

Living With Crisis at Berkeley

from our Special Correspondent, Berkeley, California, October 24

THE new academic year has begun with a sense of turmoil which is not concealed even by the fine autumn weather, exceptional even for these sunny parts. Under the influence of internal and external pressures, the university has become awkwardly fragmented into groups of people with disparate interests. Although the university will survive, there seems very little chance that it will be able to enjoy some kind of respite from the troubles which have plagued it recently.

The plain warning of trouble to come came last Friday at a meeting of the university regents at Santa Cruz. The governor of California, Mr Ronald Reagan, who is *ex-officio* one of the twenty-four members of the board of regents, proposed that the regents should in future assume direct responsibility for all kinds of matters at present delegated to the faculty of the university. Under Mr Reagan's proposal, the faculty as such would cease to be responsible for awarding degrees, approving new courses and appointing new members to the faculty. In the event, the board of regents rejected Mr Reagan's proposal by thirteen votes to eight, chiefly on the grounds that it was out of order. Mr Reagan seems to have made no secret of his wish to bring up again the matter of how the university should be run, but the fact that the election will have taken place by the next meeting of the board of regents may rob the issue of some of its undertones—the Republican governor's wish to seem to voters to be tough with dissidents, for example.

The conflict between the university administration and the politicians has not, however, drawn the university as a whole together into one large friendly conspiracy. On the contrary, the way in which the administration has dealt with the affair of Mr Eldridge Cleaver has also alienated it from the students and from some of the faculty. Mr Cleaver is a member of a group known as the "Black Panthers" who are chiefly concerned with advancing the Negro cause in the United States, not always by gentle methods. Partly from a wish to provide a curriculum more in keeping with the needs of students, the faculty accepted earlier this year a proposal of the Board of Educational Development at the Berkeley campus that Mr Cleaver should be invited to give a sociological course on Negro affairs. In retrospect, there is no reason to think that those responsible for the decision can have failed to realize that this move would inflame those political opinions already uneasy about the way in which the Berkeley campus has been the scene of troubles since the first "free speech" demonstrations in 1964. In the event, the university has insisted on the view that the Berkeley campus should be allowed to hear Mr Cleaver if it wishes, but has compromised with the interests represented most vociferously by the governor, in agreeing that students attending Mr Cleaver's course cannot count that towards the accumulation of credit necessary for academic progress or even survival. The terms of the compromise, put forward by the new president of the University of California, Mr Charles Hitch, on September 20, are that no outside lecturer shall be allowed to give more than one lecture a quarter (or term) in any course which can be reckoned for credit. This decision seems to have alienated Mr Hitch both

from the governor and his allies and from a substantial part of the faculty and the student body as well.

It is proper to acknowledge that much of the faculty would support Mr Hitch even if he went much further to meet the wishes of the governor that Mr Cleaver should not lecture and, in general, that the regents should take a firmer grip on the university. Although out and out support for Mr Reagan's attitude is at the most muffled and certainly imperceptible, there are several members of the faculty who regret the way in which the most recent troubles have arisen. Those who hold this point of view would be quite happy that the board of regents should lay down the law about the kinds of courses which should or should not qualify for credit. They do, however, resent quite deeply the notion that the state legislature should actively interfere in the way in which the university is run.

The greater part of the faculty, or the most vocal part of it, takes a harder line. These are the people to whom it seems that Mr Hitch has sold an important pass by agreeing that the board of regents should lay down when it is permissible for an outside lecturer to take part in a course given for credit. For one thing, there are practical objections. More serious, however, is the principle involved. How can the faculty surrender its responsibility for an essential part of the function of administering courses without losing an essential part of its independence? After all, even the president of a university does not usually consider himself to be competent to say what should be included in a course or how it should be taught. How then can the board of regents qualify under this head? And if it comes to that, how can the board of regents consider itself competent to decide which courses should be taught and which should be ignored? And the truth is, of course, that the compromise agreed by the regents on September 20 is chiefly a device for meeting some of the objections to Mr Cleaver's presence on the campus. Even though the regents have now agreed to discuss with the faculty ways in which the course in question could be allowed to rank for credit, Mr Hitch has undoubtedly sacrificed a good deal of his reputation, among some of the faculty, by his willingness to compromise.

There remain the students. The first thing to recognize is that the campus is not nearly as eccentric as it is sometimes said to be. Long male hair is no more common here than in many British universities. Not all protests are contagious.

To outsiders, perhaps the most surprising feature of recent events is that comparatively little seems to have been done to take the edge off student protests by providing more formal channels for communication between the student body and the rest of the university. The report of the Student-Faculty Commission which appeared earlier this year (see *Nature*, 217, 1005; 1968) is widely held to be a dead letter. Its proposals are usually held to be impracticable. Even if the university can successfully defend its freedom against erosion from outside, the problem will remain of how best to create a working relationship between teachers and taught.