

Committee on Higher Education (C.H.E.)

A Gang with an Analysis

November, 1968

Contents

Genesis of C.H.E.	4
Birth of C.H.E.	7
First life of C.H.E.	8
Atrophy of C.H.E.	11
Demands of the Council on Higher Education	12
Death of C.H.E.	14
STUDENT RUN COURSES	17
COURSE DESCRIPTIONS	17
Women's Liberation	17
The Economic, Political, and Social Consequences of Imperialism ...	17
Revival of C.H.E.	20

[This is the story of the birth and death—and revival, of a grouplet, a Committee on Higher Education, C.H.E. This is an act of consciousness and an action; it is theory and practice. This is the critical self-analysis that revives C.H.E., the analysis that gives this gang a new direction.]

Genesis of C.H.E.

It all began in a “student-run” course. The instructor had gone to the administration. He got permission to offer a course called “Critique of Contemporary Culture,” with a room, credits, mandatory grades, paid guest speakers. A lot of non-credit students took the course. The enrolled students graded themselves, and the professor-student relation was “eliminated” by having exclusively student-run presentations.

But this course was not a radical action. It was not a confrontation with the university structure: it was itself part of the university structure. Students were told: you run this course! But since they didn’t run any element of their lives, they were lost when they had to run one course. Students were not de-alienated, they were not liberated, through this single student-run course. The university system could continue functioning very well by having just courses like this.

Students were not de-studented: nothing had changed in the rest of society. The course was a gift from above, not a power taken by students. We were not aware of this at that time. When an administrator came from California and described the “free university” that he had helped to institute, we all thought that was really great. We didn’t think enough about the nature of those classes, how meaningless and irrelevant their contents were, just how students were “led” down the liberal administrator’s path, studying trivial things like art and hallucinatory drugs, in summary, how they were co-opted. Just as in our student-run course, the students there did not institute the “free university.” All the student energy for critical study of their society was redirected by some forward-looking administrators towards a preoccupation with trivia—study and analysis that does not lead to a confrontation with capitalist society.

This brings up the issue of “peaceful coexistence” of two antagonistic activities. If the aim of students was critical analysis of the nature of the system and action to overthrow that system, a “free university” which coexists with an institution that is an integral part of that system cannot possibly realize that aim. (But once again: We were not aware of this at the time. The lecture on the “free university” planted ideas in our heads which were manifested in later actions. In fact, later, we were led down the same path by a liberal administrator in Kalamazoo—and were almost co-opted.)

Our course began to get significant when one of the study groups invited five or six administrators and faculty members to confront the class. There the potential of students confronting and attacking Authority was plainly visible. The students were more intelligent than the administrators.

One question was, “Why are there grades?”

A professor answered: If there were no grades, students would never be motivated to study.

A student said she had gotten straight A's and wasn't motivated; she dropped out of school due to the irrelevance. Not only that, in this course she wasn't getting grades and she was studying harder than ever.

The professor said: There's always an exception to a rule.

Many students got up angrily. They weren't getting grades either, and they too were preparing more for this course than for all their other courses. It was obvious that STUDENTS were "exceptions to the rule;" it was obvious that the "rule" was an ADMINISTRATIVE RULING.

Students were attacking the administrators of the entire university. At that time no one knew how to translate this confrontation into meaningful action. This was before March 22nd. Someone could have gotten up and said: Look! These are the people who make all the decisions at this university! Students might have started thinking: We could make the decisions. But no one said that.

The result of the course was that some students were "radicalized," but the course did not build a base. The original intention of the course had not, in fact, been primarily to "radicalize" students, but to create a situation in which students ran their own course. It was to serve as an example. Other students, in other courses, were to "catch on" and take over their courses. But it did not have the mechanisms for spreading the example to the "other students." Even students WITHIN the "student-run" course did not run their own course, and consequently could not communicate the significance of this activity to other students.

Some of us "caught on." From the point of view of the administration, it was better to have us INSIDE of a "student run" course than running wild in the rest of the university's courses, demanding that students take over. This kind of course made it possible for the administration to co-opt potentially revolutionary students by means of a "revolutionary" course.

Our next experience was the firing of two professors by the Economics Department. This was an overt provocation to students. Those of us who took part in the student-run course were particularly sensitive to the firing of professors. Both of the professors made critiques of the American capitalist system. One of them acted out his critique (we'll call him the Radical Professor), the other gave lectures on it (we'll call him the House Marxist).

Some students prepared a petition, addressed to the University Administration, protesting the firing of the professors. An anti-revolutionary "radical" professor (i.e., a Liberal) in the Economics Department forced the students to split the petition into two. He argued: one is a radical but has intellectual integrity (i.e., he provides "Marxist Critical Analysis" but does not act on it; he talks to Liberals), the other has no intellectual integrity (i.e., he expresses his hatred of Liberals

openly); one of them could become a Valuable Asset to the University, the other is not even a Social Scientist and he's Not Objective (i.e., he's radical in his very behavior, and thus a menace to anything that is "respectable" or even acceptable to the University). This way the Liberal is able to define the type of radicalism which is unacceptable, namely revolutionary radicalism. In other words, he is able to define the terms on which the radical is legitimate; he's able to define the limits of radicalism.

The House Marxist (who was also the "instructor" of our student-run course) dissociated himself from the split petition, and announced his unwillingness to accept a post in ANY department of the University in case the Radical was dismissed. At this point he lost his "intellectual integrity," he ceased to be a Valuable Asset (i.e., he ceased to be a House Marxist), and the Liberal quickly provided his Liberal followers with the neologism "Radist" (Radical Fascist) to redefine the former House Marxist.

A student was made to play the role of informer between the Liberal and the fired Radical Professor, in order to "enlighten" the students. The student was sent to "interview" the professor: the student said he would sign the petition if the professor could convincingly demonstrate that he was Objective (i.e., that he was Liberal). (The Radical Professor later suggested that it was the Liberal who had to prove he was Objective—i.e., revolutionary.)

Petitioning the administration for the reinstatement of two radical professors was acceptable to the Liberal. However, when a group of students got together to discuss doing something else, and when they went to the Liberal professor to discuss this "something else" with him, he turned them off. He said he was already doing something else, and they should wait for the results of what he was doing. He was telephoning the AAUP—the professors' union. He was going through proper channels. The AAUP spent some weeks investigating the dismissals. The investigators asked for the date when the letters of dismissal were sent. Since they were sent on the date specified by the AAUP. rule book, the AAUP ruled that the dismissals had been properly carried out.

A group of students who were considered "hippies" by the Kalamazoo community strongly protested this entire sequence of events as well as other aspects of the university. However, they did not engage in any kind of collective action. Each of them acted individually: they quit school. And instead of informing other students of their drastic action, they informed the vice president of the University and other administrators.

Birth of C.H.E.

Those of us who wanted more than individual action met with the fired professors and with Liberal professors. Someone suggested that a direct action had to be organized. A confrontation between the fired professors and those who fired them was proposed. That's when the Liberal jumped: he had spoken to people in the university hierarchy, the protest would get out of control, students might start criticizing the whole economics department (including the Liberal). Confrontations, demonstrations, would embarrass the economics professors. Liberal professors were trying to develop a program, they had a twenty-five page report, they'd made a study of the problem, the problem was almost solved, and action by students would rock the boat. One student suggested: students can't work with professors. One of us concluded radicals cannot plan together with Liberals. Liberals plan reforms: they want to improve the present university. We wanted a confrontation between students and the university. The Liberals wanted an improved economics department and asked: Will a confrontation improve the economics department? In the opinion of the Liberals, the economics department could be improved through appeals to the administration. We were forced to argue on the Liberals' terms, namely to answer whether or not a confrontation would improve the capitalist University. When the meeting ended, most of the people thought that a debate among professors should be held, so that "both sides" could be heard.

At this point a new element appears. We call a smaller meeting, not to discuss the best way to reform the University. We meet in order to plan an action to transform the debate between professors into a confrontation between students and professors. We prepare a proposal and plan a demonstration. This was a small, well-designed action, with concrete steps. This was March 22.

First life of C.H.E.

We looked for a name. We considered various possibilities: Free University Committee of Kalamazoo; Student Higher Intelligence Team; Mobilization for Action Organization; Committee for Higher Education. We settled on the last: it spelled CHE. We did not intend to ask the oppressor: please stop oppressing us. We prepared a leaflet calling on students to expose the economics department and to challenge the legitimacy of the professors in the department:

It Is evident that the now existing academic departments at Western are not concerned with our having any relevant and working knowledge of our situation in the world context. That Is, the U.S. Empire, upon which the sun never rises nor sets without a rebellion taking place among that 2/3 of humanity who live Under her rule, is crumbling; and there are no courses taught at Western which give us the tools to analyze the crises of our time.

This summer our cities will burn . . . our young men will die to put down a peasant rebellion In Vietnam. But in the classroom you only learn to “tailor” yourself for a position within the system that young men are dying to continue. You learn to protect and perpetuate the status quo, but where do you learn to analyze and understand just what the maintenance of this type of system implies? Just what are we doing to other members of humanity? Just what are we doing to ourselves?

It is no longer relevant to tailor your life for a slot in this society, for this society is falling apart from within and from without. Its days are numbered.

ARE YOU GOING TO FALL WITH IT? OR ARE YOU GOING TO LEARN WHAT’S GOING ON AND PREPARE?

Since the only concern of the present system is to fit us into these crumbling slots, students must demand that relevance be brought to their “institute of higher learning!”

Since it is the future that they must live in, students must demand that their formal education give them the tools with which to cope with that future!

STUDENTS!

IT IS OUR EDUCATION.

IT IS OUR UNIVERSITY.

IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE IT RELEVANT TO OUR LIVES.

DEMAND THAT YOUR CLASSES BE RELEVANT OR BOYCOTT!

SUPPORT STUDENT INITIATIVE FOR RELEVANT CURRICULUM IN EVERY DEPARTMENT!

DEMONSTRATE FOR STUDENTS’ RIGHT TO DEMAND THAT CURRICULUM THEY WANT . . . AND TO GET IT!

At this time the Economics Department at Western is attempting to make an already narrow and irrelevant department even more irrelevant to the needs of our times.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE: DEBATE TODAY FROM 3:00 to 5:00 in 2303 SANGREN.

Student ad hoc Committee on Higher Education

While some students invited the economics professors to a debate, we held a demonstration inviting students to a confrontation. We carried signs through the student and faculty cafeterias during lunch hour. The signs said: "Confront your Manipulators," "Don't teach ME to serve YOUR boss," "Professor: If you're a racist and don't know it, you should learn, not teach," and "El deber del revolucionario es hacer la revolucion."

The event took place. Eighty students came. But only a few economics professors came, mainly the professors who were totally out of it. The professors talked about how good economics was as an area of study. The life-dream of one of the Leading Professors who came, was to become a consultant to the Upjohn Company. There was another Leading Professor: he is already a consultant; he didn't come.

The economics professors defended their department with cliches. The fired professors attacked. Then one of us made the following proposal:

"Whereas, the existing Economics Department fails miserably in providing curriculum relevant to 1968, and;

"Whereas, scholars who are free to determine the content and focus of their courses do not have the right to determine and thereby limit an entire area of knowledge to fit their own needs, namely to perpetuate their own positions, and;

"Whereas, students will always be at the mercy of self-defining "academic departments" until they take matters into their own hands,

"I propose that any and all students interested in this issue take it upon themselves to constitute a Student Economics Department in direct challenge to the legitimacy of the existing department to limit the educational experience of students.

"I further propose that all interested students meet next Monday evening at 7:00 in the Bronco Room to plan future activity.

"And I suggest that the two types of activity to be carried out be the following:

"1) Research for the purpose of designing a new curriculum which includes all systems of thought relevant to today.

"2) Writing knowledgeable persons for the purpose of finding possible faculty to participate in the courses to be set up by the Student Economics Department."

This transformed the debate into a confrontation between students and the economics professors. Students got angry. Some shouted: "What the hell do you

teach this shit for!” “You fire the only two guys who talk about ghettos and about imperialism, so that you can teach your meaningless shit!” “What the hell are you people for!” This was no longer just the few of us who had formed C.H.E.; it was the whole room.

Some students were ready to remove the Economics Department then and there.

A student said the professors should be given a chance to improve their own department.

Another student said: “You’ve seen how they can’t even understand what you want! These aren’t the people who’ll change anything!”

The Liberal made a speech in the back of the room: he criticized “both sides.” He said he was the only one who had “fought” (i.e., he had talked to the bureaucrats). Then he pointed his finger to the student who made the proposal, and said: “You didn’t write that speech!” (i.e., the House Marxist moved your hand across the paper). And finally he came to the attack: “You are radists, RADISTS–You are Radical Fascists–You use the same means as those you’re fighting against.

The atmosphere was tense. Students were ready for action. The professors had been exposed, not only as ideologists, but also as ignorant men and as petty opportunists. Some twenty-five people signed up to join the group which would form the new department. But the school term was about to end. Students were about to leave campus for the summer. And we failed to make personal contact with any of the people who had signed up.

Atrophy of C.H.E.

At this point we were suddenly disoriented. Our well-planned action was followed by a series of mistakes.

First of all, since we hadn't contacted anyone personally, hardly anyone came to the meeting we had called. Instead of asking WHAT WE HAD DONE WRONG in calling the meeting, we vaguely blamed ALL STUDENTS for their apathy and lack of interest. This set the tone for our next mistake. Since STUDENTS hadn't come, we couldn't have a "student-run" department; so we did what seemed like the next best thing: WE TURNED TO THE ADMINISTRATION. In other words, since students DIDN'T HAVE THE POWER, we turned TO THOSE IN POWER. We made all these mistakes AFTER the whole process during which we had learned 1) that radicals could not plan ACTIONS with Liberals, 2) that THOSE IN POWER are able to grant many things, but will not GIVE UP THEIR POWER, 3) that a student-run department had to be instituted by students themselves to be student-run.

Only a couple of weeks after having walked out of a Liberal meeting, determined to take RADICAL ACTION, we drew up a completely LIBERAL proposal. We "demanded" that the ADMINISTRATION institute a student-run department. Although our POWER had diminished, our ASPIRATIONS had grown. We were no longer calling on students to organize a student-run department. Now that we were only a handful of students, we started calling on the administration to organize a whole student-run Counter-University. (See text on following page.) The contradiction between what we had learned before and what we were doing at this point was manifested in the very title of the proposal: "The Council . . . Demands and will design and implement . . ." and also by the last line, where we "submitted . . ." our WILL to the administration.

The model for this behavior had been the earlier lecture about a free university in California, which had been created by a "radical" administrator. We, too, went to a "radical" administrator to ask for a "free university." And we found one. Two days after we spoke to him, he proposed a scheme in which a major corporation would sponsor a "free university" across the street. It was the kind of thing a liberal administrator would do to channel our energies into a "free university" sponsored by a corporation.

THE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEMANDS AND WILL DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT A STUDENT DEPARTMENT BASED ON SELF AWARENESS AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

This course of action is necessary in the face of the apparent inadequacy and irrelevancy of the present curricula at Western Michigan University.

The Council on Higher Education knows that students are not being prepared to deal with the massive economic, political and cultural explosions of our world. We demand that students design, formulate, implement and run a department which will deal fully and comprehensively with the total world situation in order that students will be able to deal effectively with themselves and others in this new revolutionary totality of life in the world.

Through the curriculum of this department, students will be made aware of their identity and power to discover and revolutionize humanism in all its vast implications on life in the twentieth century.

This department will be the fuse that will ignite student power to be able to determine their education in all other curriculum of this university.

The Council declares that the existence of a student department is a necessity in order that the students are able to determine, organize and govern an educational system which will raise the struggles of our times into relevant significance to enable students to find meaning and authenticity in the Twentieth Century. We know the day will come when students will be able to create the society in which they live—a better society for all mankind.

Demands of the Council on Higher Education

1. A separate department will exist and this department will be completely student run.
2. Similar to all other departments at this university, we require funds for:
 - a. bringing scholars to Western Michigan University to assist in implementing the department.
 - b. sending students to study under people who will help in instituting the department.
 - c. bringing professors the students demand to teach their classes.
 - d. offices and other necessary departmental expenses.
3. A hostel for visiting scholars will be initiated in order that these people are directly available to students. Noted individuals who have something to contribute to students will be given standing invitations to stop over whenever they are in this vicinity.
4. Through the power of this student department, all students will have full use of all university facilities, such as the television studios, audio-visual materials, the University Auditorium, etc.
5. The student run department will demand that one of its courses will be required of all freshmen and that the course will take precedence over all other courses of the university.

6. A group of fifty freshmen, reviewed and selected by the Council, will, as a group, undergo a complete university education within this department with:

- a. no grades
- b. no set curriculum
- c. no education for a specific job

Submitted by the Council on Higher Education

April 18, 1968

We were even invited to a meeting of professors. This was to be a “participatory revolution.” We were to participate in our own brainwashing; in fact, we would be able to run it ourselves, freely, with corporation funds. This was “student participation.” We were on the point of betraying the name C.H.E.: we were about to be co-opted. Even so, at that “faculty meeting” we experienced, once again, the quality of our “professors,” our “teachers,” our “educators.”

A reformist thread ran through every one of last year’s actions, including the most radical ones. Even those of us with “revolutionary” views did not point to the firings of the professors in order to begin a struggle against the entire university as a repressive structure. We wanted “Critical Analysis” and “Relevant Subject Matter” within the Capitalist University: this is why we wanted to keep the “revolutionary” professors; this is why we wanted a student economics department; this is why we wanted a student-run counter-university. We did not struggle against the university as an integral part of the capitalist system; instead, we struggled against the fact that one “cultural strain” (namely anti-capitalist, i.e., Marxist economics) was thrown out of the university curriculum. Our aim was to get “both sides of a question” for ourselves and other students.

Our struggle to keep Marxist analysis within the Capitalist University was not a revolutionary struggle, but it did have importance for revolutionaries. By keeping out this cultural strain, the American University fails to provide the background in social analysis which is available to every literate person in the 20th century. The result is that, when radical ACTION appears, it lacks the background for radical ANALYSIS.

The absence of Marxist analysis from the American University reflects a profound difference between the university structure in the U.S. and that of Germany and France. American Liberalism has been able to absorb elements of Marxism, while dispensing with Marxist socio-economic analysis, whereas in European universities, Marxist analysis leads a separate existence. Liberalism presents itself as “objective analysis,” it does not present itself as what it is, namely, the dominant ideology of American capitalism. Consequently, for the Liberal, the perspectives of classes other than the dominant capitalist class are “Ideologies,” ideologies are not objective, and have no room in the university. This is the essence of American cultural imperialism.

Death of C.H.E.

We realized we weren't building a movement.

We had angered some of our radical comrades by calling them Liberal. We had gotten together an auditorium full of angry students, and were then unable to propose a workable action. We had simply thrown the idea of a "student-run Department" into the laps of eighty students, and expected others to do what we hadn't done: to define the steps necessary to reach the goal, and to begin acting. So we again diminished into a tiny group. We felt impotent, we felt powerless to realize our project. So we ran to the administration: they'd realize it; they had the power.

This was the end of C.H.E.

We knew we had failed. But we didn't look to ourselves to find the reasons for our failure—we didn't do that until we sat down to write this self-critique. We tried to locate the failure in THE OTHERS, the students. We didn't look at our lacks, but at theirs, to remedy our failure. And what they lacked was first of all social theory which enabled them to define their own situation in society, and secondly the sense of their own power to change that situation. We set out to remedy both lacks. We would organize student-run courses to provide the missing analysis, and also to undermine Authority by demonstrating that courses without Professors were more interesting, relevant, and better organized than the bureaucratically-run brainwashing sessions of the official curriculum. Parallel with this, we would organize an SDS chapter to give students an awareness of their power and ability to change society.

During summer session, we set up a table at registration, and the registrants (mainly freshmen) were able to "register" for student-run courses on imperialism, racism, women's liberation. At these tables we also called for the organization of an SDS on campus, and picked a date for the first meeting.

STUDENT POWER . . . YOU MEAN US?

Many of you probably wondered "Why?" when you read of the recent rebellions initiated by students all over the world this spring (most notable were those in France and the one at Columbia). This reaction is easily understood since the nation's press coverage and reporting of these student led revolts were largely inaccurate. Many of you asked "Why?" because your idea of university life was one of parties, romance, intellectual stimulation, and at this very moment probably one of vague strangeness mingled with excitement. Some of you, at a higher level of awareness or consciousness, could look back at your high schools and their repressive natures and partially understand "Why?".

This fall many of you will rejoice over the greater “freedoms” found in the university and in university life. Such “freedoms” (like cutting classes, less parental control, etc.), are generally superficial and more importantly, hide even greater restrictions found in universities than found in high schools. Dorms, with their rules concerning hours, what to wear, how and when to clean “your” rooms, etc., enable administrators to have strict control over various aspects of students’ lives, besides being a convenient place to indoctrinate students with “values” that produce mechanical conformists. For what the multi-university (Western is only one good example) has become, basically, is a job training center where unsuspecting seventeen and eighteen year olds enter, become dehumanized, are cranked out as brainwashed robots four years later, and quickly pushed into prefabricated, sterile plastic slots. For the men there is an added bonus of two to three years of further brainwashing in the service of their “choice” (provided, of course, they live the full term).

The university did not become this way by accident or by the desire of the students (or faculty) but has evolved by responding to certain “needs” of this country. The reason it evolved in this manner and not in some other way was because it had become very closely intermeshed with and a vital part of our country’s economic, political, and social institutions. The reason it had become closely intermeshed with the dominant institutions in our country (most notable—corporations and the military) was that those in power (administrators, corporation presidents, government officials, etc.) were “forced to” by the peculiar needs of our imperialistic, capitalistic, and racist institutions.

Here now is the dilemma. Students who wish to have a voice in what they are being taught and what is being done to them are powerless. The slogan, “Student power,” symbolizes the movement underway to put the decisive power to determine the education and life styles of students into the student’s hands. But this movement is also part of a larger movement underway to free all people of repressive institutions and to wrest power from the small elite who rule and then to put it in the hands of the people. Those of you who reject “Student Power” out of a sense of powerlessness or because you feel “students don’t know enough or aren’t responsible enough to make decisions or teach” are unfortunately ignorant of what is happening. Those of you who reject “Student Power” because “to come through four years of college and fit into a slot so that one can buy two cars, a color TV, and a nice sterile, plastic house is my goal” are only another manifestation of this sick society. But to those of you who can grasp the significance of “Student Power” or those of you who really desire an education despite the university, we urge you to take one or both of the student run courses set up for this fall by several SDS national members. We would also urge you to become actively involved in SDS (possibly setting up a chapter at Western) and/or actively involved

in two other groups on campus who are potential sources of meaningful change, BAM (Black Action Movement) and SSI (Students for Social Involvement).

Sign up for student-run courses at registration.

All students interested in the student-run courses, forming an SDS chapter at Western, or Student Power in general, please attend a meeting to be held at 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 5th in the Bronco Room, University Student Center.

STUDENT RUN COURSES

For this fall several SDS national members have set up two student run courses. These courses will have no credit, no cost, no grades, no course requirements (unless required by and decided upon by the students themselves), and will be held one night a week. Since there is no instructor, the knowledge gained, responsibility undertaken, and the general nature of the courses themselves are up to the students. The nature and content of the courses are limited only by the imaginations of the students. Tentatively, the two courses set up are titled "Women's Liberation and Social Change" (for women only) and "The Economic, Political, and Social Consequences of Imperialism." However the students in the course may decide on another topic or topics that they feel are more relevant. All non-faculty and non-administrators may take the courses (notice that this does not exclude most non-students). The reason faculty members and administrators are to be excluded is that they inhibit by their mere presence (consciously or not) students from voicing their own opinions and initiating their own actions. The same reason holds for the exclusion of males from the "Women's Liberation" class.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Women's Liberation

This course will deal with the condition of Women in American society today. An analysis of the life-styles that women of the "poor" and "affluent" sections of the society lead will be followed by a discussion of the social factors which cause and maintain the degraded condition of the "second sex." The problem of defining liberation for women and the implications of a mass Women's Movement as a force for revolutionary change in American society will be major points of discussion.

The Economic, Political, and Social Consequences of Imperialism

In addition to covering the course topic, students will hopefully experiment with imaginative presentations.

Sign up for the student-run courses at Registration.

All students interested in the student-run courses, forming an SDS chapter at Western or Student Power in general must attend a meeting to be held at 8:00 on Thursday, September 5th, in the Bronco Room, University Student Center.

—

But we didn't prepare any concrete proposals for the first SDS meeting; we had no perspectives. People were to come and define perspectives "on their own."

C.H.E. was dead: we no longer defined ourselves as an active group able to change some aspect of reality. Analysis of actions which we had already carried out, and perspectives which grew out of those actions, did not serve as a basis from which we moved on. We were again several steps behind the stage we had reached at the confrontation with the Economics Department, where we had defined a plan of action, proceeded to bring it about, and created a new situation for a larger number of students.

The student-run classes were also several steps backwards. They were another attempt to introduce a critical current into the capitalist "culture" of the university. It was a further development of the same reformist conception: 1) the student-run course given by the House Marxist had been an attempt to introduce this critical current within the university curriculum itself; 2) the C.H.E. program, which asked the Administration for a student-run department, was an attempt to introduce the same current, again through official channels, into a separate building; 3) the student-run courses conceived during the summer abandoned official channels, and placed the courses completely outside the official curriculum, but they once again represented a "liberal" attempt to introduce a current of thought into capitalist culture.

We called for the SDS and for the student-run courses after the Columbia events, after May action committees in France. We didn't yet know anything about the March 22 Movement. But we did know about our own confrontation with the Economics Department a month earlier, and we didn't move a step forward from that action; we moved two steps back. We could have defined a specific project, like a systematic critique of the dominant ideology, to be carried on in every classroom and public meeting; we could have proposed this project as the basis for the formation of the SDS. But we didn't prepare a proposal before the meeting, and we had neither action nor perspectives to propose at the meeting itself. (We spoke about the student-run courses: but this was a dead-ended project of "radicalization," i.e., conversion, through discussion of different currents of thought.) We waited for the action proposals to come from "the people." And in fact, proposals did come from another group with different experiences and different perspectives. (Critical analysis of the other group, or groups, will be carried out in future issues of Black & Red.) We had learned nothing from our earlier action. By the logic we were using then, if we expected "projects" to come

into existence all by themselves, we might just as well have expected the SDS to come into existence all by itself, without our having to set a date and a place for a meeting.

Reacting against leaderism and Bureaucratism, we had run to the other extreme: absolute spontaneism. We had not learned the significance of the French “action committees,” we had not even learned the significance of our own earlier action. We were not even aware of the valid kernel in the student-run courses, namely that we had defined a concrete action with open perspectives, and then STARTED DOING IT:

In these classes, we were in fact starting to form a work-group with a project, A GANG WITH AN ANALYSIS.

Revival of C.H.E.

We snapped out of the spontaneism. Not because of anything that happened in Kalamazoo, BUT BECAUSE OF THINGS THAT HAPPENED ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD. We started to learn about the March 22 Movement, about the German SDS, about the self-critiques of the Columbia Strike Committee, about the projects of the New York University SDS.

We began to reconstitute C.H.E. We analyzed our situation. We're students. Other students are in classrooms. That's the place to begin to build a movement: not a student movement, but a revolutionary movement. We developed a new plan of action: not disconnected actions which wait to react to situations created by profs or cops; not "actions" which are thrown to a larger group with the expectation that the larger group will spontaneously bring them about; not one-man shows with a permanent audience of "supporters." We defined what we, a small group, could do, and we proceeded to do it.

We began by defining perspectives which were neither reformist nor limited to the University:

- 1) To EXPOSE the fact that the "objective knowledge" of the University is in fact a reflection of Capitalist Ideology, namely that the world is defined from the point of view of the capitalist class. The actions of the Berlin SDS, of the March 22 Movement, of all student movements, have demonstrated that the Capitalist University cannot resist this critique. By denouncing the mystification of "culture," namely by liberating themselves, students have exposed what stands behind capitalist ideology: POLICE REPRESSION.

The University "enlightens," the Army and Police repress; they seem contradictory, but are in fact a carrot and a stick, they're TWO EDGES OF THE SAME SWORD, two constituents of the POWER of the capitalist class.

- 2) To develop a CONSCIOUSNESS of oppression and alienation, an understanding of the world from the point of view of the oppressed and the alienated—a theory which can serve as the basis for revolutionary action.

- 3) To spread this consciousness to every student, forcing all students to CHOOSE between the oppressor and the oppressed, and thus eliminating the neutrality, indifference, apathy of students.

- 4) At this point choice leads to ACTION: students must either OPPRESS or STRUGGLE AGAINST OPPRESSION. They can no longer be passive servants of the oppressor. They must either actively maintain the repressive functions of the Capitalist University (i.e., brainwashing and weapons research), or else destroy those functions and transform the university into a red base. In other words, they must extend the struggle to other sectors of society, since there can

be no LIBERATION without the DESTRUCTION of the entire system. Students cannot be liberated unless the authoritarian University is destroyed; the university cannot be “liberated” unless the Capitalist Class (which it serves) is destroyed; the capitalist system cannot be destroyed in a specific region (“one country”) unless the entire World Capitalist System is destroyed, since the region will get re-integrated within the capitalist world market, the same way the “free university” will get re-integrated within capitalist society, or the “liberated” student within the capitalist university.

We then designed a strategy through which these goals would be realized. The strategy consisted of operational steps whose efficacy could be tested, thereby making it possible for us to re-evaluate our actions.

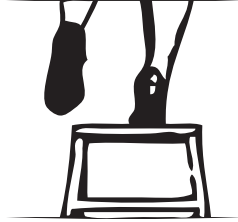
The first step consists of activities of an INITIAL GROUP. This group carries on a systematic critique of a limited number of lectures, and analyzes the content of the “knowledge.” Based on this analysis, it EXPOSES the assumptions and the ideological bias of the “knowledge.” This exposure is carried out through confrontations with the professor and with the contents of his textbooks. The tactics of these confrontations obviously depend on the nature of the situation. The point is not to convert the professor, but to make the students conscious of the professor’s function. Through these confrontations, and through meetings with students who have begun to challenge the professor, the militants develop a systematic understanding of the institutional framework of capitalist society as a specific historical form of human society: they expose the function of capitalist ideology as a mediation and justification of capitalist relations and of their consequences: imperialism, racism, nationalism, and thus they expose the function of the Capitalist University as the main purveyor of this ideology. Thus the militants develop the Marxist social analysis which is absent from the official curriculum, not in order to include this missing “cultural strain” within the Capitalist University, but in order to create a background for action against the University, against the capitalist system.

If the tactics of the initial militants are effective, then a new group of critical analysts will form in each of the classes where the militants initiated their critiques. If new groups are not formed, then this action cannot grow, and the militants will have to re-evaluate either their strategy or their tactics. This is the test of the efficacy of the action.

If the action is successful, if new groups are formed, this will mean that a much larger group of militants will be brought into existence. The existence of this larger group means that OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN CHANGED. At this point it is essential for the militants to be aware that they no longer confront the same situation as the initial group. Therefore they will define actions and strategies consistent with the new conditions. The new militants must, once again,

define an action which creates a new situation, until at long last they create a situation which goes beyond the point of no return.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright
May 11, 2014



Committee on Higher Education (C.H.E.)
A Gang with an Analysis
November, 1968

Scanned from original.
Black & Red Number 3, November, 1968, page 5