Social Constraints and Academic Freedom

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The First Harold Laski Forum Lecture

THIS essay was delivered, originally, as the opening talk at The Harold Laski Forum at the London School of Economics, October, 1958. The Forum is sponsored, jointly, by the ULR, The New Reasoner, and the LSE Labour Society: it is intended to encourage awareness (and discussion) of the political relevance of some of the controversies now stirring the British universities. Professor Laski’s vast erudition, great analytical powers, and ready human sympathies were fused in a career at once academic and political. The courage and explicitness with which he acknowledged his political commitments was and is a standing reproach to those who either shirk commitment, or — the more usual case — disguise theirs beneath the shabby and torn cloak of academic neutrality. I had neither the good fortune to study under Professor Laski, nor the advantage of serving as his colleague: I came too late to the L.S.E. But in my student days in the U.S.A., I formed an indelible impression of the influence of this man on an entire, international, generation. I am very proud to be associated with this tribute to his memory.

The social constraints restricting academic freedom are often, too often, dealt with under the easy rubrics of Stalinism and McCarthyism: easy, because the enemy is visible, the battle joined on an open front, the issues unequivocal. I do not propose to discuss these constraints, or constraints like them, at length: this despite the fact that recent events have eased the situation in some of the Communist countries, and that the American situation is by no means without movement — making both Stalinism and McCarthyism more ambiguous, and more difficult to diagnose, if somewhat easier to live with. I propose, instead, to deal chiefly with the contemporary situation in Great Britain—in particular as it affects the social sciences. Here the constraints on academic freedom are often obscure, the struggle uncertain, the issues frequently indiscernible — so much so, that some persist in the illusion that there are no constraints at all, except for those internally specific to that most peculiar of all social institutions, the university. It is certainly true that, externally, the British universities present a most untroubled face to the world: their teachers are free to say and write what they like, their students unregulated (apart from those moments when Vice-Chancellors and Principals dissolve, chattering, on some or other provocation — usually connected with an un-British manifestation, like sexuality). It is not difficult to find Marxists on university staffs, and there are even a number of Communists — to the mixed astonishment and horror of visiting Americans.

Withal, we enjoy a freedom mainly formal. Informal, but terribly effective, ideological pressures in fact limit our freedom. We are, formally, quite free to choose problems to investigate and equally free to formulate our conclusions. Informally, but practically, neither choice nor conclusion are free. Freedom is not a term for an abstract condition: it implies a concrete activity. We spend so much energy congratulating ourselves on the possession of freedom in the abstract, that we hardly ask if our works in fact are our own. The question unasked, or answered in a formula-like way, we are "free": to continue our submission to social constraints which subtly but pervasively dictate the terms of our discourse. Revolt is difficult, if not impossible; restiveness, however, is not: the point of this essay is to stimulate restiveness. Perhaps revolt will follow; in any case, something will have been gained.

The Stalinist case, by contrast, is much simpler: the principle of partijnost in scholarship has reduced most Communist work in the social sciences to rubbish. The great modern triumphs of Marxist scholarship, indeed, have been won in the bourgeois countries — and usually by scholars outside party discipline. Recent events, and those of 1956 in particular, have given rise to hopes of a Marxist revival in the Communist countries. But all social science defines itself, even if implicitly, by its relationship to the social conflicts in its immediate environment. A Marxist revival in the Communist countries, if authentic, would sooner rather than later have to consider the conflicts in its environment; until partijnost goes, the revival cannot come. Meanwhile, the Stalinist political machinery and the society it has shaped, have formed the professors in its image: there is little evidence that the Soviet Institute of Philosophy is filled with lean, hungry men who cannot sleep at night. The situation in China and in the satellite countries is different, if only because the intelligentsia there can measure reality against their relatively recent hopes. The student disturbances in Russia, however, warn us against writing off either the next Soviet generation — or all of its teachers. And, as most visitors to Communist countries will testify, it is a remarkable tribute to our Communist colleagues, not how little, but how much, of their heritage they have been able to retain.

The McCarthyite problem seems to resemble the Stalinist one: a situation of sheer, outer, constraint. In fact, it is rather different: a matter of the quality of the resistance to constraint. The ultimate sanctions applied to dissident academics in the United States were by no means com-
parable with those used in the Communist countries. A congressional or state legislative committee did occasionally have a recalcitrant witness tried; I can recollect no professor who actually went to jail. The real work of the purge, however, devolved upon the universities themselves: they were, alas, fully equal to the task. But the punishment for a refusal to join the swelling ranks of critical academics—self-critical academics—was simply dismissal, not death. (It is easy enough, of course, to use the adverb 'simply' in London in 1958. But many of those investigated were not young, most had families, and dismissal meant not only an end to their academic careers but considerable difficulty in finding other employment. I left the U.S.A. to avoid having to face a situation of this sort and not everyone could obtain a passport, or a post abroad.)

Stalinism and McCarthyism

The astonishing fact about the purge in the American universities was the relative lack of resistance by the staffs. Worse yet, when resistance did occur, it was not entirely principled. It was directed at the 'excesses' of McCarthyism, the designation as 'Communist' of all sorts of dissent, even the more consistent kinds of New Deal liberalism—but not against the ultimate validity of dismissal on political grounds. The purge was possible because the professoriat accepted the vulgar ideas of political loyalty promulgated by philistine politicians. This (and not mere cowardice, as some Britons mistakenly suppose) precluded any effective demonstrations of solidarity on behalf of those who resisted on principle. The American intelligentsia have become virtuous in apologetics, not as a defensive reaction to McCarthyism but as part of that larger movement towards ideological conformity in America of which McCarthyism was but one expression. McCarthyism as such has little relevance to our immediate situation; there are lessons for us in the spiritual disarmament of the American intelligentsia before the McCarthyite attack. The chief of these is that the intelligentsia which fails to keep its distance, not from politics, but with any fixed or parochial definition of the political community—is lost. (The French intelligentsia, it may be argued, feel themselves very French. True—but their definition of France and M. Bidault's do not coincide.) I have said that the situation differs from that of Stalinism; one similarity does suggest itself. The Communist intelligentsia, in Russia and elsewhere, for years accepted the Central Committee's definition of political community—for years before dissent meant death; they disarmed themselves in advance of Stalinism's advent.

Neither Stalinism nor McCarthyism threaten the British intelligentsia today. But it is no part of U.L.R.'s task to mix bromides: assertions of the intrinsically benign character of "the British political tradition" are available elsewhere, and in profusion. That tradition, in fact, contains quite enough violence, ugliness, and repression for any one country: traits not entirely missing from the British politics of 1958. The highways leading to Britain's future are many: the journey uncertain; our destination unknown. In this indeterminate situation, the intellectuals have a critical role to play. They will influence thousands of minds, affect hundreds of decisions. Their contribution to the resolution of any one set of social conflicts may be very small; it will almost certainly be intangible. But, in the last resort, the intellectuals will not alone reflect but shape the consciousness through which men view their society. The intellectuals are very prone to a special occupational disease: an infantile disorder described by the psychoanalysts as a belief in the omnipotence of thought. But if thought is not omnipotent, it does not follow that it is without any influence at all on human history. Upon this generation of university teachers, and the tens of thousands of students they will teach, devolves a special political responsibility: they are not simply spectators but participants in social conflict. And they are no less participants, should they happen to deny their involvement.

If the political role of the universities is to be understood by those inside them, they will have to chart territory hitherto unmapped: they must analyse the social constraints to which they are subject. This is a task both theoretic and practical—theoretic because it entails a critique of our customary assumptions—of the very terms in which we debate them; practical because it demands a fairly unsparring kind of self-observation. Analysis of this kind, moreover, carries its own inner dynamic; it implies (psychologically, not just logically) an alteration in our behaviour. It is, therefore, painful; unless a certain number of colleagues take violent exception to this piece, I should think it superficial.

We are formally free; this essay is an attempt to show that we are ideologically, if not imprisoned, paroled on rather strict terms. Our freedom to see, to think, and to reflect is in fact limited by our social experience; that experience supplies the unarticulated assumptions we bring to our work. The limitations on our freedom, then, are in the final analysis internal: we have made our own the categories intrinsic to the unreflective functioning of contemporary society. But society does not affect us diffusely and generally: our contacts with it are specific and particular. Consider, briefly, the multiple involvements of the social scientists in the daily business of their society.

The Administrative Technologist

The university social scientist has become, in large measure, an administrative technologist. He does not perform the routine tasks of government or the economy; neither does he stage that vast tragi-comic spectacle, mass communications, by which millions are given the illusion of participation in affairs. His students, past and future, man these positions. The university teacher is, rather a consultant—a role even more welcome to him because honoraria and fees are taxed on a scale less exacting than P.A.Y.E. The agencies employing him are many: cabinet ministers, government departments, royal commissions, the nationalised industries, private enterprises of all sorts and sizes, the political parties, governments, Commonwealth and even foreign, local government, international organisations, publishing houses, magazines and newspapers, television and wireless. It is clear that only a small fraction of these assignments require him to formulate a view of society entire. Rather, most demand mastery of an isolated fragment of the whole. "Mastery" is perhaps a misnomer; the consultant social scientist is expected to combine thorough knowledge of a specialised problem with an impeccable disinclination to question the uses to which his knowledge is put.

What, more precisely, do these consultant social scientists do? Economists travel to under-developed countries: sociologists and statisticians assist in market research; sociologists survey the malleability of the human materials to be housed on a new Estate; historians order the files and supply accounts of giant corporations, military units, country families; an army of experts, not all self-appointed, has intervened in industrial conflict. It
almost invariably "sound," that is to say, inoffensive. Having incorporated in his analytical categories the fixed scientist frequently escapes his control. But in many cases, training manipulate them to educating society; in most cases, understand are forthcoming. I have said that the scholar is not supposed to question the uses to which his knowledge is put. In some cases, even if he did it would make no difference. This is particularly true of limited and easily definable posed to question the uses to which his knowledge is put. In some cases, even if he did it would make no difference. This is particularly true of limited and easily definable technical operations: the laying out of a sample, for instance, or the prediction of the demand for some consumer good. In cases of this order, we deal with a classical form of alienation: the product of labour escapes the worker's control. But not all, nor even a majority, of such cases are so simple. (Alienation, as we shall see, can also describe our teaching efforts. We think that we are educating students to understand society; in most cases, we are training them to manipulate it.)

I have said that the work of the consultant social scientist frequently escapes his control. But in many cases, he is allowed a value judgment: his advice is prescriptive. Having incorporated in his analytical categories the fixed ideologies of the outside world, his value judgment is almost invariably "sound," that is to say, inoffensive. Economists asked to advise on increasing productivity in a newly-liberated Commonwealth country do not usually suggest the nationalisation of British-owned industry; specialists on labour relations called into industrial disputes do not propose the introduction of workers' councils; the psychologists doing "motivational research" do not find that the human personality might be done less injury in another cultural milieu. (These are hypothetical and extremely crude examples: we require thorough ideological analyses of current preconceptions and modes of work in a number of social sciences. There are some difficulties involved, should junior men attempt these: the senior ones are, for effective rather than good reasons, usually reluctant to do so.) The consultant social scientist does not simply envisage solutions to short-term problems in terms of the prevailing social arrangements. After some years at this sort of thing, he cannot envisage different arrangements — even theoretically. He becomes "practical," that is to say, an implicit apologist for the status quo, or for certain approved modes of inducing change. No doctrines are held or argued with such unmitigated ideological ferocity as those of the academic "realists," particularly when they denounce some other doctrine as "impractical," "Utopian," or "ideological." Years of work in one society, and in one segment of it at that, have this effect: the social scientist can envisage none other. His factual acceptance of the world usually produces an endorsement of it: beliefs that certain social institutions are the only possible ones are ineluctably bound to beliefs that they are the best possible ones.)

Three Objections

Three objections may be made. The first was phrased by Ernest Gellner (who in fact agrees with much of what I'm saying: indeed, he's said it himself)—what's corruption for the goose, is engagement for the gander. In any society, university teachers will always be involved in practical affairs and therefore in social conflicts. Should we commence, tomorrow, the construction of the New Jerusalem, the university staffs would provide not only a considerable number of sacrificial animals, but a formidable body of masons and a number of candidates for priestly office. Much of the social policy of the Welfare State (in housing, education, health and the social services generally) rests on the work of a devoted set of academics between the two wars. True, but they undertook the work not on commission but because of a definite political position — and their work, for many years, was severely academic: a reminder that certain conceptions of practicality are narrow. What we can legitimately demand is that the academics abandon the semi-automatic acceptance of whatever ideology is going, and criticise their own commitments. This in turn requires a revision of the usual notions of academic objectivity, acknowledgment of the political implications of much technical work in the social sciences, a reconsideration of the philosophical assumptions on which our current methodologies are based. Not the least of Professor Popper's achievements is to have fashioned a reasonably coherent theoretical justification for the reign of administrative technology in social science, a justification the more effective for its abstract character. (It has, significantly, been put to political uses, not dissimilar to those we have experienced here, in the United States — where the political servility of the social scientists is far greater than it is in Britain.)

The second objection is that the consultant (or captive) social scientists constitute only a fraction of the academics who do study social affairs. Precise data on this question...
would be a valuable contribution to a contemporary sociology of knowledge: it is my impression that a very considerable number of colleagues, certainly the majority, do engage in activities of this kind. (Indeed, in one institution I know something about, salaries are set with this in view: it is an unusually good base for lucrative extra-mural activities, and it expects its lecturers to accept less than their academic market worth.) This question falls, properly, in the discussion (below) of the style of life of the university teacher. For the present, we can see that the common objection disadvantages the left. (Those who receive the B.B.C. pay rather useful fees; U.L.R. pays none.) Moreover, those at the top of their fields are more likely to receive commissions than those still climbing up the academic ladder. The commissions are built into the system of rewards for distinction. And those who receive them, being distinguished, are likely to exercise an intellectual influence disproportionate to their numerical strength — on students and junior colleagues alike. Further, activities of this kind are frequently the only way to gain access to data: they cannot, often, be declined with professional impunity.

The third objection is that my term, administrative technology, is factually an inadequate characterisation of the social sciences — especially when we consider history and social philosophy (or those disciplines whose personnel seem pronouncedly left — like sociology). I'm prepared to concede that this objection is not entirely unjust — but I shall persist in using the term. I shall do so because it appears that administrative technology influences all the social sciences. Even the theoretic and speculative ones, after all, rest—however uncertainly —on a foundation of data, in particular data about contemporary society. And the data gatherers are frequently: technologists. History appears to be an exception, but it is not as much of one as it could be: historians do accept commissions from a host of contemporary sources, they share the style of life of the academician in general, and they are clearly influenced by the prevalent political and intellectual atmosphere. I have said that what looks like scholarship rather remote from an immediate administrative use (the social enquiry of the 30's, which did, however, provide arguments for the left) can eventually prove highly practical. The converse is also true: immediate contemporary interests may influence, in indirect ways, the study of objects ostensibly remote. Let me give an example, a crude but not an hypothetical one. A distinguished British political scientist occasionally broadcasts for the B.B.C.: some months ago he was invited to interview a prominent politician. The questions he submitted were censured twice, once by the B.B.C. and once by the politician's staff. In his own, historical work on British politics this scholar would never suppress the evidence. But it is not entirely surprising that in his historical work, he lays great weight on explanations (and justifications) of political decisions in terms of raison d'etat.

All the areas of social science, then, are affected by the activities of the administrative technologists — even if the effects are indirect, and sometimes barely perceptible. But I have yet to deal with concerns seemingly remote from these activities: with the realm of social philosophy, where the situation generally is such that rule supreme over a state depopulated of all the social facts that could counter-act them. Social scientists who work with empirical data are often impatient with their colleagues in what they think is the philosophical waste land. Their impatience is at times understandable, but it is never justifiable. Philosophy is indispensable to an empirical social science, and the social scientist loudest to boast of his philosophical virginity is usually a theoretical whore. Equally, the social philosopher who thinks himself above the tedious business of ascertaining how society works is usually below it, the gullible consumer of shopworn notions of social process. It is in the realm of social philosophy that the most essential and exquisite political conflicts are fought out. This much, the Communists know: in their press, from Tirana to Peking, Kolakowski and Nagy are jointly reviled. I cannot, here, deal satisfactorily with the philosophical conflicts that now swirl about us: Ernest Gellner, Iris Murdoch, and Charles Taylor promise to develop over the next years a powerful attempt to think again about philosophy and social science, about philosophy and politics itself. (In America, Morton White promises to do the same.) For the moment, I only wish to say that some of the most interesting tendencies in contemporary social philosophy are meaningless if interpreted apart from the framework of administrative technology.

Professor Oakeshott's Inaugural Lecture can be read as an attack on the technologists. In fact, he gives them a blank cheque. The view that tradition is both a necessary and sufficient guide to political action seems to exclude conscious, purposeful effort from politics. Its central import is simply to exclude attacks on tradition. Given the acceptance of received values, any number of administrative operations are possible. Professor Oakeshott has yet to deal with this problem: not alone do his views legitimise administrative technology, they demand intervention if tradition is to be upheld. Tradition is, after all, always somebody's tradition: and never undisputed. The notion of tradition in its unanalysed form is a bit of sociological shorthand; others have spelled it out. When Professor Oakeshott next glances at one of the new Tory posters on the Kingsway, he can discern behind Mr. Macmillan's moustache tradition being made.

Professor Popper's Defence

Professor Popper has provided a more comprehensive defence of the administrative technologists — indeed, a manifesto for them, no less effective for being unread by many who most profit from it. (Did not Henry Fairlie, in The Spectator, once complain that the Conservative party bosses hadn't even heard of Professor Oakeshott? He added, unnecessarily, that they were "managers" and not thinkers.) Professor Popper is enormously learned in science—physical science. He mistakenly supposes that scientific certitude is attainable in the social sciences, providing it follows his rules. The grey fog which normally suffuses Houghton Street, however, is unlikely to give way either to brilliant sunshine or stygian darkness. Professor Popper's attack on "historicism" (i.e. sociology) and his plea for "piecemeal social engineering," rest on a distinction of his own making: between social and historical events. (Limited) social laws may be pursued; (general) historical regularities may not. But social events are not isolatable from historical context for inspection and manipulation.

Professor Popper advances these views with a noble purpose: to save us from enslavement to some supra-historical eschatology, from submission to the fanatical demands of a collective messianic illusion. But intention and effect have become cruelly separated. Professor Popper's position has in fact legitimised our stalemate state. It allows social scientists to take the goals of "piecemeal social engineering" only from the currently available range of social possibilities; it makes of them accessories
in bureaucratic rule. Some have seen in Professor Popper's defence of the open society an ideological bulwark against Stalinism; but the designation as totalitarian of all proposals for large-scale social reconstruction defends only the west as it is. It is exceedingly doubtful that the west, as it is, is capable of dealing with Stalinism.

A critique of philosophical ideas which deals with their context and use, as well as their inner structure, is philosophically an unsatisfactory affair. We do not really know how to do this, as yet: Mannheim's brilliant attack on the problem, a generation ago, led into a cul de sac. No doubt, the way out lies in a synthesis of traditions: but pious intellectual hopes are not effective philosophical structures. The point of these remarks is that the dominant mode of thought in the social sciences is not entirely without an ideology: criticism must take the ideology at least as seriously as the interests it defends.

**Capitation to the Present**

All of these intellectual tendencies lead to one result: the capitulation to the present. The social scientist draws his conclusions about human capacity from immediate observation and experience; his views reek of the morality of contemporary flesh. Empiricism, we have been told, is an infallible guarant of freedom from ideological bondage. Upon examination, a certain kind of empiricism—the prevalent kind—is itself an ideology: it expels an entire range of questions from the social sciences. And these are precisely those questions which have always given social science its dignity: in whose name? for what purpose? towards what end? The administrative technologists have allowed an instrument of enlightenment and liberation to become a generally conservative agency in contemporary society. They have done so, by and large, unconsciously and in good faith: frequently in obedience to methodological conceptions which at one time were genuinely liberating—when social science had to make its way against the claims of theology and a conservative metaphysics. All the more reason, therefore, to explore the social constraints which have prevented us from using our freedom—however commonplace, trivial, and ordinary they may appear.

Some of the forces playing upon us are, then, very near at hand: part of daily routine itself. We can begin with the student body at the British universities. The social composition of the British student group is reasonably well known. A recent survey showed that the proportion of working-class students at the Universities was as follows: at Cambridge, nine per cent; at Oxford, thirteen per cent; at London, twenty-one per cent; elsewhere (in England and Wales) thirty-one per cent. This finding complements that of a study of maintained grammar schools, where sixty-six per cent of entrants, forty-seven per cent of leavers, and thirty-six per cent of those who won university places were of working-class origin. The general conclusion is clear: the middle classes have drawn most of the benefit from the 1944 Education Act, and it is they who send their sons and daughters to the universities.

I can speak directly only of my impressions of the London School of Economics. There, the majority of the British undergraduates appear to be lower middle-class in social origin. We seem to get them at a psychological Archimedean point in their lives: after the initial spiritual restiveness of adolescence, but before the adult expectation of a pension. Unlike the students at Oxbridge, they have little chance of entering the nation's elite. They are destined to serve as subalterns and sergeants in the upper reaches of the intermediate organs serving the Establishment: their preternatural intellectual and personal caution, their plodding earnestness, their careful calculation of their chances in examinations—all these mark them as ideal grist for the bureaucratic mills. They will become, not Under-Secretaries at the Ministry of Education, but teachers or head teachers, even local education officers; not directors or general managers of banks, but chiefs of sections at economic intelligence units; not commanders of great industrial enterprises but directors of market research; not colonial governors (if there are, indeed, any colonies left) but economic advisors to the governors.

For reasons which are quite unclear to me, the Afro-Asian students at the School do not leave our rather unfermented British bread: they exert surprisingly little influence on the British undergraduates, although the latter are clever enough to see that the future belongs to our overseas guests. Some of the Afro-Asians say that they, too, have to be cautious, others that they are naturally preoccupied with their own intellectual and political problems. In any case, it cannot be said that our students would prove very receptive to new, radical, ideas even if they should hear them. The grammar school headmistresses who so hesitantly entrust to us their girls (ignorant of the Putney Debates, and convinced that "laziness" puts people into the working class) may do so with more confidence: university education is not the great corrosive it is sometimes thought.

What of the lecturers themselves? Accurate sociological data on the university teachers in this country is lacking: a full-scale study is much to be desired. I can only state my impression that (Oxbridge apart, and perhaps even there) the majority of the recent recruits to university staffs are themselves from the fringes of the lower-middle class, possibly from its more elevated fringes. University teaching is a relatively accessible channel of social mobility: talent alone may not get one very far, but it suffices to win entry. Two sets of factors constantly impinge on the university teacher, and constitute those real conditions of existence which shape his consciousness: and his work. The first is the internal structure of the university, the second is the style of life to which he is limited, chiefly by his income.

**Constraints in the University**

The internal structure of the universities imposes on the apprentice a very high degree of specialisation. He must, early, stake out a claim to a rather limited piece of academic ground: and he had better stay there, alternatively tilling and digging, for a considerable time. This is by no means entirely undesirable, but it can discourage a certain adventuresomeness: a life of strict scholarship is not always easy to reconcile with the possession of intellectual curiosity. Academic boundaries do not necessarily reflect a rational division of intellectual labour, and departmental jurisdictional disputes frequently constitute the university's own equivalents for Agadir—or Sarajevo.

Having found his metier, the younger academician begins his career. The climb up the academic ladder is painfully slow; punitive salaries at the lower levels are a remarkably effective incentive to get on quickly. The situation in this country is infinitely better than it is in the U.S.A., where junior staff are shamelessly dangled in professional mid-air, whilst waiting for tenure. In this country tenure comes relatively quickly (some universities, to be sure, are said to be rather more exploitative about this than others) and frenetic publication, another American disorder, is
generally discouraged. But in the nature of the case, advancement is a complicated and difficult affair. A certain scholarly reliability is an asset: definitions of scholarly reliability are variable, and the decision is usually in the hands of senior men, who not unnaturally suppose that the canons of all scholarly merit are to be found, with no difficulty, between the covers of their own works. The inevitable processes of self-selection prevail; what is striking is not how little recognition is accorded the academic heretics and innovators, but how much they manage to get. Nonetheless, I do not think it unfair to suggest that the system qua system encourages the sober pedestrian rather than the brilliant runner. Consider, for instance, how to establish a reputation as an "authority" in a given field: a certain industriousness, the steady output of careful and reasonably non-controversial articles, a book summarising them—these are necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for a chair.

(There is also the rather special problem of the "administrator," the lecturer who early decides that he has no taste—or aptitude—for scholarship or thought, and assiduously cultivates his reputation as a good committee man. Senior professors have to serve on committees: young men, in one way or another, generally volunteer. They make themselves useful, if not always to their peers; but when they attain those posts to which their intellectual work might not have brought them, they are unlikely to exercise any but a stifling influence on their fields.)

**Academic Bureaucracy**

It is clear that what I have been describing is the normal process of bureaucratisation. Precisely: our universities are bureaucratised, and they show no sign of becoming less so. All of us are affected by this process, the rebels no less than the conformists. The solution may lie in the modification of the academic hierarchy. For the moment, we have to recognise that the university is not altogether a hospitable environment for original work in the social sciences: the inter-penetration of the university hierarchy, particularly at its upper levels, with other elite structures; the codes of decorum utilised by senior men with vested intellectual—and other—interests to defend; the compartmentalisation of thought induced by the prevalent scholarly traditions; the isolation of critical impulse by a host of defensive mechanisms; and, finally, the danger that recruitment to the system may attract psychological and intellectual types over-adapted to it, thus perpetuating its most constricting features. Schopenhauer once said that the German spirit was in the custody of the Privatdozent, the unpaid university lecturer hoping for a chair. It may be significant that the contemporary British spirit owes much to the extra-mural lectures (Hoggart, Thompson, Williams).

**Threats to Independence**

Meanwhile, a university post entails other constraints. I have said that a university career is a convenient channel for social mobility. It is less convenient than some: it introduces us to gin tastes on a beer income. The lecturer with a family and no considerable seniority is not to be envied: in London, he is almost certainly condemned to live in Subtopia. Should he wish to move to Knightsbridge, or even Hampstead, his salary will not suffice; it won't even suffice if he stays put. He, has to look for extra income: and this involves working for all the going concerns in our society. It may bring him valuable experience, but it will reduce the time he has for reflection; worse yet, it may reduce his inclination to reflect, critically, on the society about him.

But consider the case at the opposite end of the scale. A professor's salary is small enough, by expense account standards. But a judicious use of his position can bring the academic to within striking distance of our society's most prestigious and powerful circles. He'll have to pay an admission fee, of course, usually in kind. Both the spiritual squalor of Subtopia and the inauthentic elegance of the Establishment (and all the intermediate stations) have this in common: they impose on the intellectual standards not its own, which continually threaten the independence and detachment, the general vision, demanded by honest intellectual work. (And it may be added that a reaction against these standards often follows their dictates no less than the internalisation of them.) Given these pressures, it is not surprising that not all academics develop into intellectuals, willing and able to forge anew our image of society; some intellectuals, in fact, lapse into academies.

**A New Work Ethic**

It remains to utter a few words of warning to the university left. Too often, a leftish attitude has satisfied some colleagues as virtuous in itself. But an authentic socially critical position is not a spiritual machine to pre-fabricate answers to all questions. The left, in the past, has often been inexcusably slovenly in its intellectual habits: it has thought its views authenticated by the character and identity of the conservative opposition, and it has sometimes avoided the hard, grinding work of scholarship and the lengthy and critical exertions of mind needed to establish—if only tentatively—any truth at all. It has exhibited a dogmatic rigidity which has matched that of any assemblage of S.C.R. Blimps, and it has often combined this with an unforgiveable sectarian pride. If the new left in the universities is to have an influence proportionate to its present very great promise, it must develop a new work ethic, abandon its nostalgic romanticism, and find ways of making contact with the world outside which do not entail capitulation to it, whilst affirming its devotion to the very real academic heritage it shares with those of other political persuasions.

The way ahead is not clear; nor, whatever shape it takes, is it likely to be easy. Amongst the problems likely to trouble the university left is that of reconciling our own middle-class and intellectual style of life with the necessity of understanding and our potential allies—to whom this is incomprehensible. And we shall have to avoid projecting onto the world an image of the political process derived from the bitterly intense internecine warfare endemic to universities: we require a sense of proportion about our ideas (and careers) and their import. I have not, in this essay, touched a host of problems closely connected to it (for instance, the problem of sociology in the British universities, which is currently a focus of conflict at once academic and ideological: this I deal with in a forthcoming essay in *Encounter*). But I believe that I have said enough to show that academic freedom is lived every day, or not at all. In the last analysis, our freedom depends not upon the forces converging upon us, but upon the awareness, courage and devotion with which we resolve to analyse and, if necessary, to fight them.