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POLLS AND PROTESTS

By Seymour M. Lipset

THE wave of student protest which emerged in the late 1960s has often been called a "youth revolt." Actually, however, the increasing opposition of American college students to the Vietnam war and the concomitant growth in radical-left sentiments among them have not involved the total young adult age group. The idealism of much of non-college youth at that time was in fact reflected in a show of highly patriotic feeling, support for the war and even in a disproportionate backing for George Wallace's 1968 presidential candidacy. Furthermore, opinion polls dealing with the relationship of age to views on the Vietnam war have consistently shown that persons over 50 have been more numerous and more consistent in their opposition to the war than have all other groups. As a 1970 report from the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan put it, "this 'generation gap' that one would have expected, wherein the young oppose the war and the old support it, simply failed to appear."

However, a "gap" does exist. But it is between persons on and off campus rather than between the younger and the older. Faculty members, for example, who are as a rule much more opposed than students to militant activism and campus politicization, are as a group fairly close to their students on substantive issues such as Vietnam, civil rights and domestic social policy. Both tend to espouse as their dominant political ideology what might be described as Kennedy-McCarthy liberalism and the program of the left-liberal antiwar wing of the Democratic Party. The non-college population, on the other hand, has over the last five years gradually moved in a conservative direction, until by 1970, 52 percent described themselves as conservative, as against 34 percent who thought of themselves as liberals.

II

Let us concentrate now on the development of student opinion on the Vietnam war. Massive demonstrations began at Berkeley, Ann Arbor and Madison in 1965. However, surveys showed that the majority of students supported the war until 1968. Not until June of that year did a Gallup Poll indicate that the proportion of students who thought America had made a mistake in becoming involved in Vietnam had reached 50 percent. At that time the same view was taken by 48 percent of the general public but by only 38 percent of the entire youth group from 21 to 30 years of age. This difference within the younger population was to continue in succeeding years.

The perception that the Vietnam war was a mistake grew greatly following the dramatic communist Tet offensive in February, the cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam at the end of March 1968, and the beginning of negotiations in Paris in May 1968. In effect, once the U.S. government had given up the goal of defeating the communists on the battlefield, it became

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impossible to prevent a steady erosion of support for the war, particularly, though obviously far from exclusively, on the campus.

Two Gallup samples of students taken two and a half years apart dramatically pointed up the change. While in the spring of 1967, 35 percent identified themselves as "doves" and 49 percent as "hawks," in the fall of 1969, 69 percent saw themselves as "doves," only 20 percent as "hawks."

Other survey organizations, which compared views over shorter periods after the announcement of negotiations, also found a continuing growth in "dovish" or withdrawal sentiments. In reviewing changes in attitudes which had occurred between two student surveys conducted in October 1968 and in March and April 1969, Yankelovich concluded that "on college campuses, pacifist sentiments have spread from the more liberal students to the more moderate and conservative students." In June 1969 the Harris Poll asked whether a man's refusal to be drafted because of opposition to the Vietnam war led them to respect him more or less; it found that the proportion of students who indicated "more respect" had jumped from 29 percent in the spring of 1968 to 48 percent a year later. Comparing attitudes between late September and the end of November 1969, the period of the two massive Moratorium and Mobilization protests, the Gilbert Youth Poll reported "an increase, from 28 percent in the first poll to 43 percent in the second, among those who feel the only proper action would be 'complete and prompt withdrawal of American troops.'" A similar indication of a dramatic jump in strong opposition to the war was recorded in two polls taken by the Yankelovich organization in 1969 and 1970. The proportion strongly agreeing with the statement "the war in Vietnam is pure imperialism" increased from 16 percent in the spring of 1969 to 41 percent in 1970, just before the Cambodian events. Those strongly disagreeing dropped from 44 to 21 percent.

Yet though most students opposed the war, the survey data also suggested that a majority accepted the Nixon administration's new policy of Vietnamization as a means of getting out: the administration was able to coöpt some of the campus opposition. Thus a Gallup survey of college students taken in May 1969 reported that when asked: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Nixon is handling his job as President?" 57 percent approved, 27 percent disapproved and 16 percent had no opinion. A second Gallup national student poll taken in the fall of 1969 found that students were seemingly losing interest in the protest, though they remained heavily against the war. In reporting on this survey in December 1969, *Newsweek* concluded that "the mood of the American campus is apparently undergoing a striking change: militancy and violence are in good measure giving way to passivity and personal introspection, and the revolutionary impulse seems—for a while, at least—to have largely spent itself."

The reaction against the May 1970 Cambodian incursion, of course, produced the largest and most extensive student protest movement the United States has ever experienced. All the survey data document the increased extent of student participation, as well as the fact that student attitudes in general moved to the Left, not only with respect to the war, but on other issues as well. The *Playboy* student opinion survey, for example, showed that 36 percent of the 7,300 students queried in May 1970 favored "pulling out now,"

as compared with 6 percent who had taken the same position in 1965; 29 percent favored speeding up withdrawal; 26 percent would have continued with the "administration's timetable for 'honorable withdrawal';" and only 9 percent favored fighting for "total victory," as compared with the 35 percent who had in 1965 supported continued fighting in South Vietnam and the 56 percent who had then wanted to escalate by invading North Vietnam. Naturally enough, the Cambodian events also led to a decline in favorable student opinion of the way President Nixon was handling the war, with 59 percent queried in a Harris Poll giving him a rating of "poor," 17 percent one of "fair," and only 22 percent judging him "pretty good" or "excellent."

In looking back over the five years so briefly sketched here, it is clear that in spite of some seeming shifts of interest, the number of students participating in protest activities has increased steadily. This has been documented by studies of participation in the May–June 1970 Cambodia protests by the President's Commission on Campus Unrest and the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Furthermore, not only has the number of students participating in protest activities of both a disruptive and nondisruptive nature increased, but the antiwar protests have to a very striking extent reached into relatively moderate political sectors among the students. A nationwide study of 5,000 students in 39 colleges undertaken in 1969–1970, before the Cambodian incursion, by Kenneth and Mary Gergen, psychologists at Swarthmore College, reported that "in an average group of 100 antiwar demonstrators, one might find 13 Republicans, 20 Democrats, 62 Independents, and only 5 persons who identify themselves as Radicals. The overwhelming majority of the demonstrators place a high value on traditional American ideals." Surveys after the Cambodian events confirm this finding as to the heterogeneous makeup of the protestors.

Thus, during the five years of antiwar protest, the campus has moved significantly leftward in politics. As the Gergens put it in their study, "over 40 percent of the sample indicate that the war has altered their political affiliation, and of these, only 7 percent have increased their commitment to one of the two major parties. The remaining 93 percent of this group (or 37 percent of the total sample) became more 'liberal,' 'radical,' 'disillusioned with party politics,' and otherwise alienated from party politics."

To say that the students have moved to the Left in their politics is, however, very far from saying that most of them have become alienated from society or supportive of radical activism. In fact, all available data show that at most 10 percent of the college student population could be so classified, with about one-third of this 10 percent reported to have revolutionary views. To cite only one of a number of surveys of this problem, the Yankelovich study based on spring 1969 data found that among college students 3 percent were identified as "Revolutionaries" (believing that the American system was "too rotten to repair" and justifying property destruction, etc.); 10 percent as "Radical Dissidents" (who agreed with the Revolutionaries but not on all counts); 39 percent as "Reformers" (who believed in the need for specific reforms); 37 percent as "Moderates" (who agreed with the Reformers on some points); and 11 percent as "Conservatives" (who held a coherent set of beliefs about the need for more law and order, etc.

When examining the results of various national surveys of students from 1965 to 1970, it is difficult to come to any definitive conclusions concerning the depth and enduring quality of their discontent and its portent for continued tension with the government.

The approximately 10 percent who show up as "radicals," "alienated," or "dissidents" in the surveys completed in 1969–70 may be contrasted with those who identified "socialism" (24 percent) or "communism" (6 percent) as positive terms in a 1936 Roper-Fortune national student survey. Those who advocate fundamental changes in the American system today (75 percent in a late May 1970 Harris Poll) compare with the 68 percent who favored "a revision in our attitude about property rights" in the 1936 report. At the other end of the spectrum, Harris reported that in the spring of 1969 and 1970 the percentage of students who identified their politics as "conservative" stood at 16 and 15, respectively. Their figures are identical with the 15 percent who in a 1936 national student survey told Roper that they felt positive about the term "conservatism."

The surveys of students conducted by Harris and Gallup during the "quiet" fall semester of 1970 clearly suggested that the increase in support for radical politics which accompanied the escalation in antiwar protest in 1969 and 1970 may be reversing, and that the 1970s may witness a new, less radical, political cycle. It is also possible that the surveys reported on here have overestimated the movement to the Left which actually occurred during the sixties. Most of the surveys have generally been based on national samples running from 1,000 to 2,000 students. There is some reason to believe that some of these have oversampled the more selective or higher-quality schools, or that their respondents on given campuses were selected by quota-sample rather than probability (randomly from lists of students registered) procedures. These "biases" may have resulted in an initial overestimation of the more radical or alienated segment. Evidence of this may be seen in the fact that some of the polls overestimated the membership of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Two academic efforts to sample American student opinion, one conducted for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education by a Berkeley group, and the other for HEW by Johns Hopkins sociologists in the winter and spring of 1969–1970, reported a more conservative student body than the commercial surveys had. The Carnegie weighted national samples of 70,000 undergraduates and 30,000 graduate students and 60,000 faculty members at 300 institutions found fewer on the "Left" and more self-identified "conservatives" among the students than had the smaller surveys. When given the alternative of identifying themselves as left, liberal, middle-of-the-road or conservative, only 5 percent of the three different campus groups chose "left;" 19 percent of the undergraduates reported themselves as "conservative," a designation used by 30 percent of the graduate students and 28 percent of the faculty. The largest single category (about 40 percent) in each was, of course, "liberal." Using slightly different categories the HEW-Hopkins study found 5 percent of 8,000 undergraduates were "radical," 16 percent "conservative," 40 percent "moderate," and 32 percent "liberal."

The conclusion that only a small minority of American students has ever

been alienated from the body politic is evident in the findings of a variety of polls conducted between 1965 and 1970 which indicated that students showed considerable support for diverse aspects of American society *other* than those linked to foreign policy, the war and racism. For example, during the spring of 1965, in the first year of large-scale protest, a national sample queried for a Harris Poll expressed confidence in the policies of dominant American domestic institutions, particularly those linked to economic and professional élites. Thus, the majority voiced a "great deal" of confidence in the medical profession, banks and financial institutions, higher education, and big corporations. As a group, students were much less favorable to the arts, the United Nations, the civil rights movement, religion and the labor movement.

Perhaps more significant in indicating how little alienation from American institutions existed among students in general are the findings of a poll conducted by Samuel Lubell in the spring of 1966, which dealt with the matter of confidence in dominant economic organizations. Only a year after the Berkeley revolt and the emergence of mass demonstrations on the war, Lubell found that 60 percent of the students interviewed praised the role of business, while only 15 percent were critical. Lubell also reported that an unspecified majority were for "a stronger Federal government but against a guaranteed annual income," and for "a more rapid extension of civil rights but against racial intermarriage." He concluded his analysis by commenting that in "their political thinking, far from being 'alienated,' the students remain basically like the rest of the country. . . ."

Two surveys of student opinion in the spring of 1969 also pointed up the limitations on any judgment that American college students had as a stratum become alienated from dominant institutions or the body politic. Thus, a Roper Poll dated May 1969 and concerned with attitudes toward four dominant institutions—business, the political system, administrative justice and higher education—found the largest proportion agreeing that they were "basically sound" but needed some assistance (these percentages ranged from a low of 37 percent when freshmen viewed business, to a high of 72 percent when seniors viewed the political system). "Basically Sound—Essentially Good" was the next most popular rubric (from 48 to 10 percent), with "Not Too Sound, Needs Many Improvements" ranking next (with from 21 to 7 percent). "Basically Unsound, Needs Fundamental Overhauling" attracted only from 3 to 4 percent of the respondents. A somewhat similar picture of the sentiments of the national student stratum appeared in a poll completed for *Psychology Today* (October 1969). This survey found that 64 percent disapproved of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, 39 percent indicated strong feelings, and 26 percent mild ones. On most of the other questions, which dealt with the universities, racial problems, etc., the students were much less critical of American institutions and policies.

The Yankelovich-CBS survey of 4,000 young people, half of them in college, taken in March and April of 1969, and the College Poll, which regularly samples students for newspapers and NBC, also reported concurrently that the college student population was generally liberal, sympathetic to civil rights demands, and antiwar, but far from being extremist in these views. To take only a very few examples, in the College Poll 63 percent of the stu-

dents queried said they believed that "the ROTC belongs on campus" at the very time that the ROTC was under sharp attack from the SDS and antiwar groups. Only 23 percent said they disapproved of having their university or college "participating in general projects to aid the national defense," while 76 percent said they had no objection. Although 78 percent favored having "Afro-American" courses at their school, 68 percent opposed black student control over selection of faculty for these courses. A year later, in spring 1970, the HEW-Hopkins survey found that 72 percent disagreed with the statement: "to do anything rewarding one must work outside the regular institutions of our society."

The most extensive investigation of a variety of student attitudes completed in the peaceful fall of 1970 by Harris found fewer self-identified radicals and more conservatives than during the Cambodian protest in May, the "radical" percentage having decreased from 11 to 7; the "liberal" from 43 to 35; the "middle-of-the-road" having increased from 26 to 34 percent; and the "conservative" and "far Right" from 15 to 19 percent. Although the other questions used in this survey were not comparable to those used in earlier Harris Polls, nevertheless, the general picture which emerged was a relatively moderate and unalienated studenthood. Surveys taken during the 1970 fall semester by Gallup and other pollsters seem to reach more or less the same result. Similar results as to the minority status of radical student groups were also obtained in polls taken abroad—in France after events of May 1968, in Italy in 1969, and in Japan in 1966.

III

Nevertheless, even though the vast majority of the student body remains unalienated, it should also be stressed that it is becoming increasingly reform-minded and that on some points it is very critical of and even hostile to existing policies and attitudes. To cite only one of the surveys taken in the spring of 1970, the Yankelovich Poll, a profile of increased opposition to the Vietnam war plus growing support for "fundamental reforms" emerged in the following ways: proportions favoring fundamental reforms in big business and the military had risen from one-third in 1969 to close to one-half in 1970; but relatively few students proposed to do away with specific institutions, only 12 percent wishing, for example, to eliminate the FBI, with 19 percent favoring its fundamental reform and 28 percent its moderate reform, and 40 percent against any "substantial change;" as for the Constitution, 2 percent would have "done away with it," 14 percent advocated fundamental reform, 37 percent were for moderate reform, and 47 percent wanted "no substantial change." Greatest hostility was directed toward foreign policy, with 48 percent strongly agreeing that U.S. foreign policy was "based on our own narrow economic and power interests," and toward racial discrimination, with 53 percent strongly agreeing that "basically we are a racist nation." However, only 8 percent agreed that the system was "too rotten for repair."

Hardly unexpectedly, the Cambodian incursion led to some acute reactions though not to increased alienation from the society as a whole. A Harris survey in late May 1970 showed that the confidence earlier expressed in President Nixon's Vietnam policy or in his general activities had almost

totally vanished among the students. In the same survey much larger proportions of students than earlier endorsed the need for fundamental changes (75 percent), believed that demonstrations were an effective form of protest (58 percent) and felt that social progress was more likely to result from radical pressures (44 percent); as many thought, however, that such progress would come through institutional reform (45 percent). Among the other findings was the student view (67 percent) that student protest would speed up needed changes, although close to four-fifths (79 percent) thought that radical pressures would have their greatest impact through institutional changes rather than through efforts to overthrow the system (10 percent).

IV

It is natural to overestimate support for highly visible forms of behavior. Students who participate do this; so do the mass media. The surveys and studies cited show that only a small percentage of college students are radical or alienated from the society, though the public may receive a very different impression. Numerous surveys of drug use on campus also show that the students consistently overestimate the percentage of students using drugs and that the mass media do the same. Thus the most recent national student survey, that of Gallup in November 1970, found that about two-fifths admit *ever* having used marijuana, while the proportion doing so often is only one out of seven. A similar difference between assumptions and reality seems to happen in terms of student appearance in hair and dress.

Since the results of the surveys vary so from widely held and disseminated opinion, some may question their accuracy. Yet the fact that at least 10 national survey organizations using different methods and querying different samples have corroborated each others' findings to the extent that they have should say something about the validity of their results. It may be that some extreme-left sentiment may be somewhat underrepresented. (The evidence would suggest the opposite.) It may also be that sometimes students will not respond frankly to certain questions. Yet the results of anonymous questionnaires do not differ significantly from those that are based on interviews.

The fact that the large majority of American college students do not sympathize with radical doctrines and tactics and that most of them are conventional when it comes to drug use and to dedication to academic achievement and a "straight" career, is obviously not a harbinger of a "peaceful" campus or of a stable polity. It is clear that the anti-Establishment youth culture has grown enormously during the 1960s. Increasing proportions, sometimes majorities, are discontented with the way the country is run. Continued U.S. participation in Indochina convinces these students that they can have no confidence in the nation's rulers and its élite. Many other factors point up for them the contradiction between the affluent society and social ills such as poverty and racialism. As America enters the seventies, most college students take a critical liberal-to-left posture.

This posture helps to explain why the small extreme Left can set the tone on so many campuses: most students support the overt goals of most demonstrations, though they may not approve of specific tactics. Furthermore, efforts to mobilize the moderates against the extremists usually fail because

authority is seen as defending social evils or outmoded forms of governance. Therefore, to stress the minority status of the radicals is not to say that the majority has been opposed to them. The student vanguard has been powerful since 1965 precisely because the majority of students have been politicized to the Left, particularly through opposition to the war and to racism.

During the fall semester of 1970, manifest campus radicalism and confrontation demonstrations fell off. Furthermore, the Urban Research Institute has reported that violent tactics have become much less likely in the protests that have occurred and that the focus of campus protest has switched from antiwar demonstrations to demands for minority rights. This has reflected the apparent decline in American involvement in Vietnam. Given the strength of campus antiwar feeling, the widening of the conflict into Laos may give rise to a new wave of demonstrations against the Indochina war; protests, as in the Cambodian case, will be led by the moderates.

These recent events suggest that once the war has clearly ended, the university may begin a new, relatively less activist phase in the political cycle. The history of campus protest in this country since 1800 has witnessed far more violence in per capita terms, as well as proportionately larger radical movements, than is generally known. There have been waves of countercultural behavior in other countries previously, as well as in the United States (particularly in the 1920s). Since much of the student protest of recent years has been devoted to opposing the Vietnam war, it may also be important to note that antiwar activity during wars has also been a recurrent American trait. Sol Tax of the University of Chicago sought to estimate the extent of such opposition to different wars, and concluded that Americans had opposed a number of other wars more extensively than they had Vietnam, at least up to the time the United States agreed publicly to negotiate the end of the war in March 1968. The War of 1812 witnessed a large-scale secession movement by antiwar New Englanders. Battalions of American deserters actually fought with the Mexican Army during the Mexican War. There were massive antidraft riots during the Civil War. The antiwar Socialists obtained over 20 percent of the vote in municipal elections shortly after we entered World War I, while hundreds of thousands were involved in violations of the draft laws in that conflict. Opinion polls registered early extensive adult and student opposition to the Korean War.

Periods of protest, like those of stability, wax and wane. But the prospect of a change in the cycle does not portend a quiet university. Intellectuals and students, for reasons which have been discussed amply elsewhere, are a recurrent source of criticism, of opposition. The period from 1940 to 1960, when Western intellectuals and students were relatively acquiescent, was the unusual one. American students, like those in other countries, will continue to provide the mass base for movements of social change, both political and cultural. But the historical record would suggest that those who feared or hoped that the wave of student activism of the 1960s was the beginning of an enduring revolutionary movement, one that would fundamentally change American politics and culture, are as much in error as those of the past who reacted similarly to comparable waves of change. The campus may produce an American revolution, but this momentarily ebbing wave is not it.