

The Student Revolution

Recently I wrote in these columns of the accelerating revolutionary mood on the nation's campuses. It is now clear that I underestimated the scope and depth of the looming student rebellion: for that rebellion is not only occurring now on *American* campuses, but throughout the world. In the U.S., there have been countless student sit-ins, with the mightiest, of course, being the Columbia crisis, which succeeded in closing Columbia College for the rest of the semester: but even more important, student rebellions are coming close to toppling governments in Europe, especially in Poland, West Germany, and France.

The amazing events in France highlight the revolutionary process at work. Here has been France, chafing for over a decade of near-dictatorship by De Gaulle. Add to this the archaic, bureaucratic, state-ridden and state-owned educational system, and the ingredients were brewed for student rebellion. Just as in the smaller model at Columbia, the student rebellion began as a sit-in and demonstration by a relatively small group of militant student rebels. Just as at Columbia, the police, called in to force the demonstrators into line, clubbed and beat their way through the student protestors. The savage brutality inflicted on the students swung the French working class behind the students, just as at Columbia the brutality swung the host of moderate students behind the strike. Throughout France, the cry arose: "De Gaulle! Assasin!," the analog of Columbia's "Kirk Must Go!"

What do the students want? Obviously their aims are vague and ill-defined. But that is the way it always is in revolution; nobody sits down and draws up a blueprint of how the revolution should or will turn out. On the contrary, once launched the revolution proceeds on its own inner dynamic, and the revolutionaries become educated in the course of the struggle itself. But the students do know, and clearly, what it is they are *against*; they are against the present system, and specifically against the state-ridden educational bureaucracy endemic in the world today. They are, as it were, instinctive libertarians, lashing out in fury at institutions which they perceive are oppressing and manipulating them. One thing is certain: These kids are not “Communists.” Take, for example, the case of “Red Rudi” Dutschke, the famous young leader of the West Berlin student rebels. Despite his nickname, Rudi found that he had to leave East Germany, where he was born, because he couldn’t take the oppressive Communist system of his homeland. Also, as a Christian youth leader, Dutschke found that he was particularly disliked by the East German regime. The Communist Party invariably was very late in endorsing the current student rebellions — the French Party first subjected them to bitter attack — and only swung behind the demonstrations when it was all too clear that if the Communists did *not* back the students they would lose all hope of support in the coming generation.

It’s true that the idols of the West German and the French youth, and the American rebels too, are such Communist leaders as Mao, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh. But they are not revered as Communists; no one, after all, likes very much, let alone worships, such current Communist leaders as Brezhnev, Gomulka, or Gus Hall; the reason is that the above leaders are admired not as Communists, but as successful revolutionaries. In this modern, complex, and militarized world, Ho, Che, and Mao were able to make revolution; it is this achievement, not Communism, that leads the young to idolize them.

At any rate, I, for one, shall not weep for whatever might be swept away of the old, state-dominated, bureaucratic university structures. But, whether we like it or not, whether we cheer or deplore, hold on to your hats: The international student revolution has begun.