

STUDENT POLITICS IN THE THIRD WORLD

PHILIP G. ALTBACH

*Comparative Education Center, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York,
U.S.A.*

ABSTRACT

Student political activism remains a key issue in the Third World despite its decline in the industrialized nations. Students continue to be active in politics and frequently have an impact on societal events. The historical development of student politics and student involvement in independence struggles, the role of students as incipient elites, and the fragility of the political structures of many Third World nations all contribute to the efficacy of student politics. Universities, as key intellectual institutions in their societies, also play an important role in Third World societies. Students, especially those in the social sciences, are fairly easy to mobilize and they often have a basic interest in political and social issues. It is argued that student movements emerge from their social and political environment and it is not surprising that activism continues as a powerful force in the Third World.

Introduction

Student political activism remains a key issue for Third World universities – and frequently for political systems as well [1]. Students continue to be politically active and involved, and on occasion contribute to political unrest. There are considerable national variations and the scope and pace of student politics changes over time and across national boundaries. But the issue remains one of the most important for higher education administrators, planners and for government officials. In the 1980s, the contrast between continued political activism among students in the Third World and relative quiet in the industrialized nations of Western Europe and North America is dramatic. This article considers some of the reasons for this contrast as well as the key factors relating to student activism in the Third World, a complex phenomenon which has implications for both university and society.

Student politics is generally viewed by those in authority as a negative factor

– something to be eliminated from academic life. Indeed, student politics sometimes affects higher education and on occasions sweeps beyond the campus to have disruptive implications for the political system. It is, however, not enough to condemn student politics as a negative force. It is necessary to understand the forces that impel student activism and to examine the results of this activism. Furthermore, in some respects, student political involvement can contribute to the processes of nation building and political socialization. Without any question, student activism contributes to social change in the Third World and focuses national attention on political and social questions that might otherwise be ignored by the political system.

There are quite considerable differences in student political activism among countries, regions and by historical periods. The most dramatic difference at present is between the industrialized nations and the Third World. But there are differences among Third World nations as well. In India, much student activism tends to focus on campus-based issues which are sometimes linked to broader political and ideological questions. Typically, however, student activism is motivated by political and social forces in society and its attention is generally focused away from the campus. Nations with a strong tradition of student activism, often stemming from student participation in independence struggles, tend to have active student movements. National policies concerning activism also have an effect on the viability and often the tactics of student movements. Political systems that permit the relatively free functioning of social organizations and movements will tend to have more active student participation, but such activism is less often revolutionary in nature. Social and economic conditions also affect student political movements and organizations. Poor campus conditions, as in India, have stimulated activism and protest. On the other hand, an “elite” campus environment can also contribute to student political consciousness. Variations by academic field and discipline can also be noted, with students in the social sciences and humanities in most countries more involved in political activities than those in the natural sciences and professional fields.

The variables are substantial and it is not surprising that there is no widely accepted theoretical perspective concerning student activism. The purpose of this article is not to create such a formulation, but rather it is to reflect on the experiences of Third World nations. This is particularly important since most of the theories relating to student politics refer mainly to the experience of the industrialized nations [2]. National variations, historical differences, changing political environments, academic organizational variations and many other factors all relate to an understanding of student politics in any one nation. It is too much to expect that a readily applicable general formulation will be able to completely explain this complex phenomenon.

The literature on student activism is a curious blend of the descriptive and the theoretical. There was a massive outpouring of publication during the 1960s,

when Western nations were disrupted by student activist movements. Since then, there has not been much discussion of the topic in Western academic circles. Much of the literature reflects the concerns of Western social scientists and university officials – impelled in considerable part by a desire to understand and to “deal with” activist movements which arose suddenly. The paradigms used were largely Western in orientation. The political models reflected the realities of North American and Western European situation. This literature is not necessarily directly relevant to the Third World. While academic institutions stem from similar roots, Third World realities differ significantly from those in the Western democracies. Further, the cyclical pattern so evident in the West is not necessarily the case in the Third World. In most Third World nations, there was no dramatic upsurge during the 1960s (although the international current did have some impact virtually everywhere), and no dramatic decline in the mid-1970s. There are national variations in the scope and timing of student activism in the Third World, but these are based more on national developments than on international currents. In many respects, the Western “bias” of the literature has distorted analyses of student politics in the Third World. While it is possible to utilize conceptual frameworks from the Western literature and even some of the general research trends, it is necessary to look at Third World student activism as a relatively independent phenomenon.

The Political Framework

Universities do not function in a vacuum, and they are especially related to and dependent on their societies in the Third World. Students are also attuned to societal developments, and student political activism in most Third World countries is directly related to broader political forces and trends. It is rare for a student movement to be fully campus-based and concerned mainly with university issues. There are many reasons for this close relationship between students and the political system.

Third World political systems are typically less “dense” than those in the industrialized nations. There are fewer competing political forces and this permits students to play a more direct and powerful role. The mass media are weaker, parliamentary systems are often ineffective or nonexistent, trade unions, consumer groups and the myriad of interest groups typically found in the Western industrial nations are missing, and the educated middle class is small. University students, as one of the few easily mobilized and politically articulate groups in society, play a crucial role in politics. It has often been said that student movements constitute something of a “conscience” for their societies, as they often embody the concerns of broader segments of the population who are unable to voice their discontent.

Students are a uniquely mobilizable group in the Third World. In many countries, the major university is located in the capital city, often a short distance from the seat of political power. Students have a geographical focus on the campus and generally have their own newspapers and journals. Politics impinge on the lives of students in many ways more directly than is the case in the industrialized nations. The decisions of government have an immediate effect on the direction of the economy, including employment prospects for graduates in countries where a very large proportion of the graduates go into the civil service or other government employment. Students take politics very seriously, in part because it affects them and the university very directly and in part because they have, in many nations, a consciousness of their unique role in society. Students see themselves as a kind of "incipient elite" destined for power and responsible for exercising their political power even while students (Hanna and Hanna, 1975).

While there are a number of Third World nations which have exhibited considerable political stability (Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Paraguay, Taiwan and Malaysia are a few examples), in general politics are less stable than in most industrialized nations, and political issues are both perplexing and controversial. Students, as one of the main articulate and politically aware groups in society, naturally concern themselves with these issues. The basic political fabric of society can be torn apart by disputes concerning language policy, social reform or other matters. Many Third World societies are multi-ethnic, and this presents further possibilities for unrest and contestation. Many of these pressing societal questions directly affect the student population. Language policy, for example, often has implications for the medium of instruction in the educational system. Variations in the treatment of ethnic groups also affect student populations. Students are often more ideologically aware and oriented than the population generally. Ideological interests come from a variety of sources, including the nature of university education and the psychological propensities of students (Keniston, 1971; Klineberg, 1979). The ideological orientation of student groups, often but by no means exclusively on the left, has broad political implications.

The reaction of the political system to student activist movements helps to shape their actions, orientations and, of course, the impact they have on society. Many Third World political systems are relatively intolerant of political activism, fearing that the students may generate political instability or cause disruption. A growing number of countries have sought to ensure, by a variety of policies, that the universities will be relatively free of political activism. In some countries, a "certificate of suitability," which is aimed mainly at checking for political dissidents, is required for anyone wishing to attend university. Nations as different ideologically as China and Singapore use this means of controlling dissent. Those denied such certification may not enroll in post-secondary educa-

tional institutions. Legislation concerning the operation of universities has sometimes included restrictions on political expression on campus by both students and academic staff. The traditional concept of university autonomy has, as a result, been weakened (McConnell, 1981). In many Third World nations, campus unrest is dealt with harshly by political authorities, with repression of organizations, jailing of student leaders and severe limitations on freedom of movement imposed on activist organizations. The traditional insulation of the university campus from external interference, honored most strongly in Latin America, has lost its force in most countries and police or military authorities are willing to come onto the campus to deal with unrest or perceived disruption (Walter, 1968; Maier and Weatherhead, 1979). Malaysia's recent University Act, which was stimulated by student unrest and widespread rioting in 1969, severely limits university autonomy. Restrictions in many other countries, including Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines, have limited the scope of student activism and indicate the concern political authorities have about the potential force of student activism.

It would be tempting to develop or posit a hypothesis that the more democratic and civil libertarian a regime is in the Third World, the more likely it is to permit a fairly high level of activism. In general, this seems to be the case, although political currents change so rapidly that activism can become a risky business very quickly. It is perhaps significant that in those countries where activism is most widely permitted, it generally has the least impact on the political structure, precisely because there are other competing political forces at work as well.

Governments consider students a potentially powerful political force and have in many instances moved to ensure that activism does not become a political threat. Despite these efforts, students have been influential in politics and efforts at repression have not been completely successful. The fact is, however, that student activism is more difficult when restrictions are placed on it by external authorities, although governments have been unable to completely eliminate activism. Given a sufficiently severe social crisis and strong student opinion and a desire to participate, activism cannot be completely repressed without disrupting the academic system and closing the universities. Where governments have felt themselves sufficiently threatened, universities have indeed been closed and in some cases entire student populations dismissed. Even such dramatic action has sometimes failed to quell student activism. Without question, in the Third World, students are a key political force – one which is reckoned with by governments. Students are not necessarily involved in all political struggles, but when they become mobilized, they are a powerful force.

The Academic Environment

Students live and work in academic institutions and the environment, curriculum, and policies of the university have an important effect on student activism. Although, as has been noted, students are generally concerned about societal politics, the institutional milieu does play a significant role. It is necessary to understand the nature of the university and its culture to fully comprehend student politics. Universities are unique institutions in many ways. They have a degree of autonomy rare among large social institutions and even if this autonomy has been under attack in recent years, it is nevertheless important. The educational culture of the university is important also. The process of learning and the nature of the curriculum can contribute to political consciousness. For students in the social sciences particularly, the study of social forces contributes to understanding, and sometimes to criticism of, established institutions and policies.

Universities have unique cultures, histories and practices that contribute to student political consciousness and concern (van den Berghe, 1973; Altbach, 1972). Universities are meritocratic institutions and emphasize promotion and advancement by merit alone. This concept is often in contrast to more traditional practices in Third World societies, where family, ethnic group or tribe is more important. The meritocratic ideal is part of an academic value system often at odds with traditional norms and values and helps to engender an oppositional culture among students.

The university as a community also has political implications. In the Third World, independent and autonomous groups of young people are unusual and the subculture in the university is perhaps unique. The freedom that university students have from their families is a significant experience as well. Further, in many countries, the subculture of the university (and of intellectuals generally) is frequently an "oppositional" subculture, which examines carefully and critically the society of which it is a part (Shils, 1972). The professoriate often adds to the sense of intellectual ferment by encouraging students to ask difficult questions and, in some instances, by displaying oppositional political and social views. The campus community is more cosmopolitan than its surrounding society and inevitably comes into some conflict with it. While student populations tend to come from relatively privileged strata of the population, they have relatively greater opportunities to interact with compeers from different social strata. Traditional barriers of caste, ethnicity, tribe and religion seem less important in the meritocratic atmosphere of the university [3]. The ethos of the university community tends to contribute to interest in social and political questions and to make it easier to express these interests and to organize for political discussion and action.

The university, in almost all countries, is a more autonomous, independent

and more liberal environment than its surrounding society. The professoriate, while seldom revolutionary in its political orientation, tends to be somewhat to the left of the general population (Basu, 1981). Even in countries where there are significant limitations on freedom of expression and action, the campus tends to be allowed a greater degree of freedom than the rest of the society. To some extent, political authorities recognize that a university requires a free environment in order to provide quality education and research. Political authorities have always found it difficult to enforce total conformity in the universities. The example of China during the Cultural Revolution shows the results of totally eliminating dissent from the universities and harnessing academic institutions to meet the dictates of government. Without question, the balance between the requirements of a quality educational institution on the one hand and the demands of government in many countries for political loyalty on the other is a delicate one. Student activism often is able to flourish in the confusing middle ground between freedom and conformity.

Universities have some other special advantages in terms of stimulating student activism. Student newspapers are able to ensure that students are quickly informed of events and they are able to create an atmosphere that stimulates activism and political consciousness. Universities in many Third World nations are located in the capital city and thus close to the seat of power. In this geographical environment, it is relatively easy to organize a demonstration which can be seen – and perhaps felt – at the seat of government. As universities have grown in size, it becomes easier to mobilize a large number of individuals on a variety of political issues. Even a small minority of ten percent of a student population of 10,000 is a large crowd of 1,000 students. While student demonstrations are almost everywhere minority phenomena, a fairly substantial group can be easily organized on a university campus. The geographical factor in student activism is often ignored but is nonetheless important.

In a few countries, campus issues and conditions stimulate student activism – and this activism sometimes spills from the campus to the society. The most dramatic example of campus-based activism is India, where poor and often deteriorating conditions, combined with an interest by external political groups in campus politics, often stimulate activism. The Indian case may be relevant to other countries if standards of education decline or unemployment of university graduates becomes endemic (Jayaram, 1979; Altbach, 1968). In India, most activism in recent years has been campus-based and stimulated by local issues, often relating to examinations, complaints against administrators or faculty or other similar issues. Poor and deteriorating conditions in the hostels and a general feeling, supported by statistics, that graduates (except in a few fields) are in a difficult employment market are underlying factors. The unrest that emerges is often violent and disruptive of academic life. The University of Bombay, for example, reported recently that it was able to hold its annual

examinations on time for the first time in four years in 1983. India's most prestigious university, the Jawaharlal Nehru University, has been closed down on a number of occasions due to local campus disputes. Most recently, this university was closed for several months after rioting damaged several staff houses in reaction to a dispute relating to hostel regulations. In India, external political groups often attempt to gain support in the universities and often contribute to local, and largely nonideological, student unrest. The combination of a tradition of local student politics, external interests, and deteriorating conditions in the universities is a powerful one. While India is almost unique in the scope and intensity of local student activism, campus conditions can contribute to student activism and to a generalized feeling of disaffection among students throughout the Third World.

The organization of studies has an impact on student activism. Academic systems which permit long periods of time between examinations, in which the examination system is centralized, and which leave students relatively unsupervised and without direct academic responsibilities, are more prone to student activism than more regulated academic systems. Students in systems with relatively few requirements have more time to participate in political movements. The sense of constant responsibility for academic work is not strong and in general lectures and other assignments are not compulsory. In contrast, academic systems which are organized according to the American course-credit system, in which students are examined regularly by their teachers, seem to instill a greater sense of responsibility. Further, there is less time for extra-curricular activities of all kinds because of constant assessment of academic work. There has been a trend in the Third World to shift to an academic organization that provides more supervision and continuing assessment.

The academic environment is a complex one. It is based on traditional approaches to higher education, on patterns of administration, on sets of expectations for academic work, and on particular locations and cultures of academic institutions. These factors have a profound impact on the nature and orientation of student political activism. Perhaps the most important force, however, is the very nature of a university education. An academic institution and all that it stands for is related to the examination of society and a desire to understand reality. It is not surprising, therefore, that university students sometimes take their newly found understanding seriously and translate their knowledge into action.

Historical Traditions

Although universities stem from a common Western institution, nations have different academic histories. Historical circumstances and traditions have

quite a bit to do with the nature and scope of student activism in a national context. Perhaps the most important general difference in this regard between the industrialized nations and the Third World is the role played by the academic community in general, and students particularly, in independence struggles in many Third World nations. This key political role has legitimated the participation of students in national politics (Altbach, 1982). Because students participated in the national struggles, they have achieved a place in history and their contemporary political role is considered legitimate. Governments have attempted to lessen this legitimacy, but it remains a powerful force. If students are somehow expected to play a political role, their actions and opinions carry a greater weight. In the Third World generally, students, as representatives of the middle classes, have been expected to play an active political role.

In Latin America, there has been a powerful tradition of student activism that continues, with variations, to the present time. Stimulated by the famous reform movement of 1918, which transformed the Latin American university and placed students in the governance process, Latin American universities have long been sanctuaries for student radicalism. The recent period has seen significant changes in Latin America. The rise of repressive military regimes with modern means of repression limited activism. Further, the traditionally militant public universities have to some extent been eclipsed by newer private and technological institutions which have little activist orientation. Very recently, there has been a trend toward democratization in Argentina, Brazil, and even in Chile, and it is possible that students will again move to the center stage of the political system. Without question, the historical tradition of student activism in Latin America remains strong and students remain involved in university governance in a number of countries as well as in politics (Liebman, 1972). While Latin American higher education and politics have seen some important changes, the activist tradition remains and the legacy of the 1918 reforms is strong in the consciousness of both students and society.

Students were active in independence struggles in a number of countries including India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Egypt, and many others. In countries where students were active in such important points in national development, they have often maintained a sense of their political efficacy and there has been an acceptance of students as legitimate political actors, in part based on their involvement in the national struggle. With the exception of Latin America, there are no Third World nations with a tradition of student involvement in academic governance and in university reform movements. Student political participation has, in general, been on the national level and with ideologically-based political movements.

Students have historically been involved in cultural and linguistic reform movements, and have been important also in shaping the cultural traditions of the modern period. Students, for example, were at the forefront of the struggle to

use *bahasa Indonesia* as the Indonesian national language and they provided intellectual underpinnings to the national movement. Muslim students in India were active in the intellectual movement that led to the founding of Pakistan, and Indian students generally were involved at all stages of the nationalist movement (Lelyveld, 1978). Historically, the universities have been important places of cultural ferment and debate. This is not surprising considering the small size of the intellectual class in most Third World nations prior to the growth of modern universities in the post-independence period. When the history of the growth of nationalism and of cultural ferment is written in many Third World nations, the academic community – both students and faculty – will emerge as an important force. This is true in many cases where students were not very active in the independence struggle as where political nationalist movements were active. In pre-revolutionary China, students played both a political and a cultural role of considerable importance. The May 4, 1919 movement was spurred by students and marked the emergence of students as a significant political force (Chow, 1960). Students demanded radical solutions to the many problems facing China at the time and contributed to the intellectual and political ferment that culminated in the 1949 revolution that brought the Communists to power. In Burma, students were active in creating a nationalist movement in the 1920s and they remained politically involved until the military government put an end to all political activity in the 1960s (Silverstein, 1968). This pattern was repeated in Vietnam and elsewhere. While there were a few international contacts among students in Third World countries during the colonial period, most of these movements emerged without significant international involvements [4]. Where there was contact, it was between the universities in the colonial center with students and intellectuals in the colonies.

Historical traditions function in different ways in different countries. In some, there was direct student involvement in the independence struggle. In others, students played an intellectual and cultural rather than a political role. In a few cases, there was student involvement in campus reforms, but this was not the general situation. And in some instances there was international ferment among students during the important period of colonial development. In almost all cases, the intellectual influences of the West – the ideology of nationalism, of unity, and later of socialism and Marxism – all permeated academic and intellectual communities in the Third World. Special ferment occurred after World War I, as the ideology of colonialism was attacked and the Russian revolution had an electrifying impact among intellectuals and nationalists. While the historical tradition differs from country to country, there is no question but that it remains a key factor in understanding contemporary student activism.

Sociological Currents

Student political activism does not occur equally in all types of post-secondary educational institutions nor among all segments of the student population. Student politics, even in the most troubled environment, is almost always a minority phenomenon – the majority of students do not participate in student movements. In order to understand student activism, it is useful to consider some of the sociological variables that seem to affect activism. Unfortunately, the largest amount of sociological research has been conducted in the industrialized nations, and particularly in the United States, but some generalizations relevant to Third World nations can nevertheless be made (Lipset and Altbach, 1970; Bakke, 1971). Again, national differences are very important and generalizations are difficult to make. Nevertheless, there are some common themes that emerge from observation of a large number of student activist movements in a variety of Third World nations.

Much has been written about Third World university students as “elites,” either present or future. It is almost universally true that university students come from the upper strata of societies in almost every Third World society. Further, student populations tend to be largely “urban” in countries that are predominantly rural. Student populations in many instances contain disproportionate numbers of young people from minority groups which happen to have a tradition of education or have achieved a level of affluence. Thus, student populations often differ significantly from the general population in the Third World.

Students in industrialized nations are not fully representative of national populations in most cases. Students come from more affluent and more urbanized backgrounds than does the general population. In general, the larger and more comprehensive the post-secondary education system, the more typical is the student population. In small academic systems that enroll a limited proportion of the age-cohort, there is generally a high level of elitism. In the United States, for example, the student population is fairly close to the general population in its socio-economic characteristics, although even in the United States the elite sector of the system is disproportionately affluent in terms of student background characteristics. In the Third World context, those countries with larger academic systems (such as the Philippines, India and to some extent, Nigeria) have a relatively more “democratic” pattern of access to higher education.

As student populations are generally not typical of national populations, this naturally has some implications for both student activism and for the role of the university in society. The role, for example, of such groups as the Chinese in Southeast Asia, of Ibos in Nigeria, of Brahmins in India, of Christians in Indonesia, of Tamils in Sri Lanka and of Indians in East Africa all reflect the

importance of minority communities in higher education. Relatively affluent backgrounds give university students a certain confidence in their future social roles and certain expectations concerning the way they should function while in the university as well. There are, in many countries, further variations concerning the field of study. Students in the sciences and professional fields tend to come from more privileged backgrounds than those in social sciences and humanities, although differences are often not very great.

Student activists are atypical of the student population in general in many countries. Activists tend to come disproportionately from students in the social sciences and to some extent the humanities, and very seldom from fields such as agriculture, engineering or medicine. There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon. Social science students, in almost all countries, tend to be among the most liberal (or radical) in their ideological views and the most interested in societal problems and issues. Thus, there is an element of self-selection and propensity toward social concern prior to entry into the university. In addition, the content of the social sciences is focused on societal issues and on an understanding of the problems of modernizing societies. In the Third World particularly, the gulf between reality and a desired social goal is often wide, leading students to question the efficacy of existing political arrangements. Social science faculty are the most liberal (or radical) in the university in most countries, and it is possible that the sometimes critical stance of the professoriate has some influence on the students. Social science students are, of course, not the only students interested in politics. Next in concern are generally students in the humanities. In some countries, especially in Latin America, law students seem to exhibit a high degree of concern for politics.

Student activist leaders tend to come from the most affluent and cosmopolitan sectors of the student population. In many instances, they are the sons (and occasionally the daughters in the Third World context) of families politically or economically powerful in their societies. They have, in other words, connections to the elite. These students have an understanding of the way power works in their society and a willingness to attempt to use it. Their backgrounds give them a feeling that their families will protect them from the risks that are sometimes entailed by participation in activist movements. In other words, the perceived risks of political involvement in terms of possible disciplinary action by the universities or perhaps arrest by the civil authorities are not quite so formidable to students from affluent backgrounds.

Student activists are often among the most able students in terms of academic performance. Although the sociological studies of student leadership have largely been done in the industrialized nations, this phenomenon seems to be the case in many Third World nations as well (Lipset, 1976). Relatively few student leaders who come to public attention have very poor academic records. In some countries, such as India, there seems to be a pattern of "permanent

student leaders” and these individuals are often marginal academically or no longer enrolled in the university. This pattern exists in some other Third World nations as well, but it is unusual.

There are a variety of social-psychological aspects of student activism that have received very little attention in the Third World context. Social psychologists in the industrialized nations have pointed out that activist students (largely with a leftist orientation) have a higher level of moral and social concern than the general student population and are more articulate. Authors such as Kenneth Keniston (1968) and Richard Flacks (1971), using data collected during the 1960s in the United States, have argued that student activists are more “humane” and morally concerned than their fellow students. Whether student activists are in some way “superior” to their compeers is open to considerable debate, but it seems likely that the nature of concerns, societal orientations and interests of activists is somehow “special.” Considerable differences no doubt can be found in various countries, since activist movements focus on different issues and stem from different origins.

It is unfortunate that most of the studies of student activists stem from industrialized nations, as the leadership of student movements in the Third World is extremely important, not only because student movements are sometimes very effective but because student leaders sometimes emerge as national leaders later (Singhal, 1977). Without question, however, sociological factors are important in understanding the nature and orientation of student activism. Orientations toward society, toward the university and toward politics all play a role. Students from different fields, and from different types of institutions, may have varying political opinions. Students from different groups have different propensities toward involvement as well. Social class, religion, and ethnic group may also play a role in shaping activist movements. The relationship between the student and the university is also important. Thus, to understand student activism, it is important to understand both the institutional context and the sociological, and perhaps the psychological issues as well, that are related to activism.

Ideological Orientations

Student movements are generally assumed to be leftist in their orientations and nationalist in direction. Student activists are assumed to have a strong ideological interest and to be anti-establishment. These generalizations, which stem largely from the militant decade of the 1960s and relate to the experience of North America and Western Europe, nonetheless are applied throughout the world and to all historical periods. While it is true that the majority of contemporary student movements are probably left-of-center in their orientation, there

are considerable variations among student movements and these are very important to understand. Edward Shils has argued that student activists (as well as intellectuals generally) tend to be "anti-establishment" regardless of the orientation of the ruling authorities (Shils, 1970). Although the evidence is mixed for this generalization in the Third World context, it does help to explain why students seem to be anti-regime in countries with widely differing political systems and orientations.

Student politics, with some exceptions, are the politics of idealism. Students look for consistent, just and far-reaching solutions to the many problems of society. They tend to be more interested in ideological issues since ideologies offer "complete" solutions to problems. The politics of compromise and accommodation, practiced in most political systems, does not appeal to student idealism. Student leaders are particularly interested in complete solutions to problems and often embrace political (or religious) ideologies which offer a total program for society. Marxism has had a great appeal for student activists for this reason, although the difficulties which most "Marxist" regimes such as the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have encountered have somewhat diminished the appeal of this ideology. To a considerable degree, student activists have embraced ideologies which offer justice and social equality. While there are a few elitists among student activists, their numbers are few. Activist leaders tend to be much more ideologically inclined than the rank-and-file of participants, and this fact is often overlooked since the tone of the movement is shaped by those in leadership positions.

It is usually assumed that student movements are "left" in orientation and program. This was the general trend during the 1960s, and remains the dominant current at present. But there are significant variations in ideological currents and, if anything, these are growing in strength in the Third World at the present time. It should be indicated first that, historically, student movements in Europe were occasionally rightist in their orientation. Both Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany had considerable student support (Steinberg, 1977). Earlier, the nationalist student movements in Europe in the nineteenth century could not be classified as "left" in their orientation. In the Third World, nationalism and socialism were in many countries intertwined. Further, the influence of the Russian revolution of 1917 on the emergent Third World nationalist and student movements was considerable. In countries like the United States, Britain, and France, where liberal and left opinion has dominated student activist movements, there have been influential rightist student organizations as well.

The situation in the Third World is complex. Radical ideological currents remain strong, and probably dominate most student movements and organizations. In Latin America, left ideological currents continue to dominate, although there are some variations. For example, during the radical Allende period in Chile, students at the Catholic University expressed opposition from center or

right-wing positions (Levy, 1981). On occasion, extreme leftist student groups oppose democratic or radical regimes. Virulent nationalism occasionally attracts student support, and this trend is usually allied with rightist political groups. With the exception of South Africa, where anti-apartheid sentiments remain strong among black students as well as among a militant minority of white students and where radical orientations are clear, there has been a decline in student political activism in sub-Saharan Africa (Adam, 1977). Nigeria, which has had a strong tradition of student political involvement, has been relatively calm as well. In general, however, student opinion and orientations seem to be leftist, and even where campus conditions and issues have been the primary source of activism, as in Nigeria, radicalism is the dominant mode.

The situation in Asia and in the Islamic areas is varied. Although students played an important role in the "Cultural Revolution" in China, their participation seems to have been as an adjunct to the dominant faction in the Chinese Communist Party at the time. The very crucial participation of Indonesian students in the movement that overthrew the Sukarno government in 1965 was a reaction to the leftist orientation of the ruling authorities at the time (Douglas, 1970). Egyptian students have not been politically militant, although there is considerable sentiment among some Egyptian intellectuals in favor of the orthodox Islamic Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, in countries like Malaysia and Pakistan, there is considerable sentiment in the universities for an Islamic revivalist political movement and a stress on Islam as a political current. Governments which are secular-minded or which must deal with populations which are not fully in favor of the new religious revival have been faced with a dilemma in dealing with these "rightist" student movements.

Thus, in the contemporary Third World it is no longer true to point to campus activist movements as uniformly leftist in their orientation. A revival, particularly in the Islamic world, of religious orthodoxy and interest, in part perhaps as a reaction to the predominant secularism and Westernization of the universities, is an important element. Students remain an anti-establishment force in many nations, criticizing entrenched political regimes for their failings and sometimes leading anti-government movements. In recent years, students have been key forces in anti-government movements in South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Malaysia and other countries. In each of these instances, there are recognizable ideological differences. Students in Communist countries are not generally free to organize and express their views but, when they do, student movements tend to be opposed to established orthodoxy. This was certainly the case in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Ideological tendencies among Third World students are diverse and increasingly difficult to predict.

The Industrialized Nations and the Third World

It is significant to reflect on the differences between student political activism in the Third World and in the industrialized nations because such a comparison yields some useful variations. It may be worth noting that the level of economic development does not seem to affect the level or nature of student political activism within the Third World. The main bifurcation is between the industrialized nations and the Third World. Within the Third World, it is impossible to correlate activism and development. Without question, students have been successful in the Third World in stimulating political change, creating disruption and in general affecting their societies. They have, of course, not been successful in all attempts, but their success is in sharp contrast to the industrial nations, where only in France (in 1968), and to a lesser extent in Japan, did students come close to overthrowing governments. In both the Third World and the industrialized nations, students have focused attention on national issues (such as the Vietnam War and racial problems in the United States), and students have been in the vanguard of attitude and life-style shifts [5]. In general, students in the industrialized nations have been able to influence the policy only indirectly by raising issues and stimulating debate. In the Third World, students have had a much more direct influence on society by directly forcing social and governmental change. The list of Third World nations which have been politically affected by student activism is substantial. In these countries, students have either stimulated significant social unrest or have been instrumental in forcing the collapse of the government. It is generally the case that students have been more effective in forcing the downfall of a regime than in having a say in creation of a new government. Indeed, in many instances, the military has taken power once the students (and often others as well) have stimulated political upheaval [6].

Highlighting some of the reasons why Third World students movements have been so much more successful in affecting political change is a useful way of pointing out some of the factors important in Third World student activism.

- Third World nations often lack the established political institutions and structures of the industrialized nations, and thus it is easier for any organized group, such as the student community, to have a direct impact on politics.
- The historical tradition of student political involvement is strong and contributes to the creation of a sense of legitimacy for student political involvement in the Third World. In the West, student political involvement is seen as an aberration and an illegitimate intrusion into politics. Third World students, in many countries, are expected to participate directly in politics.
- Third World students are much more of an elite group than their compeers in the industrial nations and they have a consciousness of their elite position

(Barkan, 1975). They are members of the small minority that has access to post-secondary education and their opportunities for access to positions of power and authority in society are much better than average.

- The location of the major universities in many Third World nations in the capital cities makes access to the seat of political power easier. The simple fact of geography makes demonstrations easier to organize and gives the students a sense that they are near the center of power and have access to it.
- Relatively few Third World nations have effectively functioning democratic political systems. As a result of this, and of the widespread problems of illiteracy and poor communications, students are often seen as spokespersons for a broader population. They have, in a sense, moral authority beyond their small numbers and those in power take student demonstrations and grievances seriously for this reason. In a sense, Third World students act as a “conscience” of their societies.

These are some of the reasons for the relative effectiveness of student movements in the Third World in the past twenty-five years. All Third World student movements have not been successful, however, and repression has often been used and has been effective, at least temporarily, in destroying dissent. Indeed, violence against students and loss of life have been much greater in the Third World than in the industrialized nations. South Korea, Argentina, and Thailand, in recent years, provide examples of massive repression of students. Governments have also moved to impose much stricter control over the universities, often creating problems for the effective functioning of academic systems.

The Future

Students are and will remain key political actors in the Third World. This does not mean that students will be a potent political force in all countries at all times, but that the conditions that make for effective student political participation exist in the Third World and are likely to continue. One cannot make the same prediction for the industrialized nations, where the emergence of student activism is the result of rather special circumstances. Despite the continuing importance of student activism, it is difficult to predict where activism will play a major political role. Further, the shape of student political involvement varies from country to country and over time. Thus, a left-wing movement may collapse and emerge later as a traditionalist student focus.

It is perhaps significant that Third World students have not been in general interested in university reform or change and, when they have, they have as often as not actually opposed reforms. In Latin America, for example, students have consistently opposed changes in admissions policies, finances, examination

procedures and the like. Students in India have also generally been against reforms in higher education. Thus, Third World activism is in general less of a threat to the functioning of academic institutions than it is to the political system itself. In a few countries, such as India, students have been concerned with campus-based issues, but usually to correct an injustice or express frustration rather than to attack the academic system itself. The one major exception to this generalization was the university Reform movement in Latin America early in the twentieth century, which resulted in major academic change. Students have, on occasion, been interested in issues that affect higher education, such as language (and by implication to the language of instruction), but there have been few university reform movements in the Third World and students have been surprisingly tolerant of academic systems which sometimes produce neither a high quality of instruction nor jobs for graduates. As a general rule, however, those Third World academic systems which are able to provide a reasonable level of upward mobility for the graduates of universities and jobs for graduates will probably remain relatively free of activism directed at the institutions themselves.

It is more difficult to predict the ideological direction and the tactical orientation of student movements. There is some tendency in the Third World for student activist movements to look to traditional values and religions – particularly in the Islamic countries. The trend toward anti-establishment politics remains strong. And the student predilection toward ideologies, particularly those that offer “total” solutions to societal problems and a model for social reconstruction, is an important factor.

Student movements do not emerge from a vacuum but are determined, to a considerable degree, by the social and political environment in general and by government (and sometimes academic) policies concerning student activism. Evidence shows that repression, legal or otherwise, does work, at least in the short run. In Argentina, Uruguay and in several Central American nations, right-wing governments used a combination of repression of the universities and jailing (and sometimes torturing) activists as a means of controlling student unrest. In Malaysia, new legislation placed restrictions on student activities as well as on the functioning of the universities. In many countries, universities or entire academic systems are closed down by the authorities in response to activism. Such draconian measures are generally effective, at least temporarily, in stifling dissent in the universities. The long-term result may be damaging the universities, creating a deeper sense of alienation among young people, and perhaps in creating an “underground” oppositional movement. Repression, while often effective, does have implications beyond the simple snuffing out of dissent. Or repression, in some cases, can trigger even more massive social unrest. Authorities have occasionally tried to co-opt student movements and organizations in order to obtain their cooperation and to ensure campus calm.

Student leaders have been brought into the government and authorities have listened to student grievances. Such tactics sometimes work to defuse dissent and also to bring different perspectives to the political debate.

In conclusion, one can point to the experience of Central America, a current flashpoint of world tension. Students were very active in the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and they remain strongly in support of the revolutionary regime. The Somoza dictatorship ruthlessly repressed the students. In El Salvador, the university has been closed for a long period because of anti-government student activism. Students and the academic community have been at the center of political activity.

Students will continue to be politically concerned and involved in the Third World. Activist organizations and movements will be involved in politics. Students will continue to take ideological politics seriously. The possibility for direct student involvement in the political system remains strong. The nature, scope and direction of such involvement is, however, difficult to predict. The basic social conditions for student political activism in the Third World remain and it can be expected that students will continue to be a volatile and sometimes powerful force.

Notes

- 1 This article reflects almost twenty years of observation of student political activism. See Philip G. Altbach (1968, 1974, 1981), and S. M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbach (eds.) (1970). I am indebted to Dan Levy for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.
- 2 For two opposing theoretical perspectives, see Lewis Feuer (1969) and Michael Miles (1971). Both of these volumes, by Western social scientists, related mainly to the industrialized nations.
- 3 There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization. Recent increased interest in Islamic values among Malay students in Malaysia, for example, has tended to separate ethnic groups on campus.
- 4 The history of international involvements of students has yet to be written. There is evidence, for example, that Asian students studying in Japan during the early twentieth century had a good deal of contact. Similarly, students from the various British colonies studying in England were in close touch, and several organizations emerged to serve their interests. Ho Chi Minh and Chou Enlai were in contact with colonial students studying in France in the 1920s.
- 5 In the United States, student attitudes on such social questions as race relations, divorce and others have consistently been in the vanguard and, in most cases, general public opinion has moved in the direction pointed out by the campus community (Levine, 1980).
- 6 The following incomplete listing gives an indication of the scope of student political impact in the Third World. These examples are from the past two decades: Brazil, Central African Republic, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Nicaragua, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, Zambia, Uruguay, Argentina and others.

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