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I Accuse This Liberal University of Terror and Violence

Fredy Perlman

March, 1969

On February 24th, 1969, a radical student was arrested at her home early in the morning and taken to the Kalamazoo Jail. She was charged with “assault and battery” for defending herself from the insistent harassment and insults of a student who opposed her POLITICS: he insulted her because she had dared to question a Political Science Professor and had tried to PROVOKE DISCUSSION among students in a university. The Political Science Professor did not answer the questions she raised; he responded with VIOLENCE: he had her summoned to a Dean and a Disciplinary Board to suspend her from school for “disrupting” his class, and he proudly announced that she would be arrested by the Police FOR VIOLENCE against his “good” student. For trying to question his course, the Political Science Professor is having her thrown out of school and tried for a crime; once he transforms her into an “outsider” and a “criminal,” she will no longer be able to question his

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“Black and Red” number 6

Scanned from original. Capitalization and punctuation as in original.

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course: he can then have the “criminal outsider” arrested merely for being in the university.

In 1968 two radical professors (B.R. Rafferty and I) were fired by the Economics Department and the School of General Studies of this Liberal University. The reasons were not written down; verbally we were accused of being “Unobjective, Dogmatic, Vulgar, Violent, Stalinist, Extremist...” If we had reacted to the stream of insults and defended ourselves, we would have been arrested by the City Police for “assault and battery.” (I have recently been informed that I am to be arrested on the charge of “conspiracy” for fighting back IN WRITINGS.) Within this Liberal University “devoted to stimulating probing minds and critical intellects,” radical politics is HERESY, heresy is VIOLENCE, and violence is repressed by the FORCES OF LAW AND ORDER.

These events did not take place in the Middle Ages, in Nazi Germany, or in Stalin’s Russia. They are taking place NOW at THIS UNIVERSITY, where the majority of professors and students are LIBERAL.

The repression of “heresy” is not being carried out by Reactionaries or “right wing extremists”; it is initiated and justified by people who consider themselves LIBERAL and “moderate.”

B.R. Rafferty saw through the LIBERAL who is in favor of free speech, who is in favor of All Points of View being Represented in the University, who is Willing to Talk to Radicals, who “understands” Marx, C. Wright Mills, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, and is “sympathetic “ to them. It’s precisely BECAUSE HE EXPOSED THE LIBERAL that Rafferty had to be destroyed.

The Liberal says he has more “sympathy” for the Extreme Left than for the Extreme Right. However, as soon as a radical is hired into HIS department, the Intellectual Liberal no longer has “sympathy.” The radical in HIS department is not a “scholar” but a “Vulgar

same time “contributes generously” to “Left-wing organizations” and “is against the war in Vietnam.” He is a supporter of all GOOD THINGS; he is a GOOD PERSON; he’s the BEST PERSON IN THE WORLD. He is able to accept physical and psychological TERROR and VIOLENCE WITH A GOOD CONSCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN MORALS.

Kalamazoo, February 1969

Marxist,” he’s not an “intellectual” but a “propagandist”; he’s not “objective” but “Dogmatic”; he’s not a “Theorist” but a “Nineteenth Century Marxist.”

Rafferty’s insight about these terms is that THEY ARE EXTREMIST TERMS COUCHED IN A “MODERATE” LANGUAGE: that “Vulgar Marxist” means: “Throw him out!” When the Liberal Intellectual mildly calls someone a Vulgar Marxist, or a Dogmatic Leftist Propagandist, he’s not simply stating his “moderate disagreement” with someone, the way he does when he says “He’s a convinced Keynesian” or “He’s a stubborn Aristotelian”; he’s making an extremist and fanatical statement which means: HE’S A VULGAR MARXIST AND DOESN’T BELONG IN THIS DEPARTMENT! HE’S NOT OBJECTIVE AND SHOULDN’T TEACH IN ANY UNIVERSITY: HE’S A DOGMATIC LEFTIST AND MUST BE STOPPED FROM EARNING AN INCOME; HE MUST BE KILLED!

“Vulgar” means DIRTY and COMMON; the “Vulgar Marxist” or “Vulgar Leftist Propagandist” is someone whose ideas are not based on “Pure Research” but on DIRTY REALITY; someone who does not write for the Sophisticated Audience of Scholarly Journals (for Pure Academics and for the top bureaucrats of Corporations and the State who pay for these journals); the “Vulgar Leftist” writes for the DIRTY PEOPLE IN THE STREET.

“Vulgar Marxist,” and “Unobjective” and “he doesn’t consider both sides,” mean: IT IS LEGITIMATE TO THROW HIM OUT! These statements are IDEOLOGICAL WEAPONS WHICH JUSTIFY THE EXCLUSION OF A RADICAL FROM A UNIVERSITY.

Reactionaries did not fire Rafferty or myself from the Economics Department of Western Michigan University; LIBERALS FIRED US (in Liberal jargon, they didn’t “fire” us; they merely didn’t “rehire” us). AND IT IS NOT REACTIONARIES WHO ARE HARASSING STUDENTS TODAY. Liberal Professors initiated the slogan campaign and rushed us out before we had the time or the psychological composure to reply; Liberal Professors justified our elimination,

a year before we were fired, with the “moderate” accusations of Un-objective, Dogmatic, Vulgar.

The Reactionary, who openly identifies with the project of Big Business, straightforwardly recognizes the radical as a threat to his project. He is overt and honest when he says “Those radicals want to destroy Civilization” (by which he means his corporate-capitalist society), “and THEREFORE they must be destroyed.” And he means DESTROYED—through violence: the police must get them, and they must be locked up or shot or both. The Reactionary knows that when He excludes a radical from the university, all his “Fellow Reactionaries” are pledged to do the same.

Unlike the Reactionary, the Liberal does not call for terror and violence overtly but covertly; he does not call for violence all at once but in stages. He does not say “Exclude him from the University” but “Don’t renew his contract.” Unlike the Reactionary the Liberal maintains a good conscience by telling himself he has no intention to exclude the radical from all universities: he merely doesn’t want the radical back in “his” department.

The Liberal does not admit, even to himself, that he is a member of a group; he does not like to be called a Liberal; he does not admit, even to himself, that Liberals run other departments and other universities, that Liberals run the dominant hierarchies of American society; he does not admit that HIS POWER COMES FROM THE FACT THAT OTHER LIBERALS WILL BACK HIM UP. Unlike the Reactionary, he does not admit that when he fires a radical he expects other Liberals to do the same. The Liberal’s “liberalism” is an ideology which informs him that he’s an “individual” who exists in a vacuum, and that his decision does not bind anyone else. He denies that all Liberals are bound to one Liberal’s decision. He lies to himself: if it ever happened that a group of Liber-

At every single step he applies systematic terror and violence, and at every single step he manages to maintain his clean conscience.

The Liberal ALREADY KNOWS that when his “Leftist Colleague” is an unemployed radical he will do something for which it will be legitimate to throw him in jail, but the Liberal doesn’t want to be aware that HIS PEACE AND QUIET ARE MAINTAINED THROUGH TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE. In other words, the Liberal’s weapons are the same as the reactionary’s; the only difference between them is that the Liberal doesn’t look, and has a good conscience. He’s “tolerant,” he “reads radical literature,” he’s the “only one who talks to radicals,” he’s MORAL in every single way; he goes out of his way to “help radicals”; he’ll do everything for radicals which will help him keep his good conscience WHILE HE CONTINUES TO RELY ON TERROR AND VIOLENCE.

Liberal professors and students whose situations can only be maintained through terror and violence, through systematic psychological and physical murder, advertise “Make Love Not War.” Liberal students who have ALREADY CHOSEN to help maintain the dominant project when their time comes, are busy “accumulating” large “stocks” of good conscience while they can, while their “new styles of life” do not yet conflict with their future “responsibilities.”

Liberals are not “moderate.” That’s their own self-image. They’re extremists, but unlike reactionaries, THEY’RE EXTREMISTS WITH GOOD CONSCIENCES. Their instruments are not “ideas”; their instruments are TERROR and VIOLENCE. But unlike lynchers, THE LIBERALS TURN THEIR EYES AWAY to maintain their innocence.

People are EXCLUDED; thousands of people are OUTSIDERS; yet the Liberals who forced them out are TOTALLY GUILTLESS, and have the illusion that they are the ones who are “sympathetic” to the Radical Students, the Emotionally What-Have-You Students, the Hippie Students. The Liberal who is the first to move WHENEVER SOMEONE CROSSES ONE OF HIS LINES at the

The Liberal's project is to exclude the radical from society, but he does not take responsibility for the project; he realizes his project in stages, but he is only responsible for the "innocent" first stage. OTHERS DO THE REST. The Liberal merely initiates the process, and is not responsible for what the others do.

The Reactionary hits the radical directly; the Liberal does not do his own hitting. The Liberal merely PROVOKES the radical until he responds to the provocation, and when he responds, THE COPS GET THE RADICAL. The Liberal maintains his good conscience: HE didn't act—the radical acted; HE didn't repress the radical—the cops did. THE LIBERAL IS ALWAYS INNOCENT; his only desire is peace and quiet.

The Reactionary throws out a radical and then has him arrested for Loitering or Conspiracy or outside Agitation if the radical returns to fight; the Reactionary "eggs on" and harasses until the radical is provoked to hit back, and then has him arrested for Assault and Battery; the Reactionary tries to exclude the radical from any sources of income in order to have him locked up as a thief. To the Reactionary, the radical is ALREADY A CRIMINAL WHEN HE EXPRESSES HIS THOUGHTS

The Liberal knows just as well as the Reactionary that "The cops'll get 'im"; HE COUNTS ON THE COPS TO PROTECT HIS PEACE AND QUIET; but, as Rafferty repeatedly observed, THE LIBERAL DOESN'T WANT TO SEE THE COPS WHO PROTECT HIM.

The Liberal can be compared to the Medieval Church. The Church excommunicated a heretic, but did not itself put the heretic to death. The Civil Authority, the Secular Authority, took charge of the heretic's body. The Church was innocent; the Civil Authorities and the Executioner were the ones responsible for physical extermination. The excommunicators of the Church maintained clean consciences.

Thus also the Liberal: All he does is to excommunicate the radical, to exclude him "spiritually"; the Civil Authorities do the rest.

als rehired the radical and fired the Liberal, the Liberal would shout "We all agree that..." and "Our basic principle is..." and "How can we tolerate such a blatant denial of our most sacred..."—in other words, "WE'RE ALL PLEDGED TO ACT TOGETHER"; "WE'RE MEMBERS OF THE SAME GROUP"; "WE'RE ALL ENGAGED IN THE SAME PROJECT"—and the project is the continued functioning of the corporate-military system. Consequently, if one Liberal spots a radical, he spots him for all Liberals; he spares them the trouble of spotting him. The Liberal's LIE is to tell himself that THE OTHERS are not bound to exclude the radical "just because" he excludes him. By his philosophy, the Others, like himself, are Pure Individuals Who May Hire Him Even If I Fire Him.

The Reactionary does not claim to be "neutral": he's overtly pro-Capitalist; he's an ardent supporter of every American corporate and military bureaucracy; he's openly fighting to maintain the power of the groups who are presently dominant, and he overtly wants to eliminate any real threats to that power.

The Liberal claims to be "neutral" and "objective"; he claims that he's NEITHER on the side of the "establishment" nor on the "other side"; he claims that he's not on any side: he's not in society but above it.

However, to the Liberal, only the action of the corporate-military bureaucracy is "legitimate"; the action of the radical is not. And just like the Reactionary, the Liberal thinks of the action of radicals AS A THREAT, which means that the Liberal sees himself ON THE DOMINANT SIDE, the side that's threatened. He does not recognize the provocations of the bureaucracy as provocations; only the actions of radicals are provocations. The Liberal accepts the rules of the dominant bureaucracy, and he defends those rules. He's not "objective." A challenge of the dominant rules is, for him, a "provocation."

The Liberal moves WITHIN THE DOMINANT BUREAUCRACY; his success comes from PLEASING THE PEOPLE WHO ARE ON TOP. The Liberal (whether professor or student) climbs WITHIN THE HIERARCHY and he wants to do so WITH A GOOD CONSCIENCE. The so-called “radical sympathies” of the Liberal are his means to maintain a good conscience while selling himself to those in power. The Liberal’s greatest fear, in fact, is to become “an outsider”; he wants to be an “insider” who is Good and Moral, Just and Objective.

The Liberal rejects Imperialism, Patriotism, Racism, and even Capitalism—IN WORDS, but never in actions; and he knows the line between words and actions. Words make it possible for him to be a GOOD PERSON; action would make him an OUTSIDER. That’s why the radical is a threat to the Liberal; HE FORCES THE LIBERAL TO CHOOSE. In the face of a radical, the Liberal is forced to choose between acting on his “principles” (and therefore becoming an “outsider”), or accepting the dominant bureaucracy. The mere presence of the radical exposes the “neutrality” of the Liberal: HE CHOOSES TO ACCEPT THE DOMINANT BUREAUCRACY.

The Liberal does not see himself as a dehumanized factor in a bureaucratic structure: his existence as a human being and his position in the hierarchy are the same to him. THAT’S WHY he cannot identify with the radical. For the radical, the provocations of the bureaucracy reach a LIMIT beyond which they’re no longer acceptable: they negate his existence as a human being and he fights to remain alive. But since the Liberal IS a slot in the hierarchy (since he IS an “associate professor,” a “director,” etc.), since he accepts himself as a slot and title in the bureaucracy, he cannot be provoked by the bureaucracy; his humanity cannot be negated by the bureaucracy BECAUSE HE NEGATES IT HIMSELF. For him there’s also a limit: this limit is reached when an “outsider” threatens the bureaucracy.

pens to radicals who fight back. He knows that, at some point, the radical will do the kind of thing which the Liberal calls VIOLENCE, and at that point will either be killed or jailed, or ostracized from society. For the Liberal, the repression of the radical means that violence has been averted, because for the Liberal there’s only one kind of violence; the threats, the intimidations, the harassments, the arrests, the trials, the jailings ARE NOT VIOLENCE for the Liberal. Only the radical’s struggle to maintain his humanity is VIOLENCE for the Liberal; the radical’s struggle to regain the humanity which the Liberal deprived him of is VIOLENCE. That’s why, when he cries VIOLENCE, he’s scared: “My job! My house! My books!”

Once the radical is thrown out, he’s no longer in the Liberal’s jurisdiction: he’s an “outside agitator,” and a “criminal.” The Outsider no longer “belongs” in the Liberal’s university. Members of the Columbia SDS Chapter, for example, are now “outside agitators”; they are “not students” and consequently “have no right to be on campus.” YET LAST YEAR THEY WERE STUDENTS OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY; they were thrown out by Liberals, and if they return to fight back, they’re arrested by cops.

Consequently, anyone who objects and who fights back is by definition an “outsider,” since his objections provide reasons to throw him out, and once he’s out, he has no “right” to fight back.

The Liberal is always INNOCENT; he has nothing to do with anything; he never acts:

“God forbid! I didn’t send for the Police! I didn’t intend any VIOLENCE! I just didn’t want an Unobjective Person in My Department. If he was jailed or shot by the Police, THAT’S NOT MY CONCERN; I’M COMPLETELY INNOCENT! I DIDN’T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THAT, and in any case, that merely shows what kind of person HE really was.”

to affirm his own life and his own project. And the Liberal projects his inability on the radical, AND COUNTS ON IT. For his own Peace and Quiet, he has to count on the physical repression OR the psychological breakdown of the radical.

The breakdown of the radical is, in fact, the usual consequence of repression. When this happens, the Liberal is INDIFFERENT, since he is innocent, and he's RELIEVED, since the radical no longer poses a threat

What does the student do once thrown out of the university? Become a waitress or a bank clerk? Move into a "hippie commune?" Or break down psychologically? That's not the Liberal's "business." A sophomore who is totally sickened by the university frequently seeks "advice" from a Liberal. And the Liberal blandly "advises" the student that some things can be done, BUT THE STUDENT CANNOT GO BEYOND A CERTAIN LINE. If he does, he will be thrown out of the university. If the student tries to fight beyond this line, the obstacles are so huge that the student may break down. And it is precisely the psychological breakdown of this student that the Liberal counts on. If he didn't, he'd never throw anyone out. If he didn't think these students would be psychologically destroyed and incapacitated even before the police got to them, he'd be deathly afraid to throw anyone out; he'd know all these people would be back in "hordes" to push the Liberals out. He counts on the physical or psychological death of these students. But he is never RESPONSIBLE for anything that happens to a student who once sought his advice. If a brilliant student, who could have learned a great deal even in the capitalist university, becomes a waitress for life, the Liberal is GUILTLESS: nothing he ever did led her to do that, and "not everyone can be a student in any case."

He knows that some radicals will, however awkwardly, try to fight back. And he also knows, from daily TV programs, what hap-

For the Liberal, the LIMIT is reached when a written or unwritten "rule" of the bureaucracy is broken, a LIMIT which is crossed by any radical as soon as he acts. This Limit is, in fact, completely arbitrary: the fact of "crossing the limit" is what enables the Liberal to justify repression: "You can argue, but you have to present both sides," "You can give out leaflets in the hall, but not in the classroom." The Limit, the Line, is not an action of the bureaucracy which goes beyond the limit of human decency; the Line is an action of a radical which challenges the peaceful and orderly functioning of the dominant system. And when the Liberal draws this line, wherever he draws it, HE JUSTIFIES THE ELIMINATION OF THE ONE WHO CROSSED THE LINE. This Limit is a justification of VIOLENCE.

When the Liberal says: "It's all right to give out leaflets in the halls but not in the classrooms"; when he finds a form, a rule, or a fictional rule that has been broken, he justifies repressing the lawbreaker. What his formula means is "Sick'im!" It's like the so-called Southern Moderate, who explains lynchings to himself but is against them in principle. In every individual instance there's some FORMAL reason to justify the lynching: "Well, in this particular case he did such and such and went too far..." He always has reasons to accept every CONCRETE lynching that takes place, while PHILOSOPHICALLY he remains opposed to lynching, which he says is "horrible and a crime." The Liberal Professor is against harassment and persecution of students; he has all kinds of Civil Libertarian principles about it. He's against suppressing anyone's freedom of speech. But the same Liberal is among the first to support the expulsion of a radical student; he was among the first to support the firing of Rafferty and myself (and many others). His PRINCIPLES are beautiful: they can all be framed. One can know who the Reactionary is from what he says; but what the Liberal says gives no clue to who he is.

The Liberal Professor spends his life manipulating students to fit the requirements of a corporate or state bureaucracy; his relations with people are manipulative relations. He programs students. The program he injects into them is "Science" (i.e. TRUTH). He injects this program into students by means of MANIPULATION. He assumes that manipulative relations are the only possible human relations: he stimulates and punishes students with tests and grades; he blackmails male students with the threat of induction into the military, and when these methods fail, he calls on the police.

The Liberal "tolerates" other "opinions." However, "opinions" are something less than TRUTH, and the "toleration of such opinions HAS A LIMIT. An individual professor may legitimately be "heterodox"; he may legitimately hold "heretical views"; BUT HE MUST NOT COMMUNICATE THESE VIEWS TO STUDENTS. Since, for the Liberal, communication can only take place by means of manipulation, the communication of "heresy" MUST take place by means of manipulation. However, when "tolerated opinions" are communicated to students, the students are not educated (since only TRUTH can edify); they are MISLED. Consequently, if students resist their own dehumanization, it is only because they were MISLED by "outside agitators" and "Vulgar Marxists." The Liberal does not give students credit for being able to draw their own conclusion about what he does to them. Furthermore, if the Liberal cannot see the INSTRUMENTS with which "heresies" are communicated, if he cannot see the tests, the grades, the blackmail and the intimidation, he does not conclude that the communication is not manipulative (something unknown to him); he concludes that THE INSTRUMENTS FOR SUCH MANIPULATION MUST BE DEMONIC. Consequently one who rejects the official doctrine, one who rejects the Church's TRUTH, is a Satanic MISLEADER of innocent souls, a Pied Piper who entices innocent spirits straight to Hell. One who uses DEMONIC instruments of manipulation is a WITCH. And a WITCH, in the 20th century as in earlier centuries, MUST BE DESTROYED.

As soon as the Liberal justifies the use of violence against a radical, he calls the radical VIOLENT. Another of Rafferty's insights is that the Liberal's accusations of "violence" are PURE PROJECTIONS OF HIS OWN VIOLENCE. It is precisely when he's in the act of excluding the radical by means of violence that the Liberal shouts "VIOLENCE!"

The radical is excluded quickly, in the dark, under the cover of bureaucratic pretexts, before he's able to react. The Liberal knows about the inertia that characterizes daily life; he knows that a counter-attack against systematic exclusion cannot be quickly organized. He counts on the radical's physical or psychological inability to launch a counter-attack.

However, the Liberal is IN FACT (if not by choice) a human being, and cannot keep himself from knowing that what he has done to another human being is humanly unacceptable and degrading. He knows that one way the radical can reaffirm his degraded humanity is by taking revenge. (As Frantz Fanon pointed out in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Colonizer fears, and prepares for, the violence of the Colonized BEFORE THE COLONIZED EVEN BEGINS TO ACT, precisely because he knows WHAT HE WOULD DO IF HE WERE IN THE PLACE OF THE COLONIZED.) That's why he yells VIOLENCE and fears it. The Liberal has dehumanized himself IN ORDER to dehumanize the other, but he nevertheless knows how he would react as a human being: whether the slave returns with a gun or not, THAT'S WHAT HE SHOULD DO. THAT'S WHY the Liberal yells VIOLENCE at someone who has never held a weapon in his hand. (The Liberals of the WMU Economics Department yelled VIOLENCE at people who had not yet taken a stick against anyone.) The accusation of violence is not an analysis of what the radical DOES; it is an analysis of what the radical SHOULD DO if he were able to react in a human way.

The Liberal knows that HE is unable to react as a complete human being; he knows that HE dehumanizes himself in order to advance; he knows that HE cannot struggle against the bureaucracy