

Developments In Chittagong University.

Now that Dhaka University seems at last to have achieved some kind of a respite from unrest and is slowly returning to its normal routine of work, a development which has been welcomed by all sections of the university with palpable relief, Chittagong has erupted into disorder. But the disorder which has practically paralysed the local university is of a slightly different kind; so are the motives behind the strike which a section of the teaching staff, with support from some students, are reported to have organised.

The teachers' strike is a protest against stoppages and violence on campus, intended, it is said, to force all elements to realise that a teaching institution cannot function where there is no security of life and limb, and where the slightest grievances are apt to be blown up out of proportion into a threat to the life of the entire academic community.

With this analysis of the situation most of us would be inclined to agree. Yet the employment by the teachers of a method of protest which they themselves are anxious to discourage raises grave doubt about the likely effects of their action. Strikes are a recognised form of industrial action which organised labour uses to enforce its demands for higher wages or the removal of grievances about conditions of work in factories, mills and mines. They presuppose a relationship between labour and management, marked by mutual suspicion and hostility, which cannot have a place in a university or college. Students are not wage-earners, nor are teachers their employers. What the latter dispense is not wages or pay but knowledge.

Of course university students which means young men and women who have left adolescence behind cannot be treated like school children. They are expected, everywhere, to display towards the teaching staff a sense of responsibility which one couldn't expect from school children. Academic discipline at higher stages rests upon a true understanding on both sides, teachers and students alike, of the kind of responsibility teachers are required to shoulder and also of the fact that this responsibility cannot be discharged unless the students respond in a spirit of give and take.

We cannot consequently help feeling alarmed at the thought of the consequences that might flow from the teachers' strike at Chittagong. If they win assurances of good behaviour from students as a condition of their eventual return to their duties they will have, may be unwillingly, introduced between themselves and their academic charges a relationship not much different from the relationship between labour and management. We are sure that this is not what they desire. Yet, how could they avoid it or escape it?

We are afraid the teachers' strike, unless it is called off immediately, will aggravate matters, weaken the foundations of academic discipline and create a precedent of explosive value. We do sympathise with their intention of improving the importance of academic security and tranquillity upon all concerned, but they would agree that right ends can never be attained by wrong means.

We have frequently commented upon the threat to our future that academic unrest poses. What is at stake is not a few courses or examinations, but the level of education, culture and administration that future generations will inherit. There must be, indeed there are, numerous other ways of convincing students that they cannot achieve anything but empty victories by uncontrolled unrest on campus, than a teachers' strike. We trust teachers and students at Chittagong will realise the necessity of returning to normal work without delay.

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