



Student World And Problems

To return to students is ineluctably to return to education. Inseparable as the one is from the other they would figure in any discussion or effort, public or private to put their world in order. And both need pursuing with a persistence in which we expect public leaders, guardians, political leaders, administrators and student leaders to participate. It is more than time that we tried and found an answer to a problem that brooks no delay.

The reason why nothing seems to have been achieved so far toward eliminating, or at least reducing, the chances of clashes on education campuses is that nobody is trying to face the facts, examine them objectively and go seriously in for an answer that the results of such an examination would point to. The most pressing reason for such an effort to be made in earnest, is that tension on the campuses keeps simmering and may, on the slightest provocation, erupt into violence as usual. Campus unrest has so far accounted for an average loss of 40-50 days out of the 120 days working calendar at the universities in each academic session. Potentially so bright and brilliant a generation of youths, capable of giving as much to the nation as their counterparts in any country in the world, has a case for the most serious thought to be given by society to their interests.

Certainly we could not wish them to turn overnight into saints of ascetics leaving behind them politics and be given over to scholastic pursuits. Nevertheless a line has to be drawn and the examples set even in the region pondered. In South Korea, for instance, or in the Philippines, or even in China (except for the period of Cultural Revolution) student politics has meant hardly much of a damage to the normal academic routine or to progress in studies. As for a revolution or war, which is an emergency, disruption and even suspension of academic activities for a period is understandable. But the period following it is and has to be one of hectic activity toward reconstruction and recovery.

Sixteen years of progressive decay following independence cannot be blamed wholly on students. A combination of factors is responsible for a situation in which student interests have become a major casualty. These are: 1) continuing socio-political instability affecting nearly all the components of the polity and economic insecurity for youth; 2) political parties' search for student affiliates and activists; 3) The slow and obstructed political growth along democratic lines. Factors 1 and 3 have to do with fundamentals, with their impact on the over-all socio-political stability, calling for democratic institutions to be strengthened to enable order to prevail in place of disorder. Factor 3 is relatively incidental but nonetheless a major one because of the built-in rivalries exacerbating the differences between the respective groups of party adherents. Hence the easy proneness to collision and clash.

If this is the position, then the remedy, as some political analysts think, is as transparent as the problem. It lies in a) putting the political house in order through the removal of those obstacles to democratic growth which have been the butt of protest; b) political parties putting their heads together over a question that must be treated as one above party or personal interests and making a joint declaration that they will leave students alone and have nothing to do with them, to promote party campaigns or strength; c) political training provided for students through the revival of hall and university unions with all their traditional democratic institutions of elections, voting, cabinets, debates etc.

The existing University area is already overcrowded both residentially and academically. A new structure added to it will be the last brick on its back. Time also to think seriously of shifting the university world to places outside the city.

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