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World-wide Concern for the Universities

The Statement of the International Committee on the University Emergency

There have always been disruptions among academic youth. But what was an exception confined to certain universities in individual countries now extends all over the world—to Tokyo as well as Berkeley, to Madrid as much as Berlin, to Rome and to Istanbul. The students' objectives are as profuse as the groups of interests involved are numerous. They range from demands for improved study courses and for study reforms to political agitation and, beyond that, to calls for a fundamental transformation of the order of society—and thus a complete overhaul of the universities' function.

University teachers in all parts of the world who feel the direct impact of the changes which are mostly belittled by public opinion are regarding

the escalation of the initially moderate protest movement and its increasing extremism as a challenge. Apart from organisations on a national level, an "International Committee on the University Emergency" has been set up with its seat in New York.

This Committee has drawn up a joint statement on the causes of the crisis threatening the existence of the universities which has been signed by 104 scientists of renown—including 7 Nobel Prize winners—from the United States, France, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Japan. We reprint this statement because it calls for farther-reaching discussion, also from the viewpoint of the developing countries.

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When an institution that embodies some of the noblest ideals of man is threatened, those responsible for its well-being should speak out publicly and unequivocally. As individual teachers, we have witnessed the mounting challenges to academic freedom. As a group we have examined the dangers to the survival of universities as free and honorable institutions in our several nations.

The obvious dangers are acts of terror, the growth of a politics of intimidation within universities, and the efforts, often clumsy, of people outside the academy to restore order. But the deeper danger, not visible in the daily headlines proclaiming a crisis in higher education, is the steady erosion of morale within the universities, the retreat from that ordered freedom that makes possible competition in ideas and cooperation in inquiry, and the steady draining away of commitment to the principle that the university must be a partisan of no creed or party and a critic of every creed and party.

The sources of this deeper danger are various. Universities are in trouble because our societies are in trouble. Our collective imperfections are legion and familiar. It is natural that universities should be centers of discontent.

There are still subtler causes for present challenges: the rise of a new "youth culture", the emergence of a "new consciousness", the outmoded structures of many universities, the inflammatory words and acts of a minority of students and teachers on one side, and of some public officials and governments on the other. People may well disagree about the relative importance of these causes, and we ourselves disagree. Some of us think the new "youth culture" a hopeful portent; others think it anti-intellectual. Some of us are inclined to place major responsibility for the crisis at the door of governments that have been slow to respond to profound grievances; others point to the fact that popularly chosen governments cannot readily accommodate the wishes of minorities when those minorities put forward demands in "non-negotiable" and divisive terms.

But whatever our disagreements, we are in agreement about the collective responsibility of scholars and teachers: when universities are threatened, university teachers must act; they have an obligation to defend the university's integrity. We must acknowledge the fact that the intrinsic interests of the academy are now being sacrificed

to considerations foreign to its central concern to advance and transmit knowledge.

Increasingly, from Berkeley to Berlin, political criteria are being used to evaluate academic performance. In many universities, militant groups have been able to exercise an influence over academic decisions far in excess of their real following in the academic community. Most teachers and students are not interested in the university as a center for political agitation, and have neither the time nor inclination for factional struggle. In consequence, what may appear to the public to be the "democratization" of the university has often been, in fact, its one-sided domination by indoctrinated cliques. The "peace" that has been won by the adoption of such hasty measures has too often been illusory: it has meant the continuation of a politics of threat and confrontation, combined with a surrender of principle. At the very least, it has meant the distraction of many teachers and students from their central tasks, and the proliferation of cumbersome and anarchic administrative arrangements which prevent universities from undertaking needed reforms or reasonably managing their everyday affairs.

The decline in the sense of intellectual purpose of our universities did not begin only yesterday, nor can it be arrested, much less reversed, by a policy of standing-pat. Many of us support specific proposals for reform that have been suggested or already put into effect. Reforms, however, must not strengthen two fallacies which have come to be increasingly accepted.

The first is that the university's commitment to learning should yield precedence to immediate political and social demands. The acceptance of such a principle threatens the very basis of intellectual and cultural freedom, and condemns the university to futility or hypocrisy both as a center of learning and as a center of social criticism. To turn universities into engines of political action, or into cockpits for political controversy, is to make it impossible for them to perform their indispensable functions in education and research.

The second fallacy which threatens the educational integrity of universities is the notion that they are composed of adversary blocs—students, teachers, administrators—competing for advantage at one another's expense. Obviously, the interests of these groups may sometimes be in conflict, and it is important that all be able to express their views in the process of university government. But it is a mistake to institutionalize conflict by ill-considered efforts at "restructuring" universities.

The purpose of universities is mutual education, mutual criticism, cooperative inquiry. These re-

quire consultation and respect for individual rights, not confrontation or haggling between competing blocs. Acceptance of the adversary principle as a guide for the government of universities is fundamentally incompatible with the spirit appropriate to a community of learning.

Only through independent study, unlimited by dogma or political command, can there be any advance in the natural and social sciences, or any contribution to the free imaginative development of the human spirit through the arts and humanities. Freedom of rational discourse and judgement of professional competence are not only the lifeblood of the universities themselves, they are a trust which the universities hold for the larger society.

If present tendencies in various countries continue unchallenged, the very concept of a university as a center of scholarship and independent criticism will not survive, even though physical structures bearing the official appellation, "university", may remain. We know that the process of disintegration has gone much further in some countries than in others; we know that in some countries the condition of universities is still deteriorating while in others it may be improving. We are concerned, however, with the survival of free universities everywhere.

We have come together, therefore, to form the International Committee on the University Emergency.

Our purpose will be to inform one another and the public about the condition of the university; to study and assess developments in different universities and countries; to strengthen the will to maintain professional standards of teaching and scholarship; to protect the rights of teachers and students to study together in peace and freedom; against all those, inside the university or outside it, and whatever their politics, who deny these rights; and to advance the understanding of rational means for reforming higher education and coping with its present unprecedented problems.

Our concerns are shared, we know, by vast numbers of our students. It is not only our academic lives that have been intolerably disturbed, but theirs. In many places today, they are being deprived of their one chance for a genuine education.

As scholars, we deplore the harm to our disciplines; as teachers, we deplore the harm to our students; as citizens, we deplore the harm to our countries.

As scholars, teachers and citizens, we assert that no social cause can genuinely serve humanity which destroys or corrupts the institutions where rational discourse and intellectual discipline have their home.