

In Memory of Campus Activism

By David Eisenhower

WASHINGTON—The apparent collapse of the student revolt, which just two years ago threatened to stop the Government, is an abrupt and significant development. Campuses claim they are back at work, newspapers talk inflation, energy shortages, scandal, checks and balances. Revolutionaries have lost their mystique. For example, as deplorable as Jane Fonda's conduct has been, one senses that the expressed outrage over her P.O.W. remarks is not deeply felt. The sentiment is genuine, but taking on a figure like Miss Fonda is like beating a dead horse. A public bored with revolutionary fantasy moves on to more pertinent issues.

The student movement began by challenging America to put aside narrow, individualistic concerns and concluded by defining a whole new set of its own: drugs, self-expression, sexual freedom. As a result, ideological content is now far less significant than the demoralization of thousands who, in another time, would have assumed responsible positions in society. While undermining the dignity of professional, military and political life, the revolution now offers little reward for those who will be left behind by a dynamic and resilient America.

The most poignant example I know concerns the case of Marshall Bloom, an alumnus of my alma mater, Amherst, and someone I came to know under unusual circumstances. Bloom graduated the year before I arrived. He was a brilliant and resourceful figure in the early days of campus activism in the Northeast. He instigated the 1966 Amherst commencement walkout against Defense Secretary McNamara, a first which attracted national attention. From Amherst,

Bloom went to the London School of Economics where he spearheaded a series of disruptions which resulted in his deportation from England.

By my sophomore year, Bloom had become a local hero due to his academic reputation and his notoriety in the world of campus politics. He had returned to the Amherst area to establish a news service to meet the growing demand in the Northeast for news written from the revolutionary perspective. About six weeks before the 1968 election I was astonished to receive a late night visit from him, requesting an interview for his Liberation News Service. I was at once flattered by the attention of an important revolutionary and disarmed by his gentle manner and destitute appearance. He came back several times.

His demeanor was hardly that of the uncompromising militant, as he was known publicly. Gradually, I discovered him to be a desperately confused person, whose commitment to the movement was giving way to a slide into communal living and the drug culture. Our political differences didn't seem to bother him. He was friendly to the point of extending the hospitality of his farm if we could find time "to pass a few hours with him." He spared no details, repeatedly offering to accommodate my wife's Secret Service agents.

Shortly afterward, Bloom apparently clashed with his colleagues at L.N.S. on the issue of whether the organization should address the needs of direct political action or serve more humanistic purposes. Bloom lost, was humiliated, and allegedly beaten by his colleagues before ending his own life by suicide.

The student revolt was irresistible at first, exhilarating in its discovery, absolutism and élan. It was undone by its deterministic logic, which, in relentless progression, condemned a

policy, hence government, hence society and, by implication, its very disciples as products of society. Redemption lay in a blanket rejection of American values and the search for life styles free from political and social constraint. Furthermore, students lived a life without want and therefore at cross-purposes with a doctrine rooted in Marxism; the campus revolt disintegrated because it never reconciled its program of radical political change with the contradictory tendency to seek self-gratification.

Alone among revolutionary groups, blacks recognized the role of physical and intellectual discipline. Whereas blacks organized behind a consistent and methodical analysis of tangible problems, students were drawn to a bundish mysticism which relied on Vietnam to sustain a vitality sapped by fragmentation and purposelessness. The movement withered politically but continued to have great social and cultural impact.

Marshall Bloom was not typical, but he was very much a part of the campus trend away from political involvement. As such, he became useless to the organization he founded. In varying degrees, his alienation is shared by thousands today who in their disillusionment shrink from the demands meaningful change imposes on those who seek it.

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