

The liberal democrat

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IN THIS ISSUE

What Is A Foreign Policy Liberal?

By Marshall Windmiller

CLARK KERR'S UNIVERSITY

BY MICHAEL TIGAR

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The Brave New University of Clark Kerr

by Michael Tigar

The popular press and the "sophisticated" magazines have recently gone in for more or less detailed and mostly less than accurate portrayals of "the student movement". In these accounts, the institutional framework in which students operate is largely ignored, and that is what I want to talk about.

We, the students of whom these articles speak, look in wonderment as University of California President Clark Kerr proclaims that the on-campus existence of SLATE, the U.C. student group, is somewhat inconsistent with one or another of the divined purposes of a university; we are concerned when told that young professors without tenure eschew political activity if they wish to keep their jobs; we pay some passing attention to the fact that the U.S. Army, erstwhile patron of the Academe, cancelled a contract with Johns Hopkins because that institution was not giving the right answers to questions asked of it. From each of these instances, and from a multitude of others, it is possible to adduce some consistent pattern.

If I were to summarize the *Weltanschauung* of the university administration, and hence of the university which it administers, I would do it thus (and here I take U.C. as typical of the major institutions of higher learning):

The university, as seen by Dr. Kerr and an unfortunate number of his colleagues, is no longer a body of scholars concerned with the objective examination of the universe and their society. It is composed of a body of subservient and nonobjective social technicians whose interest is not to challenge the social order but to affirm it and to calculate minor and marginal adjustments of it in order to maintain the existing social relationships.

If it is possible to demonstrate that this is a correct summing up, there follow rather interesting consequences for students and faculty, particularly if they are engaged in anything which might remotely be termed protest. For where is there room for protest in an institution engaged in affirmation rather than objective analysis and challenge of dominant values, or even room for questioning society's performance in the light of certain extant values?

Clark Kerr says on the cover of the 1961-62 University of California *General Catalogue*:

The dynamics of progress have changed the university from a tiny band of scholars situated on the periphery of society to a large group of teachers and investigators operating at an intersection crossed by nearly all the paths of human activity; from a debating forum to a research laboratory; from an isolated retreat restricted to the contemplation of philosophy, the classics, and the arts to a vast intellectual enterprise devoted also to the social, physical, and biological sciences.... Today the university is much more an integral part of society than ever before.

But then, who wants to be an integral part of this society in its present circumstances of mannerism and decadence? Significant social change and progress have not been authored by those who were "an integral part of society", but rather by those who stood outside the existing order. The authors of the Declaration of Independence stood outside the colonial order and proclaimed that "self-evident truth", objective and universal, demanded that the existing relationship with England be terminated. Marx stood outside of society,

so as to examine its laws of motion, "that mechanism which, by its mere working and without the aid of external factors, turns any given state of society into another." The classical economists, and the Whigs who were their priests, claimed "social rights" and invoked the laws of God and history that their true principles be grasped. Today, however, "the university is much more an integral part of society than ever before." Today we embrace what Edmund Wilson terms "the relativistic intelligence"--there is no objective truth except the objective truth that there isn't any.

Pick up any first-year economics text used in the university. The student is told that the economists, for their part, are today concerned principally with marginal adjustments designed to keep the system going. They know that stagnation results if the tinkers stop tinkering; their response is to tinker and not to question. The fact that our base level of unemployment continues to rise, in good times and bad, and despite a giant arms expenditure; the fact that some 20% of our population today lives on less than what the Labor Department thinks is "subsistence"; the fact that the wage scales in countries where our industries are major employers are low and in many cases getting lower; the facts of waste, conformity and obsolescence do not concern our academicians. The student is told that normative questions are largely, if not completely, avoided by modern, or "neoclassical", economists. They are "an integral part of society".

This is not to say that no academicians are trying to say things which do not follow this pattern. The House Committee on Un-American Activities just subpoenaed a group of them who had received grants from the Fund for Social Analysis, and those who had teaching jobs are still wondering how long they will have them.

As Paul Baran expressed it: "Thought. . . turned ever more into a neatly packed kit of assorted ideological gadgets required for the functioning and the preservation of the existing social order." Alternatively, "the university is much more an integral part of society than ever before."

Now to Dr. Kerr and his special view of society. Many readers are familiar with Dr. Kerr's book, *Industrialism and Industrial Man*. Dr. Kerr and his three co-authors see society as divided into two classes, the managers and the managed--the industrializing elite and the labor force. (Henceforth we will refer to this book as Kerr's since he is the chief author and all the authors, in the book's preface, accept its content.) What Dr. Kerr attempts to do is to form a world view of industrialism--"of the structuring of the managers and the managed" in world societies. This view has the advantage of ignoring the property interest of the managed. We are not undertaking to consider the entire book, but rather to ask, "what is Dr. Kerr's view of the intellectual and his social role in the modern society?"

It is important to remember that Dr. Kerr's view is a world view--he sees nations on the march to a final stage called "industrialism". America is on the road, and her path is fairly well marked out for her. Finally, inevitability and goodness seem, in the Kerr formulation, to be somehow linked, which manages to avoid distracting questions about the propriety of some aspects of the "brave new world"--Kerr's description, not mine.

In the brave new world, there are two classes, the managers and the managed. "... the vast bulk of the population must be literate in order to receive instructions, follow directions, keep records. Second,

managers, engineers, and civil servants must be trained to operate the new productive system."

Let us examine this class structure a little more closely. The "managed" worker does not, according to Dr. Kerr, engage in significant protest after the initial stages of industrialization. And, he is not as important as the manager. "Industrial managers, private or public, and their technical and professional associates, rather than industrial workers, have the more significant and decisive role in industrialization. Again, turning Marx on his head [this seems to be one of Dr. Kerr's favorite recreations], they are the 'vanguard' of the future. It is they who largely create and apply the new technology, who determine the transformations in skills and responsibilities, who influence the impact of such changes upon the work force and who exercise leadership in a technological society." (p. 30)

Later, Dr. Kerr explains where education fits into this picture. Education, he says, is "the handmaiden of industrialism". (Webster says that a handmaiden is "a female servant or attendant".) "Industrialization requires an educational system functionally related to the skills and professions imperative to its technology... The higher educational system of the industrial society stresses the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, managerial training, whether private or public, and administrative law. There is a relatively smaller place for the humanities and the arts, and the social sciences are strongly related to the training of managerial groups and technicians for enterprise and the government." (p. 36) And later, "education also has a high value in the industrial society because of the fundamental importance of science and the utility of education as a means of social mobility."

University students will be delighted to know that they are in school in order to have their tickets into the managerial class punched.

Dr. Kerr does leave room for the "intellectual" in the new order. Indeed, he speaks of a "diversity of markets for intellectuals," which conjures visions of entrepreneurs buying intellectuals on some sort of open market. For the intellectual, it is comforting to know that at last some principle has been imported to regulate his compensation--the market.

In further consideration of the question, Dr. Kerr identifies two groups in society as independent of the order. There are the intellectuals (those not already attached on as managers) and the generals. "The intellectuals (including the university students) are a particularly volatile element, since they are capable of quite rapid shifts of opinion, quickly sensitive as they are to the social climate.... They are capable of extreme reactions to objective situations--more extreme than any other group in society. They are by nature irresponsible, in the sense that they have no continuing commitment to any single institution or philosophical outlook and they are not fully answerable for consequences.... In the modern world, with its perfected communications, they are particularly influential since ideas travel fast.... Consequently, it is important who best attracts or captures the intellectuals and who uses them most effectively, for they may be a tool as well as a source of danger." (pp. 70-72--emphasis supplied)

In sum, the worker does not protest, and the intellectual likewise may be captured and his aid enlisted in affirming the social order. "There will not be any revolt...", Dr. Kerr concludes, "except little bureaucratic revolts that can be handled piecemeal."

What is the picture conjured by Dr. Kerr's definition of the intellectual in the emerging society, and from observations such as I made at the beginning? The

university comes to be seen as a kind of giant stock-run for intellectuals; those who would buy, sell, or capture sit on the fences and choose the ones they want. Inferior members of this herd, particularly the less docile ones, who might set off a revolt which was other than bureaucratic, are cut out of the bunch. (They may be sent off to edit little magazines, or perhaps they can get on at some out-of-the-way junior college.)

The most disturbing aspect of Dr. Kerr's formulation is not that he accepts this picture, but that it approaches reality. Military and business-sponsored research pays the salary of many an administrator, faculty member, and intellect. With such involvement comes the inevitable lack of independence, not just for those involved in the particular project, but for their whole institution. Yes, there is "a diversity of markets for intellectuals" and "the university is much more an integral part of society than ever before."

Moving from the general to the particular, we see manifestations of these trends on the Berkeley campus of the University of California.. ROTC instructors assume responsibility for shepherding the political activity of ROTC students, as witnessed by the recent case of a student assigned an "F" in his ROTC class for picketing the drill hour in uniform. (The U.C. Academic Senate is considering the matter now.) The Army and the Navy, because they have ROTC units on the Cal campus, keep an intelligence watch on campus political activity and warn their students against "bad company". The Navy ROTC captain cautioned his charges two years ago about the "pink-tinged" campus group, SLATE.

President Kerr's own directives on student government and student organizations reflect the view that the University is far too hygienic a place for students to engage in political action. Student government, under these directives, is managerial and "administrative", and dare not express itself on political issues. Student groups which take up "political" subjects may not hold their membership meetings on the campus, for this would somehow compromise the University. Apparently President Kerr does not feel that the University is compromised in any way by the fact that the rather politically significant activity of planning hydrogen bombs goes on in its laboratories. The University was apparently not compromised when the Los Alamos scientists in World War II were paid by checks issued through the U.C. accounting service, and the Army put listening devices in the offices of professors concerned with the project. The contradiction is apparently resolved by the fact that "the university is much more an integral part of society than ever before."

There are two questions which we may ask at this point. First, oughtn't intellectuals to affirm the dominant values of American society? And second, is the subordination of the intellectual inevitable? I answer "no" to both.

Clark Kerr, on the other hand, gives no coherent answer to the first question. His final chapter, describes the state of "pluralistic industrialism" toward which we are proceeding, and seems to imply approval of the role of the intellectual as he has sketched it. But the dominant values of mid-Twentieth Century America are not such as should be affirmed by any sane, humane, responsible person. It is these dominant values which justify an invasion of Cuba in protection of our interests; which make acceptable a patent lie by our United Nations representative regarding the invasion; which make television and other cultural pursuits merely aspects of a search for profit and hence for mediocrity. It is an expression of these values to say, as many of our clerics have recently, that it

(next page)

is all right to shoot or otherwise halt those who would intrude upon your fallout shelter. It is an affirmation of these values, as interpreted by Robert Kennedy and the Supreme Court majority, which can lead to the jailing of Communists. These values lead us to nuclear cataclysm; or, escaping that, they lead us to cultural stagnation.

This is not to preach escapism and fatalism, or to stimulate the reader to orgies of disillusion. Transcending their social order, men have in the past found ways to progress from one stage of society to the next. To find the way has been one of the functions of the intellectual in times past. To point this out is also to imply that the subordination of the intellectual is not an inevitability. In the short run, Dr. Kerr's view of the university becomes frighteningly real, all the more so because he is in a position to fulfill his own prophecy. But his proposition will be validated only if students, faculty, and the public acquiesce. This need not happen.

Seen in these terms, the guerrilla warfare between students and administration acquires greater importance. It is no longer a conflict on the fringe of society, but a microcosm of the conflict which ought to be taking place in society as a whole.