

## *Observations on Race and Class at San Francisco State*

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The BSU launched its strike against the Administration of San Francisco State College on November 6, 1968. Exactly two months later, AFT local 1352 at that college began its strike, with full labor sanction. Now San Francisco State College is confronted with two strikes, both strong, both effective, that have moved into statewide and national prominence.

They are twin strikes and they are of historical significance, for they are the first time students and teachers have coordinated their strikes against an institution, with maximum effect. They further represent a strike of both labor and race against racism and labor oppression. Though technically open, the campus is in no condition to operate under anything resembling "normal" circumstances. Since the AFT struck, all union services have stopped at the college: the delivery of food, books and other supplies, the collection of garbage. Many staff personnel are also on strike honoring the picket lines. In January, the college was 20% operative.

The strikes have, each, an independent identity, a unique nature, with completely different methods and tactics and with quite different constituencies. But they are the same. For both students and teachers are striking against the same "boss," the Trustees who administer the State college system.

To use a simile, they are like those astronomical configurations, twin stars. Each has a different orbit, both revolve around the same gravitational point, each is affected by the gravitational field of the other, but seen from a distance, they seem to be one. Using an earthier example, one labor official observed, "Each one says I'm not

related to the other guy, one says negotiable, the other says non-negotiable, but they're Siamese twins, joined at the tailbone."

Now entering their fourth month, the strikes have impressive support and a remarkable spirit and resilience. Students have endured hundreds of arrests and beatings, the arrests now totalling over 700, including the largest mass arrest in San Francisco history, 483 on January 23. AFT strikers have continued in the face of a restraining order and a temporary injunction, appearing in a massive picket line of 247 at the campus the morning after the restraining order was issued, having voted by unanimous acclamation to defy the order.

The context of the San Francisco State College strike is a familiar one. An urban college with an enrollment of 18,000, San Francisco State is one of two public colleges in a city of 747,500 people. It is the only four-year college, the other public college being City College of San Francisco, a junior college that has reached maximum enrollment with no plans for expansion. Almost half the population of San Francisco is non-white, this term including black, Latin-American and Oriental groups. The last frontier of class mobility is college. The two public colleges at San Francisco are not sufficient to meet the demands of the citizens affected.

The situation is further strained by California's Master Plan for Higher Education, begun under the Donahoe Act of 1960. The Master Plan sets admission standards for all public colleges in California. At present, the top 12-1/2 percent of high school graduates are eligible for the University of California and its branches. The next 37-1/2 percent are eligible for the State college system; the bottom 50 percent must attend junior college. Flexibility of entrance is minimum.

The net result of the Master Plan has been the enforcement of de facto segregation in higher education in California. And, by not allowing local administration of state colleges a sufficient budget and curricular leeway, the Chancellor and the Trustees have perpetuated a traditional college structure, not flexible institutions which provide meaningful alternatives to that structure, as is relevant to their local communities.

The typical college structure has been consistently geared to middle-class and upper-middle-class white students in its entrance requirements, standards and curriculum. Non-white students and the children of blue-collar workers have minimum access to the State and UC systems. College, instead of being the frontier of class mobility, has become the barrier to it. Institutional race and class distinctions are enforced by college, not dissolved.

Such, in brief, was the context of San Francisco State College as of fall 1968. The Black Students Union, formed in 1964, has been the voice of black criticism at San Francisco State. As early as 1965,

it had demanded some form of Black Studies, some change of entrance requirements at San Francisco State, to permit black participation in the college. Similar criticism has been voiced by the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), a more recent group, which represents all non-white students on campus. Within a day or so after the BSU strike TWLF added five demands of its own and joined the strike.

The BSU strike did not occur in a vacuum on November 6. It emerged as a final act, from a familiar pattern of urgent black demand and token white response. The decision-making machinery of the college, its evaluation standards, its criteria for making changes—in short, its whole bureaucratic apparatus—was too slow, ponderous and deliberately resistant to do the necessary thing at the right time, which was to make sweeping institutional changes, institute a Black Studies program, and a black student recruitment program, and provide the black personnel needed for making the changes effective. For the first time, the white power structure of San Francisco State was having significant demands made upon it, a legitimate black demand for *real* black power, and it resisted. It resisted from motives of personal racism; it resisted because its ethnocentrism became racism under stress; it resisted because it did not have the fire and imagination necessary to meet a revolutionary situation with a revolutionary solution. It chose instead to offer compromise and token solution: that there would be Black Studies, but *experimental* Black Studies, under the aegis of the Experimental College.

Each proposed black course was to be approved by the department it affected and, depending upon the department, be taught either by a white instructor or a black instructor or, most frequently, be sponsored by a white instructor with a black graduate student doing the actual teaching. Under the latter system, the sponsor would get three units of pay, the black TA would get student assistant funds, with monthly salaries ranging from \$50 to \$200 per month. Further, the courses would be designated as Experimental and have only elective credit. It was a sharecropper concept of Black Studies. There was no Department of Black Studies, no Chairman of Black Studies, no departmental autonomy, and no control by black students or black faculty of curriculum, course content or personnel. All were subject to the judgment of the very departments which had been criticized for not meeting the needs of black students in the first place. The “solution” was intolerable.

In February, 1968, BSU recruited and the Administration hired Dr. Nathan Hare, the distinguished sociologist and consultant for Black Studies, to come to San Francisco State College and design and

chair a Black Studies Department. Dr. Hare's proposal called for an upper-division Black Studies major of 36 units, with 9 elective units. Built into the proposal were machineries for developing student involvement with the black community, through internships and service projects, to assure black community support for the Black Studies major once he was graduated from San Francisco State and returned to the community to earn his living in it.

The program met with various forms of institutional resistance, from individual racism to bureaucratic stalling, to the final plea of, "We don't have any money or power, we'll have to study it for a while and try to get it started in fall 1969 with three black teachers."

On November 6, 1968, BSU struck.

The BSU strike began at 12 noon; by 1:20 the campus was officially closed under orders from President Robert Smith. It was not a strike in any conventional sense; few picket lines were posted or sanctions requested. BSU simply closed the campus. BSU strategy and tactics were clear and simple: 1) it anticipated a long struggle; 2) it recognized that it had only its own resources to draw upon during the first phase of the strike; 3) it recognized that it could not fight the establishment with its own weapons, force and bureaucracy. What it had at its disposal was mobility, purpose, organization, initiative and high morale. It therefore chose to make the campus uncomfortable for anyone who did not honor its strike, with tactics which ranged from discussions and arguments, to solicited and unsolicited "teach-ins" of classes in session. Mass occupation of buildings, mass confrontations with police, and mass arrests were discouraged. Discomfort was the order of the day, the same kind of discomfort as that a flea inflicts upon a dog. Though no physical match for the dog, a flea or numbers of fleas can make a dog move and make ease of existence impossible for him.

The violence of students has been exaggerated. There were skirmishes of an individual nature: several "John Wayne" fistfights between white and black, one broken window, due to a typewriter having been thrown through it, and some personal invective. But there was no deliberate, wide-scale mass violence, despite claims of Administration and the general press.

What did occur was something quite different: white faculty and Administration confused the violence of their reactions with real violence. Feeling violent, white personnel claimed BSU was violent. "Violence" became the password in faculty discussions, and the index to press coverage. The unwillingness of white faculty to distinguish violence from demonstration and harassment was critical; tension, fear and hatred mounted because of that failure, the bulk of those negative emotions generated by whites toward blacks. Ancestral memories of murder, rape and theft haunted white faculty—Nat

Turner had risen again to claim his bloody vengeance and they, minions of the white establishment, were to be his victims.

The accumulated guilt and paranoia of white America surfaced, sent subliminal ripples of reaction throughout the white faculty; rationalization and defensiveness leapt into the breach to defend the individual's psyche, and sayings such as these became common: "Well, I don't know what they've got against me, I've done my best but the system just doesn't . . ." Or, "I agree with the basic ideas of BSU but the means they're using are wrong." Or, "A college should not be political." Or, "They're violating my academic freedom." Or, "They'd better watch out, they're going to polarize the white reactionaries and we'll lose what progress we've made." Or, "I'm willing to sit down and discuss the issues, but I don't like threats and violence."

These various quotes all expressed one thing: a deep resentment at having illusions of bourgeois power and privilege threatened or destroyed. Though no one avowed he was a racist, most did not like BSU's strike. Though everyone agreed with BSU's fight against racism, very few moved for immediate implementation of the ten BSU demands. Though no one hated Negroes, very few enjoyed or liked a group of angry black faces and words, and all faculty mutually agreed they were not racist. Hovering in the background as a ransom against racism was a check to CORE or having given a black student a good break or having felt grief for Martin Luther King, or having a personal friendship with a black. All served as shields for the naked confrontation of white racism within one's self and one's institutions.

The cornerstone of such mechanisms was the ideal of maintaining bourgeois privilege. Bourgeois privilege is the idea that the man of moderate means has full sanction under law, has full and unequivocal civil rights, has significance in the political fortune of his country, has the respect and esteem of his fellowman because he is living a productive and morally righteous life, and that his voice is heard, will be heard and shall be obeyed, when it is collective, by all the power structures that obtain. Such is the illusion of bourgeois privilege—that the existence of man is ordered and reasonable and can be regulated through non-aggressive and articulate discussion, with full respect accorded each discussant, and the appropriate action to follow. No, no, it was not racist, it had nothing to do with having a white skin; no, no, it did not discriminate against color or class; though I am proud of my professionalism, I *am* democratic. White faculty and administrators did not realize that BSU had taken such protestations at their word for 5 years and having assessed them, then moved to strike against the system that makes such illusions tenable for its employees at the same time that it violates

those illusions constantly. Faculty further did not realize that they had no real power, which is the basis of any kind of privilege. The only real power or privilege they had was a white skin. So that, like it or not, the line between privileged and oppressed was white skin.

The appearance of police was inevitable. President Smith had stated at his first address to San Francisco State faculty that he had no "ideological block against calling police on campus." The police were called on campus, the City of San Francisco's notorious Tactical Squad, a group of police organized recently as a result of mass anti-Vietnam and peace demonstrations and in anticipation of black uprisings in San Francisco. They are not police officers in the conventional sense. They are more like urban commandos, with different training and different duties from those of the typical police officer. They are trained for "crowd control" and equipped accordingly. They are organized around "squad" concepts, each squad with an officer and a photographer. They are equipped with blue helmets and blue plastic face masks, four-foot riot sticks, gas masks, tear gas guns and Mace, use of the last two authorized at the officer level.

The Tac Squad had been on campus for several days, in the gymnasiums and the basements of various campus buildings; from time to time they had marched through the campus as a show of strength and as a deterrent to action that might result from the daily rallies being held.

On November 13, they moved and the first of innumerable clashes between police and students began. A squad of ten or eleven officers marched down the campus and stood in formation 50 or 60 feet from the temporary building that housed BSU and where BSU had just completed a televised press conference. A large crowd of students gathered around the Squad once it had appeared. Jeering and insults began. The Tac Squad charged the crowd and the exact cause of the charge has not been determined.

According to their commanding officer, the police had appeared following a complaint by a television cameraman that he had been attacked and his camera broken by a student. Within the hour, a student claimed that he had been assaulted by a television cameraman. In any case the crowd was chased away, some were injured and some arrested *as a consequence of the dispersal action*, not for previous offenses.

The police phase of the campus strike had begun. The pattern of student and police encounters which shaped the rest of the fall semester had been started. The cries, "On strike, shut it down," and "Pigs off campus," gained a substance that was sustained throughout the semester. Active student support for the strike intensified and broadened and exceeded 5000 and many more students provided

passive support, attending rallies and refusing to actively cooperate with an Administration that relied on police and bureaucracy to meet an emergency and not on decisive, positive leadership. The die had been cast, for the BSU-TWLF strike.

The more liberal faculty members were alarmed at the events that had been occurring prior to the BSU strike of November 6: all basic faculty prerogatives regarding due process and personnel policy had been encroached, and the Trustees were removing more and more autonomy from the campus, by directly giving the President orders and limiting his maneuvering room. Two ex officio members of the Trustees are Governor Reagan and Max Rafferty, State Superintendent of Schools, both elected to their offices by promises to the conservative element to restore "law and order on California campuses," which meant, in context, to stop black militants, white radicals and liberal teachers, their protests and their programs.

The BSU strike of November 6 and the appearance of police on campus made it urgent that faculty come up with some action that would resolve student, faculty, Administration and Trustee differences. General faculty meetings were held, Department meetings were held, Academic Senate meetings were held, there were innumerable cocktail confabs of various cliques for the next week. Produced were countless hundreds of resolutions, recommendations, and petitions which had no binding power upon anybody and which, in general, interested nobody but the author, and that but briefly. Faculty response took the form of elaborate parliamentary maneuvering, carefully worded amendments to the motion, substitute motions, points of order, of information, of personal privilege, the whole faculty converted into one vast revolving, resolving ditto machine. As in a nightmare of prehistory, one had the image of watching an embattled dinosaur, ordained for extinction, move through its pitiful and scant tropisms, inadequate in the face of the threat, the two feeble brains in head and tail sluggish in operation and unable to coordinate, enmeshed in the tar pit of its own rigidity. Finally, faculty decisions were not binding on the President anyway; the President could overrule without faculty reprisal.

The final hope for the faculty came with the Convocation of November 20-21 and November 26, in which faculty, students and administrators agreed to panel discussion of the issues, with closed circuit telecast of the Convocation. President Smith's agreement to the Convocation was reluctant. He had express orders from the Trustees to keep classes open and maintain a routine schedule, even though the faculty had voted, 487-15, for the Convocation of November 26. Though he had won a vote of confidence from the faculty, he did not wish to rigidify his position by acting in such a way as to force a confrontation with the Trustees. The Convocation

was the nearest he would come to any discussion, mediation or negotiation of the issues with BSU, the Trustees' mandate having been "no negotiations, no discussions." The Convocation was a form of compromise by students, teachers and Administration on the unbearable tension of "open campus" versus "closed campus," and it could allow striking students and Administration room in which to maneuver.

But the Trustees confronted Smith and on November 26, he resigned. The Trustees appointed Dr. S. I. Hayakawa the same day, as acting President. Hayakawa cancelled the Convocation, dismissing it as a "bull session," and began his regime on December 2 with the Declaration of a state of emergency, which forbade teaching anywhere but in the assigned classroom, which forbade rallies or use of the Speaker's Platform, which forbade the use of any amplifying equipment on the campus, which limited picketing, and which provided for summary suspension of all violators of this dictum, students and teachers alike. Dr. Hayakawa had forced the final confrontation.

On January 6, 1969, AFT Local 1352 struck.

Dr. Hayakawa's regime is the most oppressive in San Francisco State College history. During the first 30 working days of his regime, he has been responsible for the arrests of more than 600 persons. From December 2 through January 25, approximately 600 police were deployed daily, when "classes" were in session. Anyone who violated his decrees was punished immediately. All illusions were stripped away: teachers and students were indeed powerless, for the democratic apparatus of the college had no binding power. Hayakawa was boss. Period.

The AFT's decision to strike was deliberate and considered. To many it seemed tardy, in view of the daily decimation of the campus. One faculty group of 50 or 60 had already begun picketing against the repressive measures of the Administration and its reliance on police power to solve its problems. In their protests against racism and repression they are reminiscent of Abolitionists and they express an important element of AFT's moral resolve—the John Brown motif. Called the Ad Hoc Committee and the Fac Squad, they were not demonstrating for wages or personnel policies, but against a clear violation of human rights. They further recognized an opportunity to cleanse the college of racism, once and for all.

However, AFT 1352 could not secure labor sanction on a human-rights issue, and its own labor grievances were long festering. In the model afforded by the college, it became clear that the sources of race and class oppression were the same. In this respect, the twin strikes at San Francisco State promised perhaps the first resolution of the labor-race stalemate that has existed

throughout the history of the United States and which focused during the Civil War and afterward.

AFT 1352 took a strike vote the first week in December, on the 4th. It attempted mediation of the issues with the Trustees during Christmas holidays, to no avail. The San Francisco Labor Council granted strike sanction, on December 9, to be effective the day the union began its strike. On January 6, 1969, AFT Local 1352 struck.

The general conditions of San Francisco and San Francisco State made such a strike possible. The BSU and TWLF had been sufficiently pressured and politicized by the College's system to strike. So had a liberal portion of the faculty in AFT Local 1352.

The question remains: how can the actions of a student club mobilize a faculty organization, which in turn mobilizes the liberal establishment of the community? Involved in such a sequential mobilization is the jumping of class and interest barriers. A student is not, functionally, a bourgeois, though he might have middle-class aspirations and values. Functionally a student is of the masses, of the lower-salaried, who have little economic or political leverage on the system. Further, they necessarily struggle through college to get middle-class leverage. In the classic sense of the term, they are the modern proletariat. Their interests then can come into conflict with teachers, who have achieved bourgeois standing. The proverbial conflict between the radical student and his reserved, conservative teacher might well reflect their difference of class investment. The waves of student uprisings across the United States—the world for that matter—might reflect this class reality, particularly in the case of the French and Chinese rebellions, where students made explicit identification with the working classes.

However, *teachers and students both work for the same employer*. That is the most important realized fact of the entire struggle at San Francisco State. Previous mores and regulations at colleges had all ignored this fact. Indeed, the protocol of colleges seems designed to conceal it totally, to smother it under a screen of traditions, manners and rules. The unwritten rule against "fraternization with students," the separation of dining facilities, the separation of social facilities, all served to conceal the fact that teachers and students have vital interests in common. Instead, a benevolent paternalism was encouraged as the official relationship between student and teacher, with the promise that if the student were a "good boy" he would inherit the bourgeois privilege the professor held, might indeed taste of it prematurely, through a supper, a round of drinks, or several sets of tennis together.

Such a paternalism had several effects. It "brainwashed" students into believing that their interests were best served by

each of them making individual contracts with their various instructors. Collective action by students for an improved college was co-opted by the whole perceptual set of the institution itself. It did not occur to students that their interests were best served through a collective approach until recently. That same realization has been even slower in coming to teachers, who have regarded themselves as professionals and sole bargaining agents for their own individual skills. The concept of collective action has been an alien one and collective bargaining, a totally foreign idea. The teacher assumed that his privileges and power as a bourgeois were unassailable, and that he therefore had no need for the instruments of the weaker and the more oppressed, which were boycott, strike, collective action and collective bargaining.

The confrontations at San Francisco State College relieved many teachers of that idea. Through their painful catechism, teachers learned that they had only illusions of bourgeois privilege and power, not the thing itself, and that the instruments of collective action were essential if that power were to be even obtained, not to mention being defended.

### *A Postscript*

On March 3, 1969, AFT Local 1352 returned to work at San Francisco State College, ending the longest teacher's strike in California history. The settlement package was satisfactory to the AFT as a labor force and to the San Francisco Labor Council which supported the AFT Local. Indeed, it was a victory, for the package laid a strategic base for further militant labor action. It was in writing; there were no reprisals against strikers; the Trustees had negotiated and the grievance procedure was improved.

*But the AFT settlement did not include a settlement of the BSU strike*, though such a settlement was part of AFT's strike demands and the most important issue to the Local, aside from its own survival. At present, the BSU strike is still not settled. The class dispute is settled, but not the race dispute.

Hope would have had a joint settlement of the strikes. The bitter facts of institutionalized racism and the manipulation of labor against race which prevail in this society did not allow for such a settlement. The labor establishment had made it very clear that it did not support the student strike officially or, in the great majority, unofficially. In its public relations, the AFT followed the same tack, stressing its

independence of the BSU strike, not only to broaden its base of support among whites hostile to the student strike, but to assuage its own ambivalences.

Though victorious in the labor sense, AFT became the victim of its own propaganda with respect to the BSU strike. The labor establishment demanded that it divorce itself from the BSU strike, to receive labor's support; AFT officially divorced itself from that strike, though the intimate cooperation of students and teachers created a daily picket line 1000 to 2000 strong, at that campus. The Trustees said, in effect, since you are a distinctly different strike, here is *your* settlement. And so, the settlement was effected.

There is a melancholy echo of the Civil War in this resolution. The moral and economic inflammation of that war was slavery, was racism. But the rationale that Lincoln had to adopt was the preservation of the Union. For the Northern white masses believed that their labor interests were best served through racism, not equality, for the enslavement of a black eliminated him from being a competitor on the open job market. The North would not rally behind a war to end racism, as Lincoln well knew, but it could be persuaded to fight slavery when that fight was presented as a means to the end of preserving the Union and the economic interests of the Northern masses. Though in substance focal to the Civil War and the key issue, racism was in the war's procedure regarded as incidental. Consequently, in the post-Civil War period, black freedom was not given primary attention, but regarded as something to be eventually taken care of as the victorious North went about its business of expansion, and left the black American to the devices of the defeated racists.

In its war against racism, the North became the victim of its own propaganda, that propaganda maintaining that the War was not to end racism. As a result, when the war ended, Northern leadership got no mandate to end racism, once and for all. The original assumption prevailed: that race interests were not class interests. And so, the United States continued about its business, its deepest questions unresolved.

Thus, 105 years later, the same pattern can recur, as in the crisis at San Francisco State College. There may be a growing hope, however, that blacks and whites, students and teachers, may realize that they are all subject to the same establishment and form an enduring alliance, with the recognition that if one man is not free, then no man is free. Or, as Frederick Douglass said, "The man who is right is a majority."