

THE LIBERAL MYTH OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

The publicly stated ideas, and the private wish of Liverpool's new Vice-Chancellor, Trevor Thomas, is a return to one community in the University. The ideal seems, on the surface, a fine and laudable one . . . a society with a ready identity, a common purpose, and a sense of participation by all concerned from the most senior to the most junior. The hoped for return is to a "community" which has been rather naively likened to a "family" by some of the top men in the University.

Liverpool, beset openly for the first time with issues which have set many of the students into direct conflict with the administration, may now seem ripe for such a return. But is the return one which is worth making? Many doubt this.

The events of recent months . . . the causes of the occupation of Senate House, and the disciplining of ten of the students who took part . . . have prompted many to enquire more deeply than normal into the ramifications of the ideal of an academic community.

Many have found in it not a desirable goal, but one which in creating its own mystique, has within itself its own mechanism of elitist self-perpetuation, and based upon a fundamental premise which removes the University from the society in which it stands and elevates it to a position above and beyond that society.

The University Board of Discipline, in its recent judgements on ten students, has stated that in their view the students were guilty

of having placed themselves above the statutes and ordinances of the University in pursuit of their political objectives. Many now see in this much vaunted ideal of the Academic Community a means whereby the University sets **itself** above, not the laws of the land, but the objective needs of the mass of the people . . . the working class.

An examination of the values of the University, largely as reflected in its authority structure and governing elite, reveals many features of the "community" which demonstrate its patent undesirability.

The vast bulk of the money to finance a British university comes from governmental sources such as the University Grants Committee and the Science Research

Council, whilst only a proportionately small amount comes from private sources. Yet in its governing bodies one sees little, if any, representation of working class organisations like trades unions and trades councils, with the voices of both local business and international monopolies existing in abundance. Even national government is fiercely resisted if it tries to get its voice in, as was seen in the instances of the decision to have the Comptroller and Auditor General examine university accounts and the PIB report into lecturers' salaries in late 1968 making "university autonomy" the battle cry throughout the senior common rooms of Britain.

One of the mainstays of the notion of a community has always been the theoretical ease of communication. This however, has been neither achieved (witness recent happenings in Liverpool) nor, which is more to the point, is desirable in the form in which the authorities envisage. The means by which they attempt to operate, and one which is finding increasing disfavour amongst students, is the assimilation of many potential activists, into the mainstream of university administration via the bureaucracy in the established students' unions. The representatives, supposedly reporting, arguing, and defending the requests and demands of the students, are in fact never allowed near the points of true decision-making. Whenever and wherever students find their way onto a Council Senate, or committee, the exact point of power moves that much further away. The students themselves become remote and alienated beings, acting not so much as the representatives of those who elected them, but rather as apologists for the decisions of the University bureaucracy.

More and more the exact need of communications is becoming apparent, as a means of exposing and highlighting the true nature of the decision-making process, those who

manipulate the machine and exactly in whose interests they do so.

The values of the institution and the equilibrium so cherished by academics and administrators alike demand certain things, in defence of which myths are often thrown up. One example is the whole question of "academic excellence". Academics will pay great lip-service, and administrators expend enormous energy, in appearing to allow participation from, and at, all levels. However, none of this can finally challenge the position of the "academic" as the pinnacle, propagator, and judge of what constitutes academic excellence. The theory and practice of participation are, in fact, so often a smoke-screen sent up by self-interested parties to cloud the real question. Virtually no effect is spent, of course, in admitting a situation where students (acting in Liverpool, as elsewhere, as the consumers "of an academic product" rather than participants in a process whose function is commonly decided and held) have a contribution to make to the overall teaching role of the university, which is qualitatively different but as important as that of the academics.

Academics will pay great tribute to the noble ideal of the "pursuit of truth and knowledge to its highest levels" set in a framework of analysis and criticism. They themselves however do next to nothing to examine, or encourage students to examine, the relation of the product to the objective needs of society. In fact, it is not simply a question of the relation of the product . . . i.e. the graduate as a member of a managerial, professional, technological, or educational elite . . . but a question of the basic ideology underlying the product in the first place. The system, far from encouraging enquiry into this ideology, sets up defence mechanism to prevent such enquiries.

When a group of staff at Birmingham University set out to examine the nature of

the aims and functions of a modern university, they entitled their pamphlet "NO EASY ANSWERS". No one would pretend that an exact and penetrative analysis of the situation is easy, let alone any solutions which may result. One thing is certain however; namely, the gradual erosion of the liberal facade surrounding or propping up the myth of the academic community, and the related secondary myth, that within itself a university contains the necessary dynamics for change.

To place itself above society, relying on essentially different criteria of government and responsibility, and claiming to set up higher standards as an example to society is not only untrue and misleading (exemplified by situation at Liverpool) but is, to many, undesirable.

The ideal is surely to serve the objective interests of the people. Whether this is feasible in a society such as ours is of course highly doubtful if not impossible. To see the university simply as an organ of the state i.e. serving the interests of monopoly capitalism, would seem to many a facile analysis. It certainly is not the whole truth, but contains the essential premise from which one may work.

It is hard to see a university serving the objective interests of the people, whether it is **indirectly** financed and run by capitalist interests (as it is now) or taking its money **direct** from "private sources" such as the proposed "private university". To hope that a university's values and ideology will be changed simply by amending its governmental structure, is nonsense. The reason to press for such a change can only be that it will further expose, to a far greater section of people, the exact nature of the institution, its products, and the nature of the interests which the university serves.

Richard Davies





... you are guilty of conduct detrimental to the discharge of the duties of the University in that on March 9th and succeeding days you occupied the Senate House ...



1. That Senate, Council and Council publicly disassociate themselves from the views of the Chancellor—the Marquess of Salisbury, and call for his resignation.

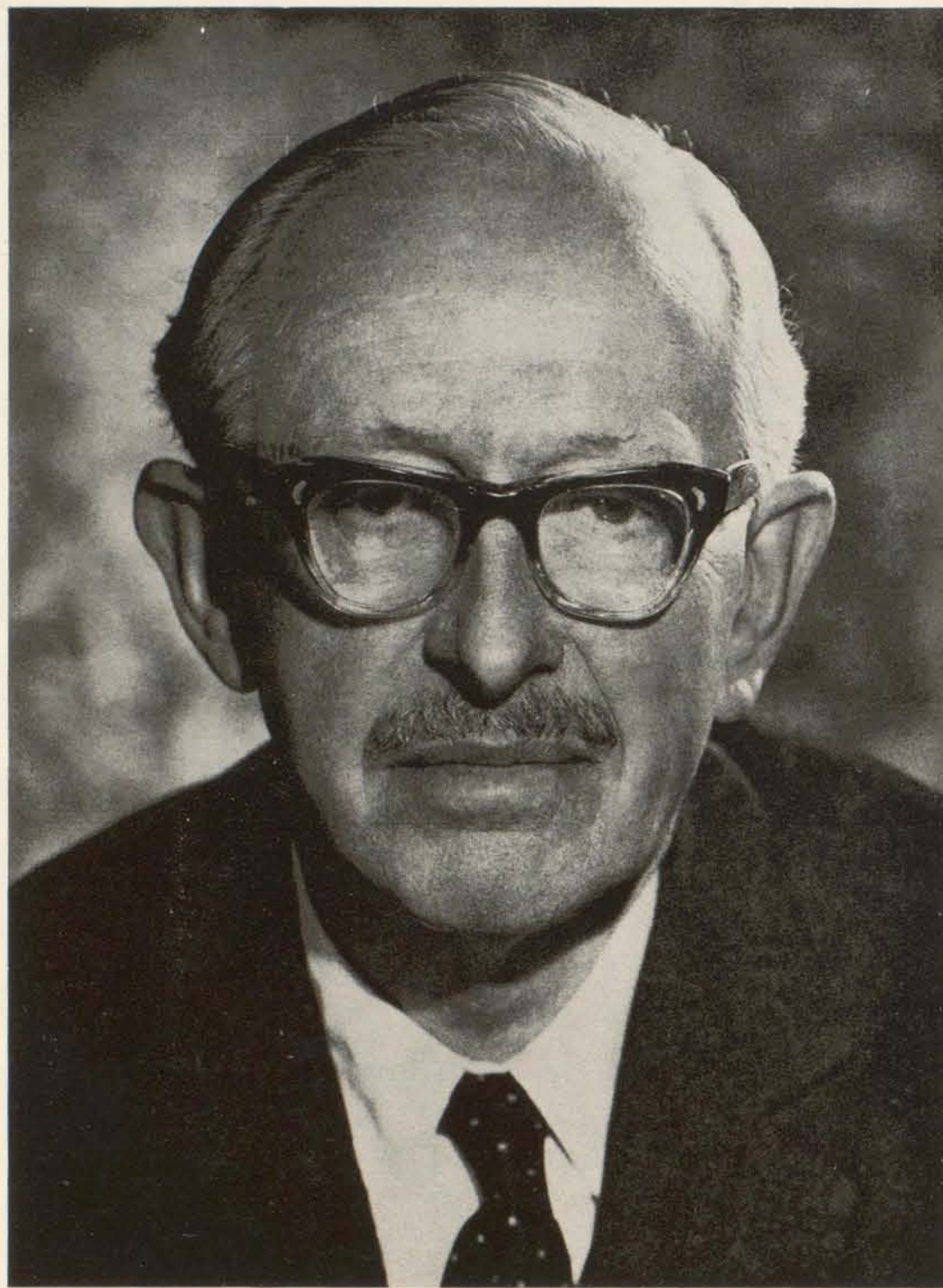
2. That the University publish a schedule of all investments in the Staff Newsletter and Guild Gazette.

3. That a public independent enquiry be held into all methods of keeping data and information on staff and students at all levels.

4. That the Vice Chancellor give satisfactory answers on the questions of secret files and chemical and Biological Warfare research.

5. That there be no victimization of any who take part in this occupation.





HOLY GHOST

Scene — Liverpool University Students Union. In the Mountford Hall a student faces east towards Senate House, kneels and prays. His mouth can be seen to move, his eyes are narrowed, fearful and transfixed

A vision of the word appears to him.

Senate: The Marquess of Salisbury is a concept beyond the imagination. To derive spiritual satisfaction from his presence it is essential that you believe. The Marquess is only the cross on the altar that you must worship—have faith. Do not question that which is true but glory in all that he manifests.

Student: But Senate, how can I believe in the Marquess when I cannot see him. Give me guidance so that I may have faith. Teach me not to doubt.

Senate: Look around you, student, and see that the Marquess is not faith in itself but the mouth-piece of my word. Understand those things that you can see and believe in the Marquess as my representative in the world. Have I not built you fine buildings so that you may live in comfort? Have I not given you laboratories so that you may discover the wonders and secrets of life? Libraries overflowing with books for you to study and understand the world around you. Places for recreation and sport—a gymnasium, swimming pool, squash courts. The largest union in the country over which you have complete control—all these things for your benefit. And for this I ask little, only that you believe in my word and listen to those that I choose to represent my word.

Student: When I entered the campus your disciples told me that this place existed for the pursuit of learning and from that learning we could together progress to a better life. I was also taught that all men are equal. Yet I read the word of the Marquess and he does not speak these things which you have told me were true.

Senate: Let me explain why we chose the Marquess. You must first understand that the Marquess is merely a symbol and that he was chosen as an example to which all students could look; for inspiration. He represents all those precepts which have made this kingdom strong. If you, as a student, can learn to respect this kingdom, our dear Britain and be loyal to the monarch H.R.H. the Queen, you will have understood the word of the Marquess. For the Marquess says be loyal to her majesty and be loyal to Britain, British lives, British property, British habits, where ever they may be, be it Hertfordshire or Africa, the words and actions of British people are always right.

The Marquess is of course a representative of the élite to whom you must pay respect. He has the traditions of Britain at heart. Did you know that his ancestor was William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chancellor, that Robert Cecil was created the Earl of Salisbury by James I, that James seventh Earl of Salisbury was Lord Chamberlain to George III, that the present Marquess's grandfather was Prime Minister of Britain. All these things we must worship and respect. Student look at the perfection of his upbringing—High Anglican, Eton, Oxford,

the Grenadier Guards. LOOK at the exclusive clubs to which he belongs, Carlton, Turf and Bucks. Look at the elegance of his stately home at Hatfield House, his country place in Dorset and his town house in Chelsea. His achievements—Conservative Minister of the Colonies, leader of the House of Lords. Above all his principles—avowedly a believer in the traditions of Conservatism. Student, Student, is it not apparent why the Marquess represents us so well?

Student: Thank you Senate, I understand better what he represents. But still I am worried that the Marquess represents more than the traditional conservatism of Britain. I understand that the Marquess feels overwhelmed by the throwing over of the past traditions and that he sees himself as a buttress for the few remaining escarpments. But do not his views offend the accepted morality of the equality of every man. How can you stand by a man who refuses to renounce BRITISH exploitation of other countries and justifies our actions by saying we are a superior race. Is this not the same thoughts we condemn when spoken by Verwoed, Voerster, or SMITH? Am I to listen silently when the Marquess says

"Do not let us be ashamed of our record in Central Africa There is no finer chapter in our whole history. We have brought to the primitive people of those parts peace, justice and security that hitherto they have never known." When I know it not to be true, from what I have learnt and read. Am I to join in the common condemnation of S. Africa and Rhodesia and to naively ignore the statements of the Marquess when he says of Central Africa that

"Today the only areas where the community, including the indiginous population, is prospering, are those where the white man is still playing his full part. The rest of its vast territories are sinking back ever more into the jungle of primitive savagery with its famine, its disease, and its witchcraft and all those evils from which the white man rescued them"

Senate, show me the difference between the Marquess's views and S. Africa's actions. For I can only see his views as a careful political euphemism. Nice, polite inanities flow innocently from his lips. Mild protestations translate oppression into education, extinguishment of freedom into a period of slow advancement.

"Some of us . . . feel that in a multi-racial State it is impossible to ignore the fact that some sections of the population are less advanced, less mature than other sections, and that a period of education may be necessary before the more primitive sections can be regarded by all respects as entirely the equal of the other section I feel that myself"

Surely you cannot deny that these are the words of an experienced politician, painfully controlling his opinions, always displaying psychopathic control over his true feelings and emotions. Am I to believe the blithe mask of contorted rationality which obscures the injustice and hardship. Senate he betrays himself. For beneath the calm of the political veneer are words that

writhe, uncomfortably, within the cage of morality. Bare and clear is the repetition of thought. For what the Marquess says today, is but a tragic echo of what he has been saying all his life. Time can extract from the tangle of guarded words the meaning behind them. Confronted with the emergence of formerly subordinate peoples his reason departs. Blindly statements conflict with motives. Claiming to believe in multi-racialism he opposes fiercely any means to bring it about; denying support of apartheid he propogates the very theory upon which the system is based.

The Marquess says that S. Africa is a "multi-racial state" in which "a less advanced section" of the society need a "period of education" before they can be regarded as equal. Empty meaningless words that ring hollowly through the realities of overcrowded prisons, the reality of the Secret police, the reality of Sharpeville. Let the Marquess tell the black people that they are being educated, as they are herded out of the cities, as they are excluded from the lowest form of administrative work. The black people in S. Africa and Rhodesia are the victims of oppressions by a racial minority whose system of government protects their wealth and power by suppression and exploitation of black labour. With the black people isolated in the border areas, the industries are being moved out to them. Is this the "education" to which the Marquess refers?

What I can't understand, Senate, is how people can be so blind as to accept such trite distortions. Is it because it's what they want to hear? Do those students who say the Marquess is right, really believe that the black people are being educated so that they can assume positions of power in white S. Africa? Do you, Senate, believe that the former Minister of the Colonies is merely mistakenly naive. That this man who has devoted so much of his life to African affairs cannot be aware of the nature of the regimes he defends.

Senate, I beseech you—the Marquess is a symbol of resistance to change, of blind nineteenth century paternalism, of colonial exploitation, of the most extreme form of conservatism.

Is all this to be indicative of our existence here?

Senate: Think of the consequences of what you have said. Remember student, that however valid is all that you have said, you must not presume to encroach on the man's freedom of thought. Every man has the right to express his opinions. Do not limit the bounds of tolerance within the bounds of your own spectrum of political thought.

Student: But I cannot accept that pure tolerance is a virtue. Society sets its own boundaries, clearly exhibiting through sets of rules the extent of our freedom. It is from these arbitrary rules or laws that society creates its moral values. Pure tolerance is a limitless concept that has no place in community life. It is my assertion that criticism of the Marquess can be justified because his position is not that of

an individual but a representative of a community. There is no sanctuary to be sought in the nebulous confines of political thought. There is no comfortable dividing line between politics and morals where the Powells and the Salisburys can claim immunity from criticism.

If the Marquess was chosen to be our symbol, for what reasons? Was it not because of a tacit approval of the Marquess's political views represents that he was chosen. I have heard it said that there was a choice between him and Lord Derby. Both men appear to have the quality of respectability and tradition that are the requisite qualifications for the position of Chancellor. Perhaps, Senate, it is indicative of your choice that Lord Derby, the Liberal peer was rejected.

Senate: Calm yourself, student. Where is your realism? We chose the Marquess to be our Chancellor in 1951 are we today to be condemned for a change in the political climate.

(Heavy whisper) You must realise that we would be glad to have a change and to accept the Marquess's resignation. Your protestations are preventing this. Be patient and when the Marquess resigns we will elect a liberal for you.

Student: Senate it is not a change of political climate that has created the opposition to the Marquess but a change in political awareness. In 1951 the choice was just as reprehensible as it is now. He was well-known for his colonial and extreme right wing views. When you decide to appoint him it must have been motivated by admiration for his political ideals. Why else did you choose him. The basis for which he was chosen was his respectable public reputation. And it was in politics that this reputation was established. It was only that students' political awareness had been blunted and drained by the devastations of war that you were able to choose him without arousing public criticism. Scrambling to rebuild their lives, they were uninterested in the remoteness of their universities administration.

But today we are free to probe and question the direction in which we are being led. If we serve any function in society, it comes of our privileged situation. Preserved in our closed community, sheltered from the hum-drum 9-5 pressures, we are able to stand back and evaluate the ideals of our society—its motives, its purpose, its future. In this way our questioning of the Marquess is of greater value than merely pressure to remove a symbol that is repugnant to us. For now the questions lead to the nature of our university itself. Perhaps we are fortunate that the doubts and distrust precipitated by the presence of the Marquess have raised larger and more imminent enquiry. If those that decide this university's policy can choose a man who is famed for his views on Africa and racial integration, a man opposed to change, what other decisions have they made that will affect us in the future? This the question that we are now asking.

Senate who are you?

What do you do?

Why are you so isolated from the rest of the community?

Where are you leading us?

Senate: Student you must continue to study and to enquire. I am pleased to observe your growing awareness and concern. BUT you must be patient and be sure in the knowledge that we are making the best decisions for you.

Student: But Senate, is the questioning, the enquiry, the experiment, to go no further than the laboratory. Is our university yet another segment of the national system moving society along predictable paths? Is our independence bound up in the habit of passing on technical knowledge? Or are we free to challenge a system that has not altered for 70 years? We are confronting your rigidity, your remoteness, and your secrecy.

Senate who are you?

What do you do?

WHO ARE YOU?

Senate: I am pleased to observe your growing awareness and concern. But you must be patient. I shall most certainly take your opinions into consideration. But you must be patient. I am pleased to observe your growing

(The questions have begun to resound above the answers. But the vision grows faint. It peers backwards and moves away into the future)

SPHINX BRIEF