

THE PHOENIX

(A manifestation: November 6, 1978)

Three hundred students and workers crowd the lobby of Stanford University's Old Union, straining forward to hear the speaker.

"If there was only one of us calling for an end to Stanford's investments in apartheid we would still be right. And we would still have the right--indeed the obligation--to act. The harshest and truest judgements on ourselves come from within. Each one of us must face that and try to break through the fears, doubts, and alienation that bind us."

Six months ago, in this building, police arrested 294 protestors who had refused to leave. They were protesting Stanford's refusal to vote its 152,487 shares of Ford Motor Company stock in favor of a church-initiated resolution mandating Ford's withdrawal from South Africa. Many arrested that hot May day are back.

"Why do we act? What do we hope to gain for South Africa and for ourselves? The South African people will win their own freedom. But what we've done already, and certainly what we can and will do, can have a tremendous impact on their struggle. It can make their road shorter and less hard. Anyone who has followed the growing movement in this country for corporate withdrawal from South Africa can see that student protests last spring had a real effect--not just on other schools in California and in the U.S. but on the mass media, on community groups, on state and national politicians, and on people of other countries. We do not act in a vacuum. The world is one vast society and what we do here sends ripples to Santa Cruz, to Antioch Ohio, to Cambridge England, to Naples, to Tanzania, and even past the barbed wire and border patrols into South Africa itself. Just as those ripples have come back--all the way from Steve Biko's prison cell, to us here."

Within the next six months Stanford will experience three more sit-ins, as well as vigils, rallies, petition drives, and a blockade of the President's office that will end only when the Santa Clara County Tactical Police arrive. Sit-ins and building blockades occur nationwide: at Harvard, Columbia, Wesleyan, Berkeley, Princeton, Davis, Irvine, Riverside.

"As the struggle goes on and passes through various stages it becomes clearer and clearer that Stanford's policy on South Africa isn't an irrational flaw in a fundamentally sound institution. Stanford's position springs inevitably from the nature of Stanford and its role in corporate America. Other policies of Stanford--the role it plays in the relentless spread of a technology that is not in harmony with humans or nature, the role it plays in wars like Viet Nam and repressive governments like Iran, the role it plays in turning out the justifications and rationalizations for the way things are, the subtle but pervasive sexism and racism of Stanford--all can be traced to the same system that hungers for the profits U.S. multinationals wring out of South Africa."

The "straight" media isn't prepared for this resurgence of student protest. Long articles on the new protesters replace stories on student apathy. Even the Johannesburg Star--South Africa's New York Times--publishes an article gloomily titled "Vietnam Yesterday, Apartheid Today." Timesweek runs its traditional article; the Time version has two mistakes in the first paragraph. But they're missing the big story: the South Africa protests are merely the most visible part of a thriving student movement. The movement isn't really new; it simply manifests in the 70's the changes of the 60's--changes still foreign to American society, whether that society is perceived as the "American Consensus" or as the American Empire.

"So for some of us, when we act against Stanford's South Africa policy, we act against a society that we feel isn't meeting our needs, people's needs. And our actions around South Africa become the first stage of an attempt to remake our world. There is a very positive side to this thesis. The way we work for change--fighting our own sexism and racism, trying to appeal to the community's reason and its highest ideals, and most important of all trying to build community--trying to act from joy--not frustration. This is an integral part of our struggle against Stanford in South Africa. Because if we acted differently we would be just like those we oppose so strongly. We have a very long way to go--obviously--but how we go is almost as important as where...maybe they're the same."

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"Why are these students protesting again?", the reader may ask. Isn't it a bit passe? So confusing--not only South Africa, but nuclear power, gay rights, feminism, minority admissions, Chilean tyranny and solar energy. Where did all this activity come from? The 120 campuses with groups working against U.S. support for apartheid, the nuclear protests in New England, the Carolinas, Colorado, the Northwest and California... the women's centers in Florida state colleges, the gay-rights groups on the sprawling campuses of the mid-west land grant multiversities...After the collapse of the sixties student movement, the last thing it seems anyone expected to see ten years later was a rise in campus activism. There must be some explanations.

One of the most interesting arguments reasons that the sixties' student movement faded from the front pages because so many of its demands were met. The war ended, albeit a little messily. Nixon became the boom-erang victim of his attacks on the protest movement. Abortion was legalized, affirmative action programs blossomed, curriculum and decision-making reforms swept the elite universities.

This theory is revealing as far as it goes, but it ignores at least two critical points. First, the system wasn't fundamentally changed by these tenuous reforms. And secondly, there was an important flaw in the protest movement itself. While there was a biting critique of things as they were, (and there was even a great deal of beautiful dreaming about things as they could/should be) there was little practical experience on getting from the former to the latter. What held the movement back then was not that it failed to put forward sharp, fact-supported criticisms of the American Empire; it failed by not having the patience to get down to living and acting in a new positive way. Starting in the early seventies many activists began to do just that.

In fact, it seems that much of the left has spent the last ten years developing a new "ethic"--not in some rambling academic treatise, but rather in the concret realities of daily life. This ethic includes the individual's relationship with their garbage, with their lover(s), with their own sexuality, with their work and play, with their friends and their vegetables.

From these individual struggles there has emerged both a richer analysis of the connections between the personal and the political, and a new kind of student left. Easily the most important part of this new thinking has been feminism, which has brought the left's critique of American society right back to the leftists themselves. By cultivating now the values of the culture to be, feminism helps make those values an experienced reality, a continuing vision:

"As women we must work for a society which would incorporate the values which, as wives, lovers and mothers we are trained to have; a society in which caring and nurturance are not secondary low-status qualities, but rather integrated into the social system. This will mean a society based on values other than quantitative aggrandizement and aggression. This means attention to questions of culture and quality of life. This means a struggle for power over our lives on every level: the material power to feed, clothe and educate ourselves; the emotional power to freely give of ourselves to whomever we wish; and the psychological power to innovate, imagine and create."

(from "The Contribution of Feminist Analysis to Socialism" by Kathy Cross)

Stanford reflects this rich new vision in the American left. The Stanford left centers in SCRIP (which focuses on the South Africa issue), several co-op houses, two women's groups, the Gay People's Union, MEChA (the Chicano student organization), the Black Student Union, the Asian-American Student's Association, student government (the left has won the last three elections), the union of service workers (S.E.I.U.), and a number of small collectives.

This variety helps create an endless ferment; people struggle over everything from anarchism, through the role of guerilla theatre, to the sexism and racism within everyone's subconscious. There's some friction among these diverse constituencies, but there is also cross-pollination and, most importantly, a real sense of shared community grown from the varied protests of the last five years: supporting the union's strike for recognition; against Stanford's satellite contract with Iran; against attempts to fire radical faculty; against attempts to dismantle sixties programs; against attempts to cut back affirmative action programs; and, of course, protests focusing on South Africa.

Most students (let alone faculty or workers) aren't directly involved in any of this, just as most campuses don't have Stanford's level of activity. But that doesn't mean it isn't significant. Stanford's left shapes the whole community's political agenda; American ties to South Africa, the realities of sexism, the cultural integrity of the southwest's large Chicano population--these are questions with which Stanford's left has confronted the University. Similarly, the student left dominates political consciousness at scores of academic communities across the country: Chico, Berkeley, Santa Cruz, Boulder, Eugene, Lincoln, Madison, Chapel Hill, Austin, etc.

In the same manner, the general student movement addresses the entire country. In an interview with South Africa's Financial Mail, United States U.N. ambassador Andrew Young explains the hardening of the U.S. position on South Africa and the recent decisions of a number of U.S. banks not to loan to the South African government by saying "But since the death of Steve Biko and the public outcry against SA (South Africa) in the U.S. on our college campuses, there's been increasing pressure on American business from private sources."

Many pundits have difficulty believing that the apathetic fifties college students may be gone forever. The fifties' apathy grew from acceptance of prevailing assumptions about the "American way of life" and from a faith that those in power wouldn't abuse that power or act against the general interest. Today this faith is almost dead, buried beneath the

weight of hundreds of sit-ins, of scores of burned ROTC buildings, of thousands of draft resisters, of liberation movements for blacks, gays, women and chicanos, of watergate, of Chile and the other CIA/FBI revelations, of the anti-nuke and ecological movements. All this separates us from the fifties, and it will never disappear.

What keeps student activity at less than a fever pitch is not the lack of a critical perception of the United States' two hundred years of history. Rather, students lack a belief that something better can be built and sustained. They harbor a deep, morbid cynicism which is seldom analyzed. The bomb hasn't left America's consciousness; it has been joined, however, by a multitude of disquieting spectres, from the family's disintegration to the collapse of trust in the nation's leaders. Yet this attitude is slowly changing. Hope for the future rises again in college campuses, accompanied by outrage at the status quo.

Hope and outrage are real only in the hearts and minds of individuals. What do hope and outrage mean to the 700 individuals arrested for protesting their universities' ties to apartheid? What do they mean to the 75 U.C. San Diego students and workers who sat in for three days, demanding continuation of a child-care program? What do they mean to the tens of thousands who marched for more minority admissions? What do they mean to the hundreds arrested at Seabrook, Rocky Flats, Barnswell, and San Luis Obispo resisting the spread of nuclear power and nuclear weapons? What do they mean to the woman who becomes a feminist? What does it mean to her family and friends and lovers? What does it mean to the individual who admit to themselves and the world that they prefer their own sex? And what does that mean to their family, and friends, and lovers?

The interesting point (at least for many radical students, sixties veterans, agitators and the like) is that so many have begun asking questions. Very few of them find satisfactory answers in the ideology of liberalism, or the economics of capitalism, or the culture of consumption. And so they turn to old ideas (so often pronounced dead): democracy, marxism, socialism, anarchism and feminism. They mix these with environmentalism, gay liberation, black power, and their own experiences; they start to live and to struggle for change--both personal and political.

To the passion of the sixties--THE MORE I MAKE LOVE THE MORE I WANT TO MAKE REVOLUTION, ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION, DISTRUST SAD PEOPLE THE REVOLUTION IS JOY; DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE--has been added not only the possibility of a more human and loving life, NOW, but also a larger perspective that hasn't been a part of the American left (and certainly not a part of the student movement). It is expressed very well by an old European radical, who, when asked on his deathbed what he'd learned from a lifetime of struggle, answered "I have learned that building socialism is very hard."

The radicalism on the campuses today is the radicalism of the sixties enriched by patience and ten years of experience. The mood is not a disco version of the fifties. Today's radical students are not the children of the fifties. They are the inheritors of the long human quest for liberation; for freedom and justice. Countless times it has appeared that that quest has failed. But it always begins again.

phoenix n. 1. a unique mythical bird of great beauty fabled to live 500 or 600 years, to burn itself to death, and to rise from its ashes in the freshness of youth, and live through another life cycle.

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