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FROM THE SIXTIES TO THE NINETIES: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD AT WORK†

Seymour Martin Lipset††

This conference seeks to deal with the effect of the 1960s on the 1990s, but I would like to start with the 1930s and discuss that decade and then deal with the 1960s more than the 1990s. I have been involved in politics on the campus and in the intellectual world since the 1930s. In 1936, as a fourteen-year-old freshman, I joined the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) in Townsend Harris High School, which was the affiliated prep school of City College in New York. I was a reluctant delegate in 1939 to the convention of the American Student Union—reluctant because it was an organization which the Stalinists, the Communists, controlled, as I tried to make public at the time. I became a member of the Trotskyists at City College of New York in 1939, but I dropped out in less than a year. I remained active in various anti-Stalinist leftist groups. I was national chairman of the YPSL in 1945. And among other things, I hired Jeremiah Kaplan, the founder of *The Free Press*, as a national organizer of the YPSL. *The Free Press* played an important role in the development of social science in the 1960s and 1970s.

The student movement of the 1930s, which extended into the 1940s, and in which I and others here participated, was, of course, a reaction to the Great Depression and the spread of fascism. Its largest bases of support were in the then largely free, publicly supported colleges and universities with their largely working-class origin population. The City Colleges in New York were, of course, the best known politically, but the University of Buffalo, Wisconsin, Berkeley, San Francisco State, and many others, had large and significant left wing student movements, and most of them had many radicals on the faculty. There were,

† This article is based on a speech given by Professor Lipset at the Academic Freedom Symposium.

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of course, leftist groups at the Ivies, which became much more important centers of activity in the 1960s and later, but during the 1930s, their activism was much smaller, almost unnoticeable, except perhaps for the University of Chicago.

The Communists were by far the strongest group on the Left. They could capitalize on the image of the Soviet Union as an anti-fascist force, as a powerful country, which supported progressive causes. This image appealed strongly to Jewish students, but also to many others who were rightly concerned about the spread of fascism. That perception led to the Stalinists becoming a much more important force within American society than I think people realize today. This judgment is not the perhaps exaggerated view of anti-Communists. Peggy Dennis, who is the wife of Eugene Dennis, the national secretary of the Communist party for a number of years in the 1950s, gave what, as far as I know, is the only quantitative estimate of Communist strength in American politics. The Stalinists had been working for much of the late 1930s and later the early 1940s within the Democratic party. Peggy Dennis reported that they controlled the Democratic party in four states and had significant influence in twenty-eight others. The behavior of a Minnesota governor led to the judgment that if he was not a member of the Communist party, he was cheating the party of its dues. This was Governor Benson, elected by the state Farmer Labor party, which was allied to the Democrats nationally. Jim Farley, then chairman of the Democratic National Committee, used to say there were forty-seven states and the Soviet of Washington. He did not mean D.C., he was referring to the state of Washington, where the Communists did control the Democratic party and were able to elect a number of Congressmen and other offices. People who followed the party line served in Congress from California, Minnesota, Montana, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Outside of their role in the political process Communists were important within the labor movement, particularly in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Many of their organizers were party members. This reflected the difficulties a weak labor movement had in finding people who were willing to get their heads broken, to work late hours for little pay, and for whom the movement was more than just dollars and cents. In the 1930s, these organizers largely came from the ranks of the

young Communists and young Socialists. The CIO leaders, including its first head, John L. Lewis, who though certainly not a Communist, consciously collaborated with the party. Lewis met with Earl Browder, the head of the party. He knew the relationship between the party and some of the people he hired as organizers or who served as officers of many affiliated unions. For example, the files of the American party, which were stored in Moscow and are now available, document that Harry Bridges, leader of the Longshoremen, was a member. Not only was he in the party, he served on the National Committee of the Soviet Communist party. This was a form of recognition which the International gave to important foreign comrades. It was equivalent to making them lords or knights within the Communist movement. Bridges apparently earned this recognition, though he denied membership in the party to his dying day.

This is neither the time nor the place to evaluate the role of the Communist party in American society. Again, however, the notion that it was just a small, insignificant, uninfluential organization simply is not true. While we are primarily dealing with the university during the 1930s and 1940s at this conference, we should recognize the important impact the party had outside the academy—particularly in politics, labor, and extramural intellectual and cultural life, e.g., Hollywood and the elite press. Those of us who fought the Stalinists in those days were dealing with a powerful force. It, however, operated undercover, *sub rosa*. The Communists in the United States, at least, followed a consistent tactic of concealing their membership. They lied. Unlike other radicals such as Socialists, Trotskyists and Industrial Workers of the World, the Communists never revealed their identity. Thus the Communists in the Democratic party never sought support as Communists; they pretended to be liberals or progressives. Very few of the Communists in the labor movement ever acknowledged membership in the party. And, of course, those in the universities did not either.

The party's policy, prior to McCarthyism in the 1950s, was simply to lie. When people were asked whether they were members of the party, they were told to deny it, even under oath. And when governments wanted to prosecute Communists, they could be indicted for perjury, for having lied about membership. Later on the Stalinists adopted the Fifth Amendment tactic of refusing to answer the membership question

because it might incriminate them. These tactics made the defense of civil liberties and academic freedom immensely difficult, because it was impossible to deal with the presence of Communists in the university and elsewhere in society as a matter of people being persecuted for their political views. Since nobody was a Communist, how could you defend the right to be a Communist? The discussion resembled a detective story—was somebody a communist or not—not whether he or she had the right to be a Communist. Among the other disservices to democracy the Stalinists performed, one of the greatest was to undermine academic freedom and civil liberties by rarely defending the right to be a radical. No other political group has ever behaved this way in the United States.

The abolitionists certainly did not hide their views before the Civil War. The Socialists who were persecuted because of their opposition to the war during World War I identified themselves as Socialists and anti-war. Eugene Debs, the party's leader, was offended because the government would not arrest him for his opposition to World War I. The record shows that he kept going out of his way to make more and more inflammatory anti-war speeches, until he was indicted for sedition. The Wobblies, the Industrial Workers of the World, consciously sought to fill the jails. They would pour into communities where there were strikes or organizing efforts, hoping to be incarcerated. The Trotskyists, who opposed World War II, never hid the fact they were Trotskyists. They were indicted and convicted during the war. They proudly proclaimed their revolutionary views at their trials. They insisted on the right to hold and present their views. Clearly, to defend civil liberties, and academic freedom, it is necessary to say "I am what I am and you have no right to stop me. I have the right to speak up. I have the right to teach. The authorities have no right to fire me or jail me for my views."

The Communists never behaved this way, not outside or inside the university. Hence they dirtied the water. The Communists would insist that the investigators were after liberals, dissidents, not Communists. Many liberal intellectuals appeared to accept these arguments. They saw Joseph McCarthy as more undemocratic than the (non-existent) Communists. Within the leading universities, it was more dangerous in terms of prospects for tenure and promotion to be a conservative, particularly to be

a defender of McCarthy, than to be a Communist.

To return to relevant autobiographical details, in the early 1960s I was teaching at Berkeley, where I served as faculty advisor to the Young People's Socialist League. More important perhaps, in terms of my knowledge of and involvement in campus politics in that period, I was a close friend and advisor to Clark Kerr, then the president of the University of California from 1964 through 1965, the period of the Free Speech Movement (FSM), the first great campus uprising of the time. Nathan Glazer was also at Berkeley and we shared many views. In fact, I have to report that almost all the leaders of the FSM were in a course we taught jointly on American society. But the other item I have to confess to is our role during the catalytic event in the Berkeley Free Speech uprising, the capture in September 1964 of a police car by demonstrating students, who then turned it into a podium with a loudspeaker. Two faculty members stood on that car that fateful night: Glazer and me. And one of the things which subsequently haunted me or followed me around was the charge that I had called the protesters, the FSMers, "Ku Klux Klaners." What I had said was that when people engage in civil disobedience in a democratic society for a minor issue, they undermine efforts to attack undemocratic groups like the Ku Klux Klan for its illegal activities. This is a view that I think has been validated by subsequent events. We believed, Nathan Glazer, myself and others, that the sit-in tactic which was derived from the civil rights movement was warranted in the South where blacks did not then have the right to vote and which, therefore, was not a democratic polity. Civil disobedience, however, was not justified in a situation like Berkeley, where the issue initially had been the right of political groups to organize on a small piece of campus property. Free speech and assembly were never in question at Berkeley.

The reason that the 1960s' student protest started at Berkeley was that Berkeley had more radical groups and organized left groups with large memberships, than any other campus in the country. There were Stalinists, different varieties of Trotskyists, socialists, and anarchists. Bogdan Denitch, whom some of you may know, a very active Berkeley socialist who was curious about other political groups, estimated that there were at least 300 or 400 members of socialist and radical groups on

the campus before the FSM started—enough to make up the crowd that surrounded the police car. The reason that the movement of the 1960s started at Berkeley was because there was more activity, more free speech, and more civil rights demonstrations there than at any other campus. Berkeley was proto-typical of the wave that swept the country with the growth of Vietnam protests.

The uprisings of the 1960s differed greatly from the protests of the 1930s, which as noted, consisted largely of students from relatively poor economic origins. The 1960s produced a movement of children of affluence who, initially, expressed middle-class or upper-class guilt about the treatment of blacks. Many had been involved in civil disobedience protests in the South or even in the North, as in San Francisco in 1963. Mario Savio, the leader of the 1964 Berkeley uprising, had been in Mississippi the year before, and transferred the tactics learned in Mississippi onto the campus. Civil rights had widespread support. The issue of equality for the black population was one that the entire campus favored. Almost every faculty member and the great majority of students were strong supporters of equality for the African-American population. Any activity which seemed to be designed to further that objective could expect and did receive backing.

Berkeley and the struggle for civil rights showed the way tactically, but the issue which produced a national mass movement in 1965 and later was opposition to the Vietnam War. Reaction to America's role in the Vietnam War, in the context of students being deferred from serving, while the poorer strata fought, gradually escalated to mass demonstrations using civil disobedience tactics. Parenthetically, it should be noted that such opposition was not unusual in America. Every war the United States has been in, from the War of 1812 to Vietnam, has seen large-scale anti-war protest, with the exception of World War II, which began for the United States with an attack by Japan. Sol Tax of the University of Chicago, in writing on the history of anti-war protests placed Vietnam fourth on the list in terms of the extent of the anti-war protest. Hundreds of thousands of people refused to serve in World War I. There were thousands of Americans, including West Point graduates, who, during the Mexican-American War deserted the American army to join the Mexican army because they believed they

should be on the right side, the morally justified one. Anti-war movements during wars are as American as apple pie. Elsewhere I have related such behavior to the character of religion in this country, to Protestant sectarianism.

To return to the 1960s, what began as a local protest turned into a national mass movement led by radicals who were critical of the establishment. At Berkeley and elsewhere, there was limited support initially for anti-war activities. But what enlarged the protests into large-scale uprisings was the stupidity of the authorities in calling the police onto campuses. Berkeley showed the way. The FSM movement was declining until the police were called in when the administration building was occupied in December 1964. The leaders of the movement very consciously tried to use Blanquist¹ tactics. Although few had heard of Blanqui, the radicals of the 1960s, in effect, followed his advice. Calvin Trillin, who spent some time at Berkeley, reported in *The New Yorker* that as the movement was declining in the fall of 1964, the leaders discussed among themselves what they could do to create an event that would bring the police on campus. The first thing they thought of was to show pornographic films on the wall of Sproul Hall, the administration building. Some years later, *The Guardian*, a left-wing weekly, published a discussion between Stokley Carmichael and Carl Oglesby, the head of the SDS, about the tactics of the movement, in which they concluded that any demonstration which the police did not break up was a failure.

Between 1964 and the early 1970s, the Berkeley scenario was repeated on campus after campus. University administrators never seemed to learn that if civil disobedience, usually a sit-in in the administration building, was followed by calling in the police, that the campus would inevitably fall apart. The faculty would almost invariably pass a resolution demanding the resignation of the administration, and the "neutrals" or even the conservatives among the faculty and students would denounce the administration and the police. One of the few places this did not happen was the University of Chicago. Its president, Edward Levi, allowed the students to sit. They sat for three

1. Blanqui was a French revolutionist who advocated that small groups of revolutionists deliberately provoke the establishment to be repressive in order to enlarge their movement.

weeks, and finally walked out, at which point they were expelled. It is noteworthy that the only university in the United States which expelled students for such actions was the University of Chicago, which, unlike most other schools, never had the demonstrators arrested.

The radicals of the 1960s, it should be noted, were not Socialists or Communists, although there were Socialists and Communists among them. They were neo-anarchists in that they were opposed to organization and they were anti-statist. They differed from earlier young radical groups, student and otherwise, in that they had no relationship with any adult movement—Communist, Socialist, or other. They had no sense of history, nor did they learn from the experiences of the adult radical movement.

If we try to evaluate the effects of 1960s' activism, it is important to note that illegal activities and counter-cultural behavior helped produce backlashes. They gave rise to Reaganism, to the election of right-wing Republicans. Ronald Reagan ran successfully for governor of California against the tactics and culture of the Berkeley movement. And he ran for president using the same campaign strategy. In 1988 George Bush also ran successfully against Berkeley, denouncing the drug culture, sexual permissiveness, increased violence, and other threats to traditional American values. Gingrich and company are still doing this today. This is what the references to family values, crime, drugs, and the like, are about.

The radicals of the 1960s produced a backlash among the middle-class and white working class as well. The United States, as Tocqueville pointed out a century and a half ago, is the most religious country in the west. And, as a myriad of comparative opinion surveys document, it still remains the most devout western country. The majority of American citizens reject challenges to its moral code and values. As social science research demonstrates, the 1960s activists were red-diaper babies, in other words, the children of the activists of the 1930s. Further, campus politics in the 1990s is affected by the fact that many of the students of the 1960s became the graduate students of the 1970s. Many of them are the faculty today, particularly in the humanities and soft social sciences. They are responsible for the increased radicalization of university faculty, particularly in the humanities. Ironically, the scions of the Free Speech

Movement, as intense ideologists, have attempted to constrain the freedom of conservative opponents, both on and off campus. People like Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Henry Kissinger, Pat Moynihan, and many others have been stopped from speaking at universities. As further irony, it may be noted that students on the whole are currently more conservative than their faculty, particularly in the best, most selective, institutions. In fact, a number of leftist faculty have expressed their unhappiness with the fact that when they lecture about politics and society the students do not listen. They are not interested in hearing about Vietnam or the sins of the Establishment.

Students are not as naive as the Left would like and the Right fears. In the mid-1990s, America has become a much more conservative country than at any time since the 1930s. Students reflect these developments in their values and behavior, as well as in their replies to opinion surveys, but many of the social and cultural changes introduced in the 1960s remain. Although many changes are negative—the drug culture, the decline in family values, the large growth of single parentage as a result of sharp increases in divorce and illegitimacy rates—others are positive. The situation of African-Americans has improved immensely, not just in terms of political rights and equality in social relationships, but in economic status as well. There has been an upgrading of the position of other minorities, as well as women and gays. These trends have not been reversed. Americans are now much more tolerant. Jews, Asians, Latinos, African-Americans, women, and gays have a better life than they did three decades ago. This is in large part consequences of the cultural changes brought about by the 1960s.

At this conference we have discussed serious threats and challenges to the intellectual integrity of the universities, but we must acknowledge that many good things have happened both inside and outside campus boundaries. I am as concerned as anyone here about the dysfunctional effects which affirmative action and multi-culturalist doctrines have had on the university and the larger society. But it is important to recognize that African-American nationalism apart, ethnic and linguistic separatisms are not threats to society, that the American melting pot is working as never before. The children of all immigrant groups, including the large majority of Latinos, are fluent in English. They understand, as Richard Rodriguez emphasizes,

that those who want them to do otherwise, are telling them to stay lower-class. But even more significant as an indicator of integration is cross-group marriages. Inter-marriage rates in this country are now fantastic. The majority of Jews wed non-Jews, most Catholics are marrying non-Catholics. Eighty percent of Italians, Irish, and Japanese choose non-Italians, non-Irish, and non-Japanese as mates. Two-fifths, forty percent of Chicanos born in this country marry persons of other origins. In fact, the only group not dissolving into a mixed ancestry category is the African-American, but the proportion of outgroup marriages among them is also growing steadily. But the latter apart, it appears as if almost every American who is looking for a mate or a date selects somebody in a different ethnic or cultural religious background than him or herself. Now those who are interested in the preservation of their own traditional ethnic group, as I as a Jew happen to be, are a little unhappy about some of the consequences for group continuity of these developments. But this result illustrates the principle that you cannot have your cake and eat it too.

My discussion ends on some optimistic notes. As indicated earlier, I do not mean to challenge the concerns about the university and culture expressed by many of the participants in this symposium. Like others here I belong to the National Association of Scholars. But I think it important to recognize that the last three decades have reflected a double-edged sword at work. We should look at both edges and their consequences, at the good as well as the bad.