

# PERSPECTIVES

FOR A NEW AMERICA

## Do colleges breed revolutionaries?

By Alvin W. Gouldner

The following is excerpted from Alvin W. Gouldner's commencement address at the New College University of South Florida, Sarasota, June 16.

The modern class struggle today is, in important part, a civil war in the ruling class. That this is no small matter we have known at least since Plato who observed that "all political changes originate in divisions of the actual governing power."

The university educated are scarcely the ineffectual and impractical visionaries of conventional caricature. They have been a decisive force in the political turbulence and in the main revolutions of the 20th century. Why is it that privileged young persons come to oppose, and oppose bitterly, the very society that privileges them?

One basic source of the alienation of the educated is largely economic and can be termed "blocked ascendance." This simply means that those whose careers had experienced some success, who had been on their way up, but who—for various reasons—find their way upward suddenly blocked may well become alienated from their society.

Career blockages are not peculiar to the intelligentsia of the Third World but are found also, indeed increasingly, in the first and second world. The emerging overproduction of educated manpower, the growing glut of Ph.D.s in Western Europe and the U.S., is structurally very similar.

As the glut of educated manpower in the U.S. grows, there is reason to suppose that here, too, intellectuals will exhibit a growing alienation. Indeed, this alienation may in time make the campus rebellions of the '60s seem comparatively mild. Each year, the American labor force—if it cannot be said to be increasingly educated—is at least increasingly "schooling." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1952 the labor force had an average of 10.9 years of schooling; by 1974 this had risen to 12.5 years of schooling. In this same period, the proportion of the labor force that completed at least four years of college nearly doubled, rising from about 8 to 15 percent. Russell Flanders, a division head of the BLS, maintains (*Occupational Outlook*, Spring 1977) that the proportion of college graduates in the labor force is still increasing and may reach about 20 percent by 1985—one year after George Orwell's prophesied "D-Day."

Universities have no monopoly on critical discourse, but they are the most important source of dissidents.

As a result, there has been a continuing spillover of college graduates into jobs they had formerly avoided, that is, into clerical, service, and blue-collar jobs. Moreover, there has been a precipitous decline in the number of school teaching jobs available to college graduates: "The 1970s witnessed a drop in the total demand for elementary and secondary school teachers. Between 1972 and 1976 an average reduction of 13,000 in new teaching jobs occurred. The average annual increase in demand for college teachers declined [after 1976] to 14,000 a year from 26,000 a year..., which had been the average between 1967 and 1971." (*Occupational Outlook*, Summer 1973.)

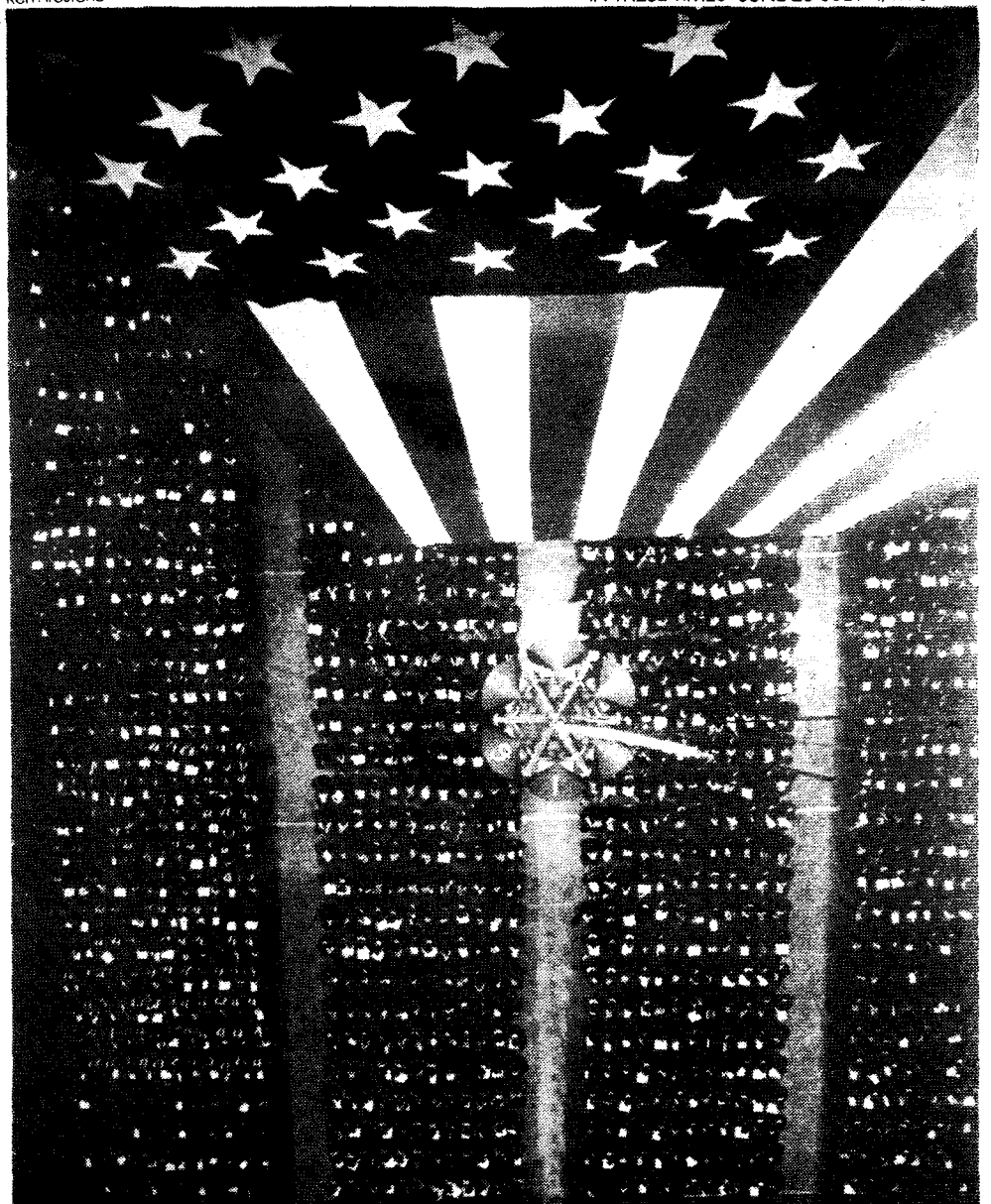
Between 1972 and 1985, it has been estimated that the available supply of Ph.D.s will be about 580,000, while job openings for doctorates will be only about 187,000. (*Occupational Outlook*, Winter 1975.)

There is good reason to suppose, then, that the market situation will in the foreseeable future increasingly block the ascendance of those with advanced educations. If the growing oversupply of the educated also increases their alienation, it will not be the first time this has happened in the West. It has recently occurred in Western Europe and Japan. It happened also during the '30s—in England, the U.S., France, not to speak of Germany where it sent many intellectuals into the Nazi movement.

Indeed, it is precisely because of the Nazi experience of the '30s that it should not be glibly supposed that the alienation of intellectuals necessarily means their leftward movement. Alienation and radicalization are not the same. Alienation can also be the first step toward a political rendezvous with the extreme right.

While blocked ascendance is plainly one important factor fostering the alienation of many young intellectuals, it is surely not the only factor.

The alienation of young intellectuals can start before they experience career blockages. But how is this possible? Upon what does such an early alienation depend?



Will this graduating class help revive the left?

I shall mention here only one important inducement to the early alienation of young intellectuals, this is the "culture of critical discourse" they bear. The culture of critical discourse is produced in various quarters in our society but most importantly in our educational system.

The university system has no monopoly on the production of the culture of critical discourse; nonetheless, the university and college system is the most important source by which this culture has been mass produced and indeed, there have even been some who once regarded this as the essence of a college education.

To put it succinctly, the culture of critical discourse insists that any assertion—about anything by anyone—is open to challenge and criticism, and that if challenged, no assertion can be defended by invoking authority. It forbids a reliance upon a speaker's position in society, or upon his personal character, in order to justify his claims.

In this view, then, intellectuals are es-

entially a speech community and their common ideology is an ideology about discourse and how it should properly be conducted. This ideology is alienating and even radicalizing because it demands the right to sit in judgment over *all* claims and assertions, regardless of how high and mighty those making them are. Under the scrutiny of the culture of critical discourse, all claims to truth are in principle now equal; traditional authorities are now stripped of their special right to define social reality. The credit normally given to the claims of those with worldly success, to the rich and powerful, now needs to be hidden if not withdrawn, because it comes to be defined as illicit and unworthy.

As a distinct speech community, the highly educated in general, and intellectuals in particular, manifest distinctive speech patterns: for example, their speech is more analytical and abstract and less concrete and specific; they employ more

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references to books and use more book-derived words and ideas. The speech of intellectuals also involves a great insistence on conforming to a proper pattern of speech and of hewing to the proprieties of discourse rather than attending to the reaction of others as the speech is made. There is, therefore, less gathering up of group support during the discourse and less sensitivity about the danger of speech rupturing the solidarity of the group. Intellectuals also commonly use bigger, more difficult words, and longer, more structurally convoluted and complex sentences; they engage in more talk about talk and manifest more linguistic narcissism. The speech style of intellectuals, then, is relatively more context-independent and manifests a greater cosmopolitanism.

If this enables intellectuals to commune with others who are distant and enter into solidarities with those elsewhere, it also impairs their capacity for solidarity with those in their own communities. Their speech may thus be freer of the local version of common sense, or freer to give it offense. The culture of discourse common to intellectuals, then, allows them access to beliefs and ideas from distant places and times which may be used to challenge the common sense of the local community or the claims of local notables. The culture of critical discourse can thus be an alienating and even radicalizing grammar of communication; it tacitly embodies a politics.

Insofar as the modern university or college teaches or tolerates the culture of critical discourse, it is a contradictory social institution: for while the university rarely teaches rebellion, its culture of discourse may, nonetheless, enable young people to learn it. While most schools are designed to teach what is adaptive for the society's master institutions, still, insofar as they are hospitable to the culture of critical discourse they foster an ideology by which traditional authority may be undermined, deviance fostered, the status quo challenged, and dissent systematically produced—even if all done unwittingly and unintentionally.

John Dewey was correct, then, when he said that the conservatives were right for "if we once start thinking, no one can guarantee where we shall come out, except that many objects, ends and institutions are doomed. Every thinker puts some portion of an apparently stable world in peril and no one can wholly predict what will emerge in its place."

It is not just intellectuals' blocked ascendance, then, that alienates them but an interaction of forces, specifically the interaction of these market forces with a university cultivated culture of critical discourse. The alienation of young intellectuals, then, rests on a combination of two factors: The success of the educational system and the failure of the job market. A society that prizes education and instills an ambition for it, a society that uses education to foster critical thought, but then proceeds to frustrate the ambitions of those who worked hard to acquire that education—such a society is careless of its own future survival.

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By Anita Diamant

**M**ECANICAL MARXIST critics of sports delight in painting the horrors of a lobotomized working class, "opiated" and prostrate before tubes alight with basketball, baseball and—worst of all—football. Paul Hoch's cranky book, *Rip Off The Big Game* goes as far as charging that "a worker who is so busy rooting for the Yankees that he forgets that his real wages are declining is a good bet to be so busy rooting for the Yanks in Vietnam that he forgets that his son might get killed there."

Statements like that succinctly demonstrate why the wide-spread distrust of Marxists and socialists is sometimes a healthy response by American working people.

But lost inside the fire-and-brimstone critiques of sport is a valid warning. Sport in our society is a rip-off of people's anger, frustration and emotions.

Spectating is the favorite and most vulnerable subject for socialist sports criticism. But the phenomenal increase in

sports participation shares some of the negative, as well as the liberatory elements of sports watching.

Sports makes life a little more bearable because it slows down the ruin that standing still, sitting still, repeating one or two motions over and over, or just working 40 or 50 or more hours a week can wreak on a body. It replaces mental and physical numbness and decay with mental and physical release.

Sports is an active, rather than passive escape. Unlike television or beer, its after-effects include better sleep and the deep satisfaction of sore muscles.

Solitary athletic pursuits, from running and swimming to yoga and gymnastics, are a lot like meditation. Breath control, rhythm and solitude can relax the stranglehold of a lousy day at work. It can also erase some of the emotional pain of "private" life as well.

Group sports discharge energy and tension in a faster and more exhausting setting. The mind-set needed to execute any play demands that everything else be put

aside, if only for a few hours. And the exertion can put enough distance between you and your problems to make it all seem more manageable.

When things get bad enough again, the gym is always there.

None of this is to say that sports are an "opiate." But it is helpful to look at the burden that sport carries in our society. To many black kids, sports dangles a way to buy themselves and their families out of poverty. What happens to fun in that context?

I've recently become friends with a number of life-long sports freaks. And when things go bad in their lives (i.e., making decisions, the prospect of aging, jobs, relationships) their hours in the gym, on the court, or the track increase in proportion to the pain they seek to avoid.

Sports can kill time, passion, loss, and finally, any kind of emotional trauma. In a society where there are few if any satisfactory ways to resolve personal conflicts, to make work meaningful, creative or expressive of self, sports become top heavy.

That's not an opiate. It's a way to survive. Survival skills aren't always the most liberatory. The amenities often go when it's a matter of fighting for a little self-determination, a little control, a little beauty in your life.

Criticism of sport by socialists has to respect the needs that all the "play" fulfills in a society that posits a scarcity of any kind of "winners." And socialists must also help imagine the ways it can be different—the ways to retrieve play from its often-grim incarnations under capitalism.

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