in at Wivenhoe House - site of the disciplinary hearings. Papers were stolen that were thought by the students to be crucial to the proceedings. The Committee was only mildly inconvenienced, postponing its session until the following day. The action

was mostly symbolic and all stopped by the evening. The turnout of Essex students was low - about 200 in all. Hardly the event that the administration had feared when it had warned staff to make sure that their papers and other belongings were secure for the day!

On the same day a newsletter appeared bearing the stamp of the "Essex Democratic Alliance" calling for a suspension of the picket and a return to "reason not violence." It soon changed its name to the Moderate Alliance. The self-styled moderate element of the student population was the subject of a great deal of speculation and confusion. In the University, as in any population, the majority of people do not involve themselves in political activity. While the General Meetings were well-attended for the most part, even at the maximum they were 1100, thus leaving a minimum of 1000 students unaccounted for. The Moderate Alliance was based on the assumption that this "silent half" objected to the tactics, if not the goals, of the student activists and needed an organisation to give them some political influence. It described itself as explicitly non-political and one of its slogans was "Don't hate, communicate." It called for closer links with all sectors of the University, and counted the University Purchasing Officer and some of the catering staff in its membership. Yellow badges served as membership cards and for a brief period they seemed to be omnipresent. The impressiveness of this display was deceptive - left wing students had joined the group almost immediately, claiming that they too were "moderate," and a closer look at some of the badges revealed pictures of Che and Ho Chi Minh! The group split a number of times. By the end of

the term there were three factions, one of which was explicitly political and in fact supported a candidate for the Presidency of the Student Union. He was to receive 271 votes out of the 851 cast, the rest being divided between the Broad Left, IMG and IS. This is the only real indication of the amount of support the Moderate Alliance had among the student body.

#### April 26

Considerable supplies were brought into the University under police escort. The University authorities had given up bothering about fuel with the onset of spring. The refusal of the T&GWU oil lorry drivers to cross the picket line had been the students' strongest card, but the season now made it worthless. It was clear that the police would provide protection for all other essential supplies. It was also clear that the activists could not risk another hundred arrests. Their anger at their impotence vented itself in a "visit" to the V-C's suite by 70-80 students. They attempted to engage him in argument and ended by shouting abuse. According to the Sunday Times of April 28, one shouted: "Albert, you're a bloody boring little academic."

The relationship between the Administration and the police was ambivalent. Though collaborating, neither fully admitted the other into its confidence. Though each wanted police intervention, each wanted to be able to dictate the time and place for this. After the mass arrests of March 20, co-operation had been closer because of the intervention of Sir John Ruggles-Brise, Lord Lieutenant of the county, and also Chairman of the University Council. Yet still the police behaved rather unpredictably.



On the evening of April 25 they had informed the University that next day they would break up the picket in a very mild way - one inspector would ride in on a delivery van and politely request the students to move their barrier. Instead, next morning 60 police in 6 black marias came through.

The police enquiries into the previous term's event were still continuing.

On April 21st it had been announced that the cases of the students arrested March 20th had been referred to the Director of Public Prosecution. Their cases would be heard in court on June 24th. Speculation grew about the meaning of this move. Only a few optimists saw this as a hopeful sign - most feared the escalation of the charges to conspiracy. Such a referral / is in fact fairly routine in "political" cases, where the authorities have options of several charges available to them, and wish the decision to be taken at the highest levels. There was some good news for the students - the NUS had agreed to pay 75% of the expenses for the court cases and fines levied by the disciplinary committee.

On April 30th at 6 a.m. the police visited a student house in a neighbouring village. They proceeded to search the house thoroughly and to question two of its occupants at some length. When the police left they had with them a small amount of amphetamines and documents allegedly stolen in the Wivenhoe House raid. The police advised one of the students that it was possible that he would be booked on five charges: (1) unlawful assembly at Wivenhoe House; (2) forcible entry;

(3) thefts of a university key; (4) theft; (5) possession of amphetamines.

To the students this seemed to mark a new and ominous stage in the conflict. Mass arrests were frightening enough - but this was rather different. The fact that one of the possible charges mentioned was unlawful assembly seemed to indicate that the police contemplated further action along this line - this was supported by the intensive questioning of the two students. They were asked about a whole series of events ranging from the NUS day of action to the window smashing. All signs seemed to indicate that the police were interested in building a case for conspiracy charges. Indeed the police stated that they planned to question several other students. Perhaps the most worrying thing was the speed with which the police acted - students began to fear that there were informers in their midst.

Throughout the term student meetings continued to draw long numbers and scores of motions were passed. But there was a strong sense of these motions being merely symbolic acts useful mainly for expressing the students' sense of solidarity. The real action had moved to other, less accessible, arenas, some of them external to the University. Police questioning of individual students suggested that the enemy was larger and far more powerful than the University. Another problem, both internal and external was the students' relationship to the trade union movement. As we have pointed out, this was at all times tenuous and highly ambiguous. The third arena of action was totally internal to the community and these were the disciplinary procedures. In a sense

this was the linch pin of the whole confrontation. The issue, in the beginning so vague, had with the mass arrests and the expulsion of three students crystalized into whether the Union could protect its membership from retribution from the University. This retribution was to be exacted through the workings of the disciplinary committee and this the students were powerless against. They could only attack it indirectly by taking action that would threaten to close the University and thus render its decisions irrelevant.

At this point one of the few pieces of administration humour surfaced. The following letter was circulated to all members of staff, emanating - we believe - from a source not one million miles away from the Dean of Comparative Studies. Perhaps we should explain that only a few miles away from the campus is the site of the Battle of Maldon immortalised by the epic Anglo-Saxon poem of that name:

"AN OPEN LETTER TO KING ETHELRED THE UNREADY OF ENGLAND.

1st May, 1012

"Your Majesty:

"Some of us are very disturbed by the present state of the country. It is quite plain that your policy of paying Danegeld to our uninvited guests has been a failure; the Danes will keep coming back! At the same time, an aggressive 'hard line' policy does not seem to work either. Acts of mindless provocation, like the armed resistance to the Danes that occurred over at Maldon back in 991, merely serve to escalate the situation. True, we all of us lamented the death of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth (a respected Essex figure if ever there was one), and we cannot deny that the words spoken by his friend Byrhtwold on that occasion have a certain literary merit (they might even make a good motto for somebody, some day); but we cannot get away from the fact that Byrhtnoth was a hard-liner, as were Byrhtwold, Aelfwine, Leofsunu, Eadweard, Aetheric, Wistan, the churl Dunnere and the others - their untimely end was in part

"the result of their inflexibility, their political immaturity.

"It is essential to analyse the parameters of the total situation. We need above all to try to understand the Danes. All they are doing is attempting to establish themselves as a bona fide expansionist nation. Surely we ought to recognize the justice of their aspirations. We might wish, certainly, that their pursuit of national expansion was a bit more responsible. We cannot deny that acts of vandalism have taken place. These we of course repudiate. The pelting to death of the archbishop of Canterbury with bones and cattle-skulls (as happened a mere ten days ago) cannot, in our opinion, be regarded as an entirely appropriate tactic. Furthermore, we cannot completely deny that a rather large number of English towns have been pillaged, sacked and burned in the last few decades; and not all of this can be ascribed to traditional Nordic high spirits.

"But we should refrain from pious moral exhortations, because they get us nowhere. In some ways, Sir, you cannot absolve your own Administration from all blame. We believe you are wrong to escalate the situation by allowing armed levies to resist the Danish host - especially since those levies have been so notoriously inefficient. (As our admirable Chronicle says, in its issue for the year 1010: "when the enemy was in the east, then our levies were mustered in the west; and when they were in the south, then our levies were in the north"). Times have changed, Sir. That sort of thing was acceptable in King Alfred's day. But the underlying patterns of socio-cultural values are altering. Some (old Byrthnoth, for instance) would say 'for the worse'. We do not agree. We should welcome these new currents of thought and feeling in a positive way and seek to adapt our life-style to them.

"We also reject the Danegeld policy in its present form. It is too expensive. It is always the hard-pressed English taxpayer who has to foot the bill for such things. And the cost is rising. In 991 it was £ 10,000; in 1002 it was £ 24,000; in 1007 it was £ 30,000; the figures speak for themselves.

"Our solution is simple but profound. We urge the immediate establishment of an independent inquiry into the underlying causes of these Danish invasions. Obviously the Danes themselves must be consulted about its terms of reference. We further urge that this inquiry produce an interim report before the Danish fleet comes back again. Only in this way can we make real progress in solving the problem. Unless something is done soon to cool the situation, Sweyn and his hordes will overrun the kingdom. And we do not much like the look of that energetic and ambitious son of his. We would not want Canute as king of England, would we?

"AD HOC COMMITTEE OF EAST ANGLIAN EARLS, THANES AND EALDORMEN."

May 4-10

The first deus ex machina descended. Sam Spicer, Professor of Linguistics, and Chairman of the Appeals Committee, proved once again that the unpredictable individual is the locomotive of history! The Appeals Committee heard evidence in the case of Will Rich and Ronnie Munck. The Committee confirmed three of the four guilty verdicts agreed by the Disciplinary Committee but substituted weaker penalties - the fines were substantially reduced or suspended and, most important, the expulsions were suspended. In one stroke the focus of the confrontation had vanished.

The decision left people on both sides in a state of shock - the conflict had assumed a momentum of its own that had seemed invulnerable to the action of any one individual. Indeed, the Union had given only cursory attention to the whole issue of Appeals. The Appeals Committee, like the Disciplinary Committee, had a staff majority - two staff members appointed by the Registrar from Senate and one student selected from the Judicial Committee of the Students Union. Ironically, the judge was one of fifteen students facing charges of obstructing the police. A few weeks before hearings were due to start, the Union received notification of the staff membership of the Committee - Professor Cattermole of Electrical Engineering, was to be chairman and Dr. Jones of Computing the other staff member. Professor Cattermole had been a leading spokesman for many of the right wing motions made in the Staff General Assemblies. The Students Union objected to Cattermole but they received no reply to their objection

and assumed it had been overruled. Some weeks later, at a meeting of campus unions the President of AUT, Professor Sam Spicer mentioned that he did not feel at liberty to discuss a particular issue as he was Chairman of the Appeals Committee. It was thus that the students learned of his appointment. While it was clear, from the students' point of view, that Spicer was a distinct improvement over Cattermole, they by no means saw it was a victory. Spicer was a very dark horse indeed. Although President of the Essex branch of the Association of University Teachers, and therefore possibly sympathetic to the issue of unionism, the Association had not shown much sympathy for students - indeed at one time there was a rumour that AUT would call a strike in protest against the activities of the students. Whatever the speculations about the composition of the Appeals Committee they had been low-key and confined to the cognoscenti. For most people in the University the hearings at Wivenhoe House had assumed a grinding inevitability.. The Committee had been almost too successful for it convinced students the only way to stop it was to shut the University down completely.

There were no celebrations in the Towers that night - rather intense speculation as to how and why the sentences had been suspended. The speculation ran along predictable lines - the more radical left-wingers seeing a monolithic elite, interpreted the decision as a sign that the administration had recognized their defeat and had crumbled. The IMG, anxious as always to define the issue in terms of the victimisation of its members, wanted to declare a victory and end the picket. The rest of the politicians, good liberals all, saw the decision as the idiosyncratic

act of one man who happened to be in the right place at the right time. The Students Union had no intention of ending the picket yet. For them the issue had become one of Union recognition. Yet their power of mobilisation over the students was obviously reduced by the Appeals Committee.

The staff reaction to the decision of the Appeals Committee was more complicated. The Appeals Committee statement explicitly upheld the finding of guilty on three of the four charges. They found that the hearings had been fair and agreed that the nature of the offences was serious. They justified the reductions of the penalties on four grounds: (1) the appellants' previous good record, (2) their period of exclusion (from the date of the original verdict), was already punishment, (3) in equity the appellants should not be punished too severely when other participants had not been so charged, (4) the appellants had believed they had an obligation as members of the Students Union to carry out certain decisions of that body. The Appeals Committee continued to act consistently on these grounds, generally confirming the verdicts but reducing sentences.

While the decision pleased many staff who saw it as the beginning of a way out of the confrontation, it enraged others who saw it as a betrayal of everything they had hoped to defend. The V-C is reported to have been furious and to have told Spicer that he had failed in his duty. Professor Spicer has remained quiet about his motives.

Warfare had ended, and institutionalisation had begun. Two new channels were opened on May 9th. The appointment of Lord Annan to conduct the Independent Enquiry was announced. The Enquiry would not exclude consideration of disciplinary procedures but would proceed without prejudice to the current cases. And a working group on "amenity space" set up by Council had its first meeting - this was a euphemism for a Student Union Building.

The appointment of Lord Annan as the Independent Enquirer seemed extraordinary to most of us. As the first chairman of the Academic Planning Board he had been influential in establishing the system of power in the University that was now at issue. He had also helped appoint Dr. Sloman himself. He had been Provost of Kings College, Cambridge, and was now Principal of University College, London - both "vice-chancellorial" positions. He would surely be more sympathetic to the V-C and the administration than he was to the students, and most of us expected a whitewashing job from him. The students certainly did, and very few of them (and none of the activists) would talk to him. One student involved in the occupation but later alienated from it, had been approached by Lord Annan because of his friendship with her family. It is indicative of the solidarity of the students at this stage that she refused to speak to him, saying that it would be against union policy.

On the 10th the Essex County Standard printed a long interview with the Vice-Chancellor under the headlines "Dr. Sloman: I'll see it through." We quote extracts from his statements:



"What is happening here is happening at other universities and throughout society outside.

It is profoundly disturbing if strength and might can prevail over reason and argument carried out with civility and courtesy.

I am deeply shocked by what has been happening and - however unpopular it is to say it - I shall go on saying that the idea of people attempting to forward their views by force is totally irreconcilable with the entire idea of the liberal university.

A university is about reason - a place of free, frank and open enquiry.

Members of the public see protesting students waiting with banners, indulging in extravagant behaviour that is sometimes intolerable. But what they should realise - and what we must somehow get across to the public - is that this is not how the vast majority behave."

[Indicating the library, he continues:]

"That's where a lot of students are, and they are having a tough time studying for their degrees. And that's what academic life is really about."

While there is much to sympathise with here - and the V-C also strongly supported the student case for higher grants in the interview - we find two depressing aspects of this interview. Firstly, force and reason are yet again juxtaposed in black and white. We hope we have shown that the dispute was far more complex than this, and that the

mass of students would be unlikely to rally to the V-C as long as he continued to analyse the situation in these terms. Secondly, he conveys a rather narrow vision of legitimate student activity, confined to the library and excluding any political protest activity. He was certainly not alone in this. Professor Cattermole, one of the leading conservative speech-makers in the university, continually asserted that students were here to study and that taking part in union politics had nothing to do with the functions of education. These are not, however, the ideal of a liberal university in which students are encouraged to find themselves in a wide range of intellectual activities, including politics, the arts, social concern and many other things. The students were more likely to be convinced that the administration's version of the academic community was not theirs.

May 14th

The labour government announced student grant increases of about 25%. Though the NUS responded, as any union would, by saying this was not enough, it was actually quite pleased. Had its change of tactics to direct action helped to produce this result? Both the NUS and the Essex student leaders believed that it had, believed that the government had realised that the universities would be ungovernable unless grants were raised. Other authorities, and the press, believed the opposite, and claimed that grants had been raised despite disruption. We are inclined to the former belief, but we can also note that the student belief that direct action pays will lead to further university troubles as inflation erodes these gains.

The elections for the following year's Student Union Executive were held, following well-attended "campaign" meetings. The results merit examination. The events of the last year had thrown up several sets of competing leaders - most of whom had been closely identified with the conflict at different stages in the conflict.

Colin Beardon won the office of President by 410 votes (a majority of 150) out of a total of 851. First as Secretary, then as Vice-President of the Union, he had been closely involved with the planning of the strategy for the last two terms. He was highly unpopular in the first term because of his early involvement in the abortive and bitterly criticised meetings with the administration. A dull and uncharismatic speaker, he was best at working behind the scenes and was popularly but quite wrongly believed to be the brains behind Rusty Davis. A member of the CP, the epithet "CP bureaucrat sell-out" seemed to dog his footsteps.

Dennis Slattery ran a poor second to Beardon with 271 votes. While not a member of either the Moderate Alliance or the Essex Moderate Students his views closely paralleled those organisation's policies. He deplored the events of the last year and stressed the independence of his position.

An even poorer third was Bob Findlay, the candidate of the IMG with 98 votes. Referred to quite erroneously and scandalously in the Annan report as the "cruelly crippled" student only brought out to gain the sympathy of moderate students, Bob had in fact played a major role

in determining the strategy of the IMG throughout the year. His physical handicap did in fact give him one advantage - it was impossible to listen to him casually. If one was to understand his speech one had to give him total attention. Then one realised that he was indeed a fluent and witty speaker, and he had played an important role in articulating IMG policies at the Students General Meeting.

Phil Benson, associated with IS came in fourth, with 54 votes. His position was the least clear of the four candidates, for IS had vacillated between the CP and IMG for most of the year.

The CP candidate, Ken Spours, easily won the post of finance officer with 623 votes out of a total of 844 cast. Ken Brownsey, a member of the local labour party won the post of Secretary from Pat Smith (CP) and Chris Talbot (Ind.) with a majority of 78 votes.

Certainly the CP had reason to be pleased with the election results. Always closely associated with the Students Union Executive, it had shared in the scorn heaped upon the Executive in the first term and had shared in its assumption of power in the second and third terms. The CP had backed the picket from the beginning and had supplied much of the organisational and manpower necessary to sustain it in the dreary and unromantic days after the Easter vacation. There can be little doubt that its victory in the elections reflected student support of the policies of the second and third terms. The candidacy of Dennis Slattery had made it possible to express a clear rejection of student activism. Speculations about a large mass of moderate but apathetic students must

confront the fact that, out of 851 votes cast with three competing left wing candidates, the self-styled moderate candidate received only 271 votes.

On the other hand, there was an even more decisive rejection of the policies of the IMG. Their brief assumption of control during the first terms occupation had been disastrous - indeed, all the candidates admitted that the refusal to negotiate had been a mistake.

May 15

Although the students were pleased to accept the decision of the Appeals Committee as a fait accompli many staff members were enraged by the decision. The Deans of the Schools spearheaded a move to tighten up the disciplinary procedures. A rather complicated motion was put before the General Steering Committee of Senate prior to going before Senate itself. The bite of the resolution was that the proctor (who could be relied upon!) would be granted the full powers of the Disciplinary Committee and that the established disciplinary procedures would not be binding. The Appeals Committee would ~~remain~~ remain, leaving only a one-step judicial procedure. The proposals seemed designed to deal with large numbers of students quickly. Indeed, the Deans were particularly worried about disruption of the rapidly approaching exams. At the time this was seen as an extraordinarily provocative move and speculation was increased because no one knew who was really behind it. Apparently, well-placed people were asserting that the sponsor was the V-C, or the

Registrar acting independently, or Dr. Cook stirring his heavy boots at last. It seemed possible that the right had finally over-reached themselves.

The Students Union discovered the proposals one half hour before the Steering Committee was to meet and quickly mimeographed copies of the proposals to be circulated through the University. Students, tired of conflict and worried about exams, paid little attention to the proposals and the Union Executive did little to mobilise them for action. They decided not to hold a general meeting on the issue and rather concentrated their efforts on lobbying the individual members of Senate. They argued that the proposals, if passed, would be provocative in the extreme and would create precisely the havoc its framers were trying to avoid.

#### May 17

By either an extraordinary coincidence or "as part of national decision of a (right) wing political group to single out Essex"<sup>1</sup> John Biggs-Davison, MP, Chairman of the Monday Club was invited to speak at Essex this day. The right was moving on Senate, and it seemed to be moving into the student sphere as well. At the time the controversy was at its height about the NUS decision to ban "fascist" speakers. Large numbers of police and almost as many press descended on the campus and we knew that news was about to be manufactured. The students rose to the

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<sup>1</sup>Paraphrasing the V-C's notorious statement of November 28th.

occasion. In<sup>a</sup> display of political maturity a large student meeting decided not to disrupt him. They even turned down a suggestion to parody his views by shouting comments like "one black is too many - send the lot back home." The Union meeting voted to tread a fine line between disruption and demonstration. A larger number of students crammed themselves into the hall outside the lecture room and in a rare, magical hour, community was achieved at last! Students of all political persuasions raised their voices to the strains of Jerusalem and then sang with a degree of self-knowledge and self-parody, painfully acquired through the year "We all live in a yellow submarine."

A few students forced their way through a union picket with the intention of disrupting the lecture. (A nice reversal of the picket that had started it all on November 15). Once inside they began to heckle and the disturbance grew to the point of "disruption." At that precise point a union officer made his way inside and shouted "This is not Union policy - all Union members out." Virtually all the students then left together with most of the rest of the audience, leaving the press constituting the majority of the meeting - which was highly appropriate, since it was "their" meeting in the first place. The Press was obviously in a quandary about what to report. Luckily real disruption of another Monday club speaker occurred at Portsmouth Poly that day, so they were able to write the story they'd come for about Portsmouth, adding<sup>a</sup> brief comment, that disruption had also occurred at Essex.

May 22

Senate met to consider the proposal to stiffen the disciplinary procedures. But the war was over and opinion had moved hard against any attempt to prolong it. The proposal was defeated resoundingly, with only Dr. Cook and Professor Bergstrom, the Dean of Social Studies, voting for it. Understandably bitter at this desertion by his fellow Deans, Dr. Cook resigned his Deanship immediately, making a long emotional speech about the weakness of leadership in the University. His fellow-mathematician, Professor Ian Proudman, had also resigned from the chairmanship of the Maths Department the previous week, giving similar reasons. The conservatives were apparently falling apart.

The students had been delaying ending their picket until after the Senate vote. Now, with relief, they voted to end both the picket and the boycott of the University retail outlets. One of the outstanding features of the year had been the completeness of this boycott.

May 24th

With tongue-in-cheek, the activists held a "Victory Rally" under the podia. Only the 40 or 50 stalwarts of the picket were there. A red tape was stretched across the delivery road and an incoming lorry driver suddenly found himself at the centre of a ceremony. He affably agreed to wait while Rusty Davis cut the tape and the students joined in a chorus of

It's hard on the picket

But we're gonna stick it.

The driver was then cheered through and the ex-pickets went on a tour of all the places they had boycotted, beginning and ending in the bar.



June

Exams had begun and for the first time all year Essex began to look like a normal university. Students basked in the sun on the grass around the lake and some even braved the slime to go for an occasional swim. Small tables with umbrellas were set up in the squares and students compared notes on essays and possible exam questions. The grimness of the year had gradually lifted and suddenly Essex seemed a nice place to live.

The conflict had not been resolved but it had become the problem of the bureaucrats. By early June it had become clear that the charges against all but six of the 104 students would be reduced to obstruction of the police and that the students would probably face a conditional discharge. The Appeals Committee continued its hearings and continued to confirm most of the verdicts and reduce most of the penalties, including suspending the third expulsion (of Halford Hewitt). The Union continued to try to organise a march to DES to present a petition asking them to set up a Committee of Enquiry but little interest was shown. It was now also showing great interest in the possibility of obtaining a Students Union building. This would ensure de facto recognition of the rights of a "student trade union," given that de jure recognition was unlikely to come from the authorities.

The confrontation had been successfully defused but it was in no way resolved. Essex might have won another few years of peace, but it was a precarious victory, depending on the exhaustion of the students and

the tact of the Administration. The events of the year had shocked students and staff alike into the realization that the whole relationship of students to the University had to be reevaluated if peace was to be maintained.

June 12. General Assembly of Staff

The attendance of about 100 was the lowest of the year. For the first time, the V-C opened with a statement unconnected with the events. It concerned the government cuts in higher education expenditure, and warned us of hard times ahead. Universities must make economies and even then will incur major deficits. The thought occurred to many present that it would not be easy to satisfy student grievances over facilities if the budget were cut.

The first motion was that concerning the recognition of the rights and duties of the Students Union. One speaker supporting the motion said that what had happened on campus was no more than a bit of rick-burning - it is precisely the kind of agitation to be expected from people in the early stages of unionisation. The motion was in three parts. The first proposed talks with the Students Union in order to recognise it as having trade union rights and responsibilities. The voting was 40 for, 40 against, 14 abstentions - a tie! Confusion and amusement resulted. Bewilderingly, the voting continued. The second part of the motion invited other campus trade unions to help in these talks. This was now passed by 40 votes to 33 with 15 abstentions. So the other trade unionists should take part in

non-existent talks! The third part suggested considering a revision of the disciplinary code to recognise the distinction between individual and collective acts, the Students Union bearing responsibility for the latter. This was defeated by 48 votes to 30, with 13 abstentions. The staff were still divided over issues of principle. But for the first time an alternative to the apprentice-master model of student-teacher relationships was seriously considered. The events of the year had made it clear that this model could no longer be accepted unquestioningly.

The next motion (proposed by one of the authors - Mann) dealt with Lord Annan. It was mildly worded: "Whilst recognising the difficulties of appointing an independent inquirer acceptable to both sides in the dispute, we nevertheless regret that this has not been achieved in the appointment of Lord Annan." There was fairly general agreement about this, and the discussion mainly consisted of trying to get the V-C or someone else to explain why Lord Annan had been appointed. He was asked directly four times, and only once did any kind of reply come back - because Annan would agree to do it! Amusement greeted this, and the motion was carried by 52 votes to 6, with 28 abstentions. For the first time the V-C was subjected to intensive and highly critical questioning of his role in the selection of Annan. He was also questioned closely about the extent of consultation with the students. The meeting was atypical -- junior staff, research officers and the like were very much in evidence and the stalwarts of the right wing-perhaps demoralised - were absent.

June 24

The trial of the 104 students took place at the Colchester Assize Court. All but 18 students pleaded guilty to the obstruction charge. Their solicitor's advice had been that if they did this, the police would not bring other charges and they would receive conditional discharges and be required to pay minor costs of £10 each. This is what happened (and the Students Union paid the costs). Both students and police breathed sighs of relief that the affair was largely resolved so easily. The judge congratulated both on their orderly behaviour on March 20th!

The remaining 18 pleaded not guilty, and their cases were held over until October when they were acquitted. Halford Hewitt (described now as a "trainee bus driver") was found guilty of participating in the Wivenhoe House break-in, and two other students still face conspiracy charges, but the legal situation, once so threatening, has dissipated.

July

Now that the Summer vacation had begun there was some confusion over who, if anyone, had "won." The dispute had taken a peculiar turn in the Summer Term. Though neither point of principle had been resolved in the slightest, in practice compromises were evident on both of them. The administration had not backed down one inch in its defence of the disciplinary procedures, having resisted principled pressure from both left and right. However, the Appeals Committee had effectively clamped down this dispute by reversing the expulsion sentence. The Students Union

was insisting on being recognized as a "trade union," which the administration was still unwilling to do. However, in practice the administration was being drawn into negotiation with the Students Union. In July discussions were held over the possibility of handing over an area of the university to the union as a makeshift union building. Apparently no one in the administration now had principled objections to this, though it was in flat contravention of the Essex traditions of having no separate facilities for any group within the university. Indeed, negotiations over this issue now proceeded in a decidedly "trade union versus management" style, with both sides proposing alternative sites, querying each other's costings, and generally behaving as if quite small differences in their positions represented complete and utter / <sup>intransigence</sup> on the other's part. These negotiations have dragged on, being essentially private between the administration and the Students Union Executive. So again the administration and the union were compromising in practice, though nothing might seem solved to the outsiders, and indeed perhaps nothing actually was solved.

#### July 30th

Lord Annan presented his Report. Intriguingly, he told us that he was reserving his recommendations for a meeting of Council. It was certainly not a "whitewash" of the Administration, as the students claimed, for it frequently criticised the Administration and the V-C. But its criticisms were mostly from a "hard-line" position. The

University was correct to serve the original writ, but it should then have enforced it by calling in the police. Furthermore, Lord Annan criticised the Appeals Committee for suspending the expulsions of Hewitt, Munck and Rich, and appeared to support the attempt by the Deans to tighten up the disciplinary procedures. Annan criticised the students much more vigorously, however - students were in the power of a handful of militants who were simply out to "wreck" the University. Others to come in for criticism were the "Staff sympathisers" whose criticisms of the Administration could have been voiced more constructively, and senior academics generally, who were accused of lacking civic responsibility.

As everyone was criticised, reaction was mixed. The students were indignant but not surprised. The Report bore very little relationship to their experience over the year. The Registrar said he supposed the Report "will mean all things to all men." The Press, except for "The Times," headlined the "mindless militant" type of story, but mentioned the criticism of the V-C without noticing the consistent "hard-line" that lay behind. The Times headlined the criticism of the V-C and ended with asking whether he could survive this. One Conservative MP and one Liberal MP made speeches that the Annan Report showed clearly that Essex University should be closed down, the former suggesting converting it into a sugar beet factory, the latter into a sanctuary for old and homeless people.

Lord Annan's report was as expected, given that he spent only two weeks in the University and did not talk to the student activists. His dependence on a very few sources is obvious from his continual paraphrasing

(not always accurate) from the two dissidents who submitted written evidence. There were a fair number of factual inaccuracies, and the interpretation of student politics was silly. Those like Annan who blamed a few student militants could only explain the extraordinary fact that their line was popular among students, at all moments of crisis, by imputing to them amazing powers of cunning and deception.

However, Annan also made some good points, mostly on issues where all parties to the dispute were at fault. The lack of communication between people who disagree and the lack of clarity about what constitutes an offence, and about the degree of offence, are all chronic within the University.

August Lord Annan, our second deus ex machina, now surprised us all.

It ~~gradually~~ became clear that ~~Lord Annan~~<sup>he</sup> had well-camouflaged his Report. In his verbal report to Council he criticised the administration more severely, and in private conversations with Council members he was damning about the V-C. Perhaps his strong public condemnation of the students was a smokescreen, or perhaps it was to give him enough credibility in Establishment circles to launch an attack on the V-C.

As the V-C departed for a month's sorely-needed holiday, the knives were drawn. Council had appointed a working party from among its members, chaired by Mr. John Crittall, an Essex industrialist. Feeling on Council was that the V-C should resign, but the Whitehall authorities said that this was politically unacceptable. Whatever was done should not appear

as a student victory. So the Working Party considered how to trim the V-C's power and how to obtain alternative sources of information besides him. Together with several senior professors, the Working Party devised a scheme for the re-organisation of the administration. Power within the University was to reside with a "cabinet" of six or seven Pro-V-Cs all but one of them responsible for different areas of University policy (the remaining one being the V-C's deputy). They were to be professors and members of Senate, and they were to report not to the V-C but to Council. This was cutting-down the V-C to size with a vengeance! There was even speculation that this might be so unacceptable to the V-C as to force his resignation. But the V-C was not without friends, and a compromise resulted. Three Pro-Vice-Chancellors were appointed by Council and Senate to act as a "cabinet" together with the V-C. Professor Bradley remained as one, the other two can perhaps be best described as "Establishment liberals."

So Essex has started the new academic year with a well-managed coup. Will the junta do any better than the dictator? There are hopeful signs. Professor Bradley has learned from last year's confrontation, "no one wins, except possibly the popular press." Both authorities and students have learned that negotiation before action is less wearying and appears more legitimate to outsiders than action before negotiation. The General Committee of Senate has formally rejected Lord Annan's claim that the disturbances were the work of a small group of "wreckers," and the Students Union is now providing firmer leadership. However, much of this results from a simple sense of tiredness on the part of all the



participants. It would surprise us if Essex erupts again in 1974-5, or even 1975-6, simply because we are all too enfeebled to start it up again. But most of the issues of principle are not as yet settled, either at Essex or at other universities.

## Chapter 5

## Conclusion

The easiest reaction to the events at Essex is to attribute blame. We feel this is neither constructive nor fair. What must be emphasized is the extent to which students and administration were operating in quite separate contexts - with different sets of assumptions and values, between which was little actual contact. In trying to write this as a narrative, we have perhaps inevitably exaggerated the amount of real communication and political give and take among the student and administration establishments. The kind of information we have gathered was never available to any of the participants, let alone to the ordinary student or member of staff. Our account might suggest a game of chess or an organized war, and there were indeed two armies. But if this was warfare, the armies were lost on the moor wondering who would loom up next through the mist and with what weapons. The one thing that seemed clear was that they had somehow to fight on.

The dispute escalated because neither side would compromise, and because no-one else had the strength and the courage to force them to. However, the two sides were so far apart that it is doubtful if different actions by those who stood on the side-lines and cheered would have materially affected the outcome. After all, several groups tried to intervene, and the singular lack of success of staff loyalists, staff dissidents, "moderate" students, campus unions, and the police can hardly be attributed to incompetence on the part of all of them.

Like virtually everyone else concerned in the events, we have from time to time cursed the Vice-Chancellor for his personal style in handling the dispute. Now, however, we are inclined to see this as not very important. There is evidence, it is true, that he is not very good at personal relationships which are not institutionalised. While good on committees, he has difficulty in handling students, critical staff, and indeed anyone who might seem threatening. And his nervousness often comes across to those people as hostility and lack of concern. Against this, of course, we could set his other considerable abilities, but to concentrate on his character is misplaced. For his objections to negotiating with dissidents were principled, and in this he was backed up by virtually all his colleagues in the Administration. Adhering rigorously to two principles - a defence of the existing constitution of the University for the settling of grievances, and of the Disciplinary Committee's right to judge unconstitutional action, and refusing to accept any validity in the students' trade union analogy, he would not negotiate because he did not agree that occupations, mass meetings, and union executives have anything to do with running a university. Nor did his colleagues in the hierarchy - the Registrar may have been advocating a slightly softer line, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor had a harder line, but we have no evidence of fundamental disagreement among the administration. Attacks on the Vice-Chancellor have been recently coming from his colleagues in the hierarchy. The plotting to which we referred in our narrative for August is an attempt to make Dr. Sloman the scapegoat for the events.

This savours somewhat of disloyalty on the part of men who were equally unwilling to concede on the principles he was defending. The fundamental question is whether these principles should be defended so firmly.

If we blamed the students it would not be for their firm adherence to principle. It is not even clear who "they" are. Student leadership was fluid, and if the Union Executive ended the year with considerable authority, it took them a long time to achieve that position. None of the student factions had any clear notion of what it wanted. Part of the grievance was material, but this could take the form of conflict either with the University over rents and prices, or with the government over grants. On top of that were overlaid more diffuse grievances concerning control within the University, especially over students' social lives. Then the occupation confused means with ends and gave the students a partly-justified belief that the tactic of occupying gave them control in itself. All these confusions about purpose were papered over by uniting over "victimisation." But this was merely self-defence, and contained no long-term political strategy. So the students were rarely constructive, and were sometimes confused and irresponsible. But these are the opposite criticisms to those generally leveled at them by outsiders. We must emphatically refute the conception of student politics as being dominated by "militants" with deep-laid plans for restructuring or "wrecking" the University.

In any conflict there are three main alternatives for the sides. They can give in; they can negotiate for compromise; or they can take

further action. The reason why so many people misinterpret student politics is that the last two options are expressed in the language of revolutionary socialism. At Essex, they were represented by the CP and the IMG, around whose positions the other activists tended to cluster. All talked about the bourgeois university and the structure of capitalism in a way that most of the outside world could find extreme, but the policy alternatives they represented should be clear enough to anyone who has been involved in collective action. The sects, rather than leading the mass of students, were simply articulating the real choices before them. Perhaps they did so dogmatically, and that is why none could consistently provide the leadership. At times when direct action seemed appropriate I.M.G.-sponsored motions were accepted, but when negotiations seemed necessary the C.P. line was popular. This fluidity was increased by the administration and the police who kept changing the terms of the debate by introducing new measures against the students. The third alternative of giving in was expressed only by the Moderate Alliance, who never commanded a majority of interested students. And they never did so because even the most apathetic and unreflective students instinctively felt the University authorities to be alien to them. When mobilised by crisis, they were only slightly less hostile to the authorities than the activists. The strength of the students lay in their ability to say "no." This was their weakness as well, for "no" was all they could say, given their exclusion from power and responsibility.

Thus to label the student leaders as "extremists," "militant," or "wreckers" is as misleading as to label the administration "incompetent." The conflict was about real, not to say mundane, issues. The issues were, of course, complex and often ill-formulated, and this gave each side the opportunity to concentrate on the supposed political<sup>and</sup> personal peculiarities of the other. But this only obscured the issues still further. So what were the issues?

### Constitutional Channels

The three original grievances of the students, as well as their later grievance for a Union building, could have been raised through the University's committee structure. Students sit on the appropriate committees. Only the grievance about the rents of The Avenue and Cambridge Road has been so raised, and this might have been duly settled without the occupation. Thus, the Administration argues, the University's constitution is adequate and there is no justification for students to by-pass it. The Administration is especially enraged because it considers this structure to be one of the most liberal in the country, involving unusual student participation (this, though once true, is probably no longer true - however, all credit to Essex for pioneering participation!).

So why didn't the students use it? Because they regard it as manipulated. In particular, they note that, though student representation is quite large on subordinate committees like catering, housing, or social policy, it is non-existent on Senate, Council and the strategic Finance Committee. This has two consequences, they claim. Firstly issues raised

by students on subordinate committees "get lost," that is, they have to go to higher authorities, where there is less interest in pushing them. Invariably they must also get the approval of the Vice-Chancellor. At the very least, delays occur; at most, they are blocked. This is especially difficult for students to bear as their University lives last only for nine ten-week periods. Secondly, students are misinformed about "the operating parameters" of the University - U.G.C. norms and the like - which are discussed openly at higher levels. By "misinformed" they mean deliberately, and by the Administration. We can probably glimpse both these occurring at the beginning of the events. The rents issue had got lost, at least temporarily, in Finance Committee; and the Administration was less than forthcoming, and (let us say unconsciously) misleading, about U.G.C. norms and subsidy problems in catering.

But these were mere symbols, perhaps even pretexts, for the students. There is a great deal of truth in the Administration's argument that the structure doesn't work because the students don't try to make it work. Student representatives are not easy to find for the committees. They are rather erratic in their attendance. They do not ask for all the information they could obtain. This is the standard set of complaints from administrations in all universities. Perhaps in other universities students shift their feet uneasily and murmur "guilty" to these charges. But at Essex over the course of the year, the active students gradually came to argue that the participatory committees don't work because they cannot work, because they fail to take account of the basic characteristics of students.

When students came to suggest an alternative structure, they based it partly on a trade union analogy. This attains its plausibility through two characteristics of students, their subordinate position within the University, and their common interests which may conflict with those of other groups.

Students may participate in university government but they do not participate as equals, either individually or as a group. They have minority representation, they do not have access to "reserved" areas like finance and staffing. If universities are communities, then the correct analogy would be somewhat between the medieval guild, with the student as apprentice, and the family, with the student as child. So the participation has definite limits both of information and of power. It is all very well for the Administration to say that students don't ask for the information they could get, but there are times when students want information that the University will not give them. When students started ransacking files, the Administration did not only object to their looking at personal files. Yet it seems to us that students - and anyone else within the university - have a right to all information that is not personal (and we would even hope that universities can move to more open discussion of a person's own record).<sup>1</sup> The issue of power itself is more difficult. Whatever the absolute level of power thought to be appropriate for students, most people would agree that they should have more control over housing, catering and social affairs (within norms

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<sup>1</sup>And in fact the United States passed legislation taking effect in November, 1974, whereby all students are entitled to see their personal files. The college authorities are able to withhold their access for a period of 45 days, but then must open up.



laid down nationally) than they do over academic affairs. The degree of student participation on the relevant Committees reflects this feeling. Yet at the top there is only one power structure, and significant power on social as well as academic affairs rests with the same people, who are not students. What structure can cope with the peculiar unevenness of student interests? Perhaps a Students Union with negotiating access to the top.

Yet changes would not be necessary unless students had a conception of their interests as common, and in conflict with those of other groups. Various commentators on Essex have argued that this is precisely what has happened, and that the community model cannot cope with such conflict.<sup>1</sup> But if this happened, it did so in a very odd manner. The issues where students clearly have an interest diametrically opposed to that of the authorities is academic, the assessment system. In the short-term their interest is to all receive first-class honours degrees, or at least to receive a higher degree than the normal distribution favoured by the academics. Yet though there is an informal tug-of-war on the issue, it is rarely raised openly as a grievance. Students are sufficiently committed to the values of the competitive meritocracy for group conflict to be averted. Here a consensus rather than a conflict model seems appropriate - the academic community still lives. On the other hand, on

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<sup>1</sup>Colin Bell, then Chairman of the Sociology Department, wrote a memorandum to Lord Annan to this effect, as did Peter Wilby, in the best piece of journalistic comment on the Annan Report, which appeared in The Observer, 4.8.74.

social and material matters the objective conflict is only indirect, concerning the allocation of resources between different uses. Here the Administration only has an interest in denying facilities to students if it wishes to (and if it can) spend on other items. This is where part of the conflict did arise, over the relative importance of the academic community on the one hand and the material/social community on the other. Students have not negated the academic community, only attempted to relativise it.

The most sensitive part of this conflict for the academic authorities was the disruption of lectures as part of the grants campaign. The students who did this were saying to them: "You run the universities, not us. You are neglecting our material community, so we will hurt your academic community." Many students, perhaps the majority, felt uneasy about this violation of academic norms. It is difficult to be sure of this, because they were never offered the chance by the administration to condemn this but not the other unconstitutional parts of the campaign. So the rejection by the students of some of the traditional values of an academic community are not absolute - they were rejecting a package of which this was a part.

Thus there are flaws in the trade union analogy - the conflict is much less direct and more complex than in the normal industrial situation. This has puzzled academics, and in many cases, led them to reject the analogy. But then they have the problem of explaining why the conflict is so intense when it does arise. The answer seems to be that students have an extraordinarily-developed sense of their own collective identity -

much more so than do most industrial workers. They live so collectively, and so cut off from the lives of the University authorities, that they have few problems of deciding who "us" and "them" are. "Us" are the students, "them" the University authorities. And if the latter try and use force against the student leaders, the polarisation is complete. Throughout the events of the year, despite all the complexities of student politics, despite the jockeying between I.M.G., C.P., the Union Executive, and (eventually) the self-styled "moderates," no group of students ever supported the administration. That is a degree of polarisation unparalleled in year-long industrial disputes. A tough line from the authorities can actually produce more severe conflict than is conventionally found in industrial relations.

It is obvious, then, that any "hard-line" policy over an issue or which the students have some right on their side is a recipe for disaster, for turning rather complex group conflicts into battle formations. Students will respond to force with force, and to beat them a degree of authoritarianism more appropriate to Spain or the USSR would be necessary. This would be unacceptable to academics and administrators, as well as to students. Those outsiders who call for "tougher measures" against students are either extremely ignorant or crypto-Fascists.

In fact it is the very inadequacies of the trade union analogy that makes it essential for university authorities to deal flexibly with student unions. In a centralised university, the committee structure is too long-winded and rigid to do this. Speed and clarity of response is essential for three reasons: (1) the short time-horizons of students; (2) the

necessity for the processing of grievances to be visible throughout - they must not get lost from sight among "them"; (3) once students get suspicious, they can mobilize for conflict very swiftly. This means that students must have immediate negotiating access to the actual centre of power in a university. A trade union grievance procedure, negotiated between the University and Students Union, would seem an appropriate method of providing this. If students have a grievance they raise it to the appropriate authority. A time-limit is laid down for negotiation, after which the sides can be "in dispute" and the union can go outside of the constitution.

Essex lacks not only this kind of procedure, but also any place in the structure of power for the Students Union. The Union has not been taken seriously by the authorities. We find it incredible that the administration is horrified at hasty unconstitutional acts by students. What can they expect, when they give them no position of power within the constitution? And can they wonder why the Union Executive is not in control of its membership when they offer it no responsible role?

We would not argue that the first occupation of the year was justified. We would instead endorse the C.P. line that it was stupid to occupy before presenting any grievances. But we would argue that occupations are to be expected within universities, and administrations must react flexibly and politically to them. The Essex administration reacted only legalistically, and this was its mistake. But clearly there must be a rule of law within

universities - the problem is really how to combine political and legal rules. So let us now examine the discipline issue.

### Discipline

The events of the spring and summer terms were dominated by the disciplinary committee and by the administration's argument that offences against University regulations were to be dealt with by the committee. The law had been broken, and suspects should be tried by the University's quasi-judicial procedures - the Union should be held collectively responsible for Union policy, and individuals should be charged only with actions which lay outside Union policy (in this case, damage and violence). Some students went further and said that the University should not involve itself in internal judicial procedures at all. Violence and damage should be dealt with in the law-courts. There should be no disciplinary committee.

We do not uphold these student arguments. Individuals should be held responsible for their actions, regardless of who else - or what collectivity - is also committing such actions. Furthermore an occupation must be against the regulations of any university if it prevents members of the university from exercising their normal rights within it. Thus if students occupy the room of a member of the administrative staff, he is entitled to expect the University to remove them. This is one view of what the legal situation should be. We think that most students would endorse it, once they are free - as they never were this year - from the tactical necessity of having to defend themselves.

Assuming that this view is held by the vast majority of university members, we see nothing wrong in dealing with offenders internally. This saves both time and money over the proper law courts. Provided there is a consensus over what constitutes an offence, and over the severity of sentences to be expected, internal disciplinary procedures might be workable. Lord Annan had some trenchant things to say about the University's failure to achieve this consensus. It was surprising that students charged with offences had no notion of what kind of penalties could be expected, that the committee had no verbatim transcript, and apparently had no body of case-law, that the appeal committee therefore had to start almost from scratch and give its own version of justice. However, this is not peculiar to Essex. In March the Times Higher Education Supplement had reported that various vice-chancellors had admitted to similar vagueness in their own disciplinary procedures.

Such vagueness is not an accident. It results from an assumption by the authorities that they will be allowed to use their discretion to interpret University rules. This seems a little arbitrary. By contrast the drawing-up of a list of ranges of sentences for offences can only be done by agreement. An internal system of law depends on consensus - if that is not present, then no justice in the conventional sense can be dispensed. This year the University's internal court failed completely in its purpose as no individual was actually punished. The Union paid the individual fines; the Appeals Committee over-ruled the expulsions. Even if the expulsions had been upheld, this would have been a Pyrrhic

victory for the authorities. The Students Union and the bulk of the active students would not have accepted the legitimacy of the sentences. Any further trials might be expected to be also contested by them. The only achievement from the authorities' point of view would have been the deterrent effect on future activists, but this would be slight if the activists felt they were backed by the student body. There is no point in having internal courts if they are not regarded as legitimate. The State is far more effective than any university at backing up the law with the only alternative to consensus - force.

What went wrong this year? Why did the consensus not exist? There are two reasons. The first is that the students did not trust the authorities to distinguish between gradations of offence. The second is that the students thought that most of the cases should not have been brought at all. The cry of "victimisation" sums up the first complaint - the authorities were deliberately picking out the student leaders, some for minor, some for major offences and were attempting to throw them out of the University. This was not true, or at least it was greatly exaggerated. But the authorities did not help by their refusal to distinguish between categories of offence. The Administration's propaganda always lumped together vandalism, violence, lecture disruption, and participation in the occupation as collectively contravening the fundamental rules of an academic community. The academics on the Disciplinary Committee consistently refused to give general rulings on categories of offences - each case would be dealt with "on its merits." These two approaches to the law are the

essence of authoritarianism. The first can be helpfully compared to something like the South African Suppression of Communism legislation, which the government continually uses to tax political discussion between races with the same brush as bombings.<sup>1</sup> The second is pure arbitrary justice - and the discretion of the judges can sometimes benefit the accused, as did Professor Spicer at Essex. In practice the disciplinary committees did judge according to discernible principles - mere occupations received a small fine, while for other offences large fines, suspensions and even expulsions were thought appropriate. So why couldn't students have known this in advance?

Of course, this would not have solved the situation, only clarified it. Students were clearly bent on breaking the law, regardless of its niceties. They thought the law should not be invoked against them. This is easily the more important of their two complaints about discipline. We feel that it is justified. Now this might seem rather surprising, and even subversive - for does not civilisation itself rest on adherence to the law and automatic punishment of any offenders who can be caught? The answer to this is clearly "No" - for the law does not operate like that.

We will start to show how it does not with an example from Essex itself. The Essex County police force watched the situation closely from

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<sup>1</sup>There is, of course, a vast difference between the level of oppression in the two cases. We are not suggesting that the University authorities are "Fascist," only that they exhibit one of the traits of authoritarian thinking.



the beginning. Their sources of information on the campus are good, partly because about two of their officers each year are admitted to read a degree in sociology. The Chief Inspector given this watching brief had become the first policeman to receive a first-class honours degree in sociology only the previous year. When both the blockade and the occupation began the police were aware immediately that the law was being broken. In the case of the blockade, a public highway was being interfered with, and the police had a duty to clear the students away. They did not do so hastily. They warned the students, but hoped that a solution could be reached to the dispute. When they finally moved in, they did so with maximum strength. This failed, in the sense that 100 arrests left the students still in possession of the road. However, the police could have cleared the students - perhaps another 200 arrests would have done so (though perhaps it would have escalated to 500). This was unacceptable, politically unacceptable, to the police: enforcing the law was in this case not worth the intangible harm to the law that would result in the long-run from the alienation of so many young people. Even after the arrests, the political brain of the police did not stop working. Should conspiracy charges be brought? The Director of Public Prosecutions and, we believe, the Home Secretary himself were involved in these discussions. They decided to "cool it."

Throughout the campus events, one involved party has behaved in an exemplary political fashion - the police. That should be said clearly, for on March 20th most of those involved talked loosely about "police

violence." Yet the police know that the law depends on consensus, and that the law itself suffers in the long run if it is used unpopularity. Police practice, and that of the supreme judicial authorities, is to think politically about when to enforce and when not to enforce. Of course, offences differ in their severity. Prosecution is automatic for many offences. If the police had been able to catch the window-smashers they would undoubtedly have prosecuted. Yet faced with industrial situations they are reluctant to involve the law. Over the last few years they have learned this afresh as they have been forced to intervene in industrial disputes to uphold new and unpopular legislation. They have learned that - provided the workers are united in their actions - then police intervention is at worst counter-productive and at best is not a solution to the confrontation. A good example of the latter is the sorry state of the building industry today. A great many strikes there nowadays involve violence against persons. The background to the Shrewsbury trial of the building pickets was one where nationally strikers and employers' men were fighting with each other. The police must obviously intervene (though it would have been more constructive if they had charged men from both sides). Yet the only way to stop such incidents recurring is by dealing with the underlying structural problems of the industry which create them - the excessive sub-contracting, "the lump," the disregard for safety regulations, etc. These are matters for industrial relations and for politics, not for those entrusted with the enforcement of existing legislation.

Compared to the building industry, there is very little violence at Essex. Yet the same point applies. The administration's emphasis on the law was no solution unless the offenders had been a few deviant trouble-makers, easily isolable from the mass of students. They were not, and the student grievances were popular. Therefore a political or industrial relations solution was needed, not a legal one. In fact the students wanted to change the constitution of the University - though it is true that they were not very explicit about how.

How are subordinate members of a non-democratic community to change its constitution? It seems inevitable to us that they will break the law. Reflect for a moment upon the history of industrial relations. In well-regulated industries today the normal strike contains no law-breaking. The right to withdraw one's labour in association with others is now firmly established. This had to be fought for, however. Moreover the power of the strike does not lie solely in withdrawing labour, but also in preventing of the employer from introducing alternative, blackleg labour. Few employers today attempt this - in the majority of cases, it does not even occur to them. Yet they did once respond to strikes in this way, and many bitter physical confrontations occurred in which trade unionists persistently broke the law by preventing blacklegs from working. There are many such cases where trade union rights have been institutionalised through law-breaking. And the achievement of political democracy itself has not been free from riots. This is a continuous process, of course. If Western society is to become still more democratic we should expect a certain turbulence in its achievement.

The conclusion is clear. The law is a necessary back-stop to conflict situations, but that is all. It is a back-stop in two senses. It can be used immediately to deal with very severe offences about which there is consensus. It can also be used as a possible threat in a bargaining ritual. But if one side is trying to change the law, its threats must be expected to lie in illegal acts of force. How serious an affront one considers this, depends not on the sanctity of law but on whether one approves of the present law. We regard the emphasis on law and constitutionalism by the Essex administration and by the mass media as a diversionary tactic to prevent discussion of the constitution of the University. The whole question of who one blames for the Essex disturbances can be reduced to - does one think that students should have more control over their university lives? We think they should, both because they themselves want this and because this would not infringe our conception of a university community. Indeed to make universities more democratic would be to return them to a much older ideal and tradition of participation than the modern liberal university has ever embodied. How can this be considered subversive in a supposedly democratic society?

We would not like to pretend that there is a complete solution available of student troubles. To negotiate with student unions, and to be wary of invoking the law, is to recognise that conflict is endemic. Moreover, students are more difficult for authority to deal with than are most groups in society. They cannot easily be confronted with rational coercion, for they are relatively unfrightened of either penury or prison.

They cannot be greatly relied on to honour agreements, because "they" change every three years and the main currents of student politics change still more frequently. They have great facility in abusing and embarrassing the University authorities, and this often seems to become the goal and not the means of their struggle. These are qualities that universities must bear with in mild or acute discomfort. Universities vary considerably in their degrees of discomfort. Those that are at the opposite end of the spectrum to Essex - science-based, decentralised in authority, in large towns, renowned for sporting prowess - can still survive without eruptions. But the number of "trouble-free" universities is in decline. Some of the causes we have discussed are national and international in nature. Let us recall such trends as the relative decline of science and the growth of social science, the earlier maturity of young people, the growing specialisation of academics, the problematic social and occupational position of students, the faltering of traditional sources of radicalism in society. This is more than an Essex problem, though Essex has experienced most of these in extreme form. Such trends may be temporary, for after all, universities have changed many times in their history. Indeed, in the U.S. a return to the conservatism of the 1950s is now becoming evident in certain respects. We are actually finishing this manuscript at Columbia and Yale Universities, where students appear to be concerned with obtaining their grades and passing their exams rather than with wider political and educational affairs. The permanence of the grants issue in Britain will probably prevent British students from following the same path, but in any case this would

not be a trend to be applauded. For there is a certain narrowness about the kind of university where students confine themselves to their academic specialism and to their preparation for a career. It was our Vice-Chancellor who concluded one of his Reith Lectures with the statement that a university is "a community where concern is not just with the pursuit of learning but with the fulfillment of lives."<sup>1</sup> At the present time we are faced with a growing student demand for more control over their university lives. We do not see this as conflict with the fundamental purposes of universities. Indeed, we see it as part of those purposes. Therefore we should gladly accede to this demand, and hope that students will continue to adhere to it. Universities can only, and should only, be run with the consent of their students.

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<sup>1</sup>A University in the Making, p. 63.