

## WHAT NEXT AT BERKELEY?

THE University of California at Berkeley, one of the finest academic centres in the United States, was torn by a campus upheaval in the autumn of 1964 that was unprecedented in an era of campus conformity for the majority and Vietnam and civil rights protests by the vocal minority. Were they 'Reds' and 'Chinese communists'? Or were the participants in the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley intelligent students revolting against the impersonality of a university the size of Berkeley—27,000 students in 1965—and their own lack of motivation? Prompted in part by the unrest represented by the Free Speech Movement, the university's Emergency Executive Committee appointed in March 1965 a Select Committee on Education to examine in detail the problems of the university and present possible solutions. The committee, under the chairmanship of Prof. Charles Muscatine, has now submitted its report, and many of its recommendations should be implemented during the present academic year (*Education at Berkeley*, University of California Press and Cambridge University Press, March 1966).

The report does not present a broad, sweeping programme, nor does it attempt completely to revolutionize any large segment of the university; what it does try to do is establish an atmosphere of change and adaptation and at the same time to present a number of proposals aimed at specific problems. "Our ideal for the student is that he be provided with rich opportunities, generous guidance, and plenty of room for experiment, and that he be enabled to make for himself as many of the important decisions about his own education as possible".

The complaints that were levelled against Berkeley by the Free Speech Movement included claims that students were ignored and even deprived of their right to speak, that they were treated as IBM numbers rather than individuals, and that professors were more interested in research than teaching and had no contact with their students. The select committee admits that some of these charges are valid and has attempted to offer some solutions. To be sure, the committee does conclude, from a number of surveys among students, that most students consider they are getting a good education. In spite of this, the supporters of the Free Speech Movement were not simply a small minority but the hard core of intelligent and articulate students who wanted a cause with which they could identify.

But the problems at Berkeley stem not only from its size but from its composition. Berkeley students are as mobile as most Californians. Of the class entering as freshmen in 1961, only 50 per cent graduated by January 1966 or were still on the campus. Of the class that graduated in 1965 from the College of Letters and Science—the largest school in the university—38 per cent had completed their first two years elsewhere; only one-fifth of the graduate students come from Berkeley, so there are also more than 3,000 new students in the graduate schools each year.

An unstable, fragmented body of students, many of whom commute for between two and six hours each week, does not make for ease of contact in a large university, and many of the committee's proposals centre on this problem. It wishes to see the advising system, especially for freshmen, changed from an empty formality to a more personal though voluntary opportunity for students to seek out an adviser of their choice when they need help and not, as at present, merely to acquire the signature of a teacher who neither knows nor has time to care about what he is signing. The report says that the present system "is

based on the doubtful assumption that a spontaneous and genuine relationship will develop between a student and a faculty member within the short periods officially required for advising twice a year. There are probably few men who are capable of forming meaningful relationships with dozens of students on short notice". To help new students the committee would like to see a summer orientation and guidance programme so that incoming students can learn what choices are available and map out a tentative schedule well before they register.

The complaint of many students at large universities that their professors have little interest in them and are more concerned with their research than with teaching can and has been made at Berkeley. At a university where more than one-third of the students are graduates, it would be very easy for teachers to neglect their undergraduate students, but, in fact, this does not seem to be generally the case. From a study of the distribution of faculty time-tables, it appears that the average teacher spends 24 hours on courses and lectures, 10 on undergraduate consultation and advising, 7 on graduate research instruction, and only 10 on individual research.

Size is a problem for classes in the lower division courses in the first two years, where classes average seventy. It seems clear, however, that the problem of student-faculty contact has not arisen from a neglect of teaching in favour of research on the part of the faculty. Even so, the committee recommends an eventual increase of the teaching staff with the student enrolment held constant. In the meantime, it considers that the proportion of lecture courses should be decreased in favour of discussion sections, seminars and tutorials, and that students be given more opportunity for supervised but independent study.

The report would also like Berkeley to reverse the increasing importance of course grades. Both students and faculty have often expressed dissatisfaction with a point-grading system—a student survey showed that 35 per cent of honours students believed that their grades did not reflect their actual knowledge and understanding of a subject—but the committee did not feel prepared to offer a comprehensive alternative. It does, however, propose that students should be allowed to take one course apart from their major each term on a pass or fail basis, and that some courses should be offered in a sequence of two or three quarters with a grade given only at the end.

Possibly the most important and far-reaching recommendation outlined in the report is for the establishment of a Board of Educational Development. As the committee says, "we believe it is important to establish machinery, not to implement any single curricular change, but to give continuing consideration, encouragement and financial support to all worthy proposals for educational development". The committee visualizes a permanent board of seven, each member serving for three years, to determine policy, implement projects, carry out studies and attempt to establish priorities for educational development.

None of these proposals will bring about any radical changes in education at Berkeley, but they do reflect and bow to the general unrest that has hamstrung the campus for the past few years. They betoken a willingness to experiment and to consider new concepts. Whether any innovations will be able to cope with the problems of size and composition that face such a State university remains to be seen, but Berkeley's pragmatic and gradual approach looks like making a practical start.