



Herbert Marcuse and Angela Davis

Speech at the University of California – Berkeley

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Herbert Marcuse

Since I am advertised as a Marxist Philosopher, I may just as well start with a material base. I have been asked to ask you to make a contribution to the protest of this event so that it can go ahead to exist. So please do.

This is not a victory celebration. On the contrary, I believe that this fight is just beginning to start. The fight against all those who want to make your university a training school for the perpetuation of a society, the security of which, and the prosperity of which, is based on the oppression and enslavement of other peoples, within the national frontiers and without. The fight against these powers must go on because it is a fight for you. They want to block your mind, they want to protect you against controversial ideas which, according to their judgment, endanger and destroy American society. In all modesty, I suggest there is a slight confusion here that is like Orwellian language. Because what these controversial ideas may indeed endanger or destroy is the rule of the power over the society but not the society itself. [Applause].

Now, a court has decided in favor of Angela and against the regents. I surmise that the regents have long since recognized the mistakes they made. There are other and more effective ways of repressing the university, namely, via the budget – a very favourite means – and via a pre censorship and control of appointments, promotions, and so on, before they are made, so they don't have to go to court afterwards. And I bet you that is precisely what is going to happen. The fight for Angela is, in the last analysis, a fight for you. It is a fight against the new McCarthyism, against the new wave of repression that spreads from this country over the entire world. And it is in this large context that the case of Angela has to be seen. It is a fight for you, for us, I would like to say, who can no longer tolerate, who get sick in the stomach to see the richest society in the world live on an economy of death, live on an economy of waste, planned obsolescence and pollution which cannot tolerate it [applause] – which cannot



tolerate it any longer. And this intolerance, this blessed intolerance, I hope, cuts across the so-called generation gap because, although I am a little older than you are, for me it is just as intolerable as it is for you. In this, too, we are in the same boat. [Applause]

2 The question which I want to raise, very briefly, today is: Can this society, without radical change, abolish the conditions on which its very security and on which its very prosperity rests? And I suggest a negative answer. A negative answer because – and as a Marxist I must confess it to you, I have great faith, bad faith, in the capitalist system. I know that this system is a very businesslike, a very rational system, and that it does not like waste and destruction unless this waste and destruction is considered necessary for the reproduction of the capitalist system. It seems to me that the best Marxists we have in this country today are those who rule our society. It is as if they wanted to demonstrate by their acts, and not only by their speeches, that Marx was right. [Laughter, applause] Right not only in his notion of the merger between economic and political power, but right also in this notion that capital must expand, must continually expand in order to be able to exist and to exist profitably. Such a society, precisely a capitalist society, does not spend one trillion dollars – one trillion dollars – since 1946 on what is called “national security” while, at the same time, it sees that this security is diminishing rather than increasing. This amount includes more than 25 billion dollars spent on arms and weapons that were never deployed. More than half of its scientists work directly or indirectly for the Pentagon; and the waste and obsolescence in other branches of the economy, I don’t have to illustrate. Now, they wouldn’t do such things unless they were considered necessary and, indeed, they consider it necessary that their future living space is being secured, that it is not supposed to fall into communist hands. Therefore, the enemy must continue to be built up everywhere – in China, in Vietnam, in Cuba, in Latin America – it must continue to be built up so that the people continue to have faith in this insanity. Now, I suggest that this faith is already being shaken, and that it is being shaken is to a great extent your work, the result of your efforts. You may not know it, you may still think you are nothing but a bunch of intellectuals separated from the masses. The government knows far better than you know, and they have a far more realistic evaluation of the power you already represent. The full weight of repression is falling upon the schools and universities and on the black militants in the ghettos with whom you have joined the fight. The full force of repression is not falling on organized labour, it



is falling on you – and they know why they have to do it. In other words, if there is anyone capable of breaking the insanity which is daily reproduced, it is you and it is only you – black, white, and brown – who can break this insanity.

Well, again the first truth comes from the president of the United States. He says it is all right to dissent as long as the dissent does not become too public. [Laughter] Preferably kept within the four walls of the house or in the ballot box. In other words, he doesn't like demonstrations on the street. And the truth is: continue your demonstrations because he knows, perhaps better than you know, that they do good, that they get larger, that they do develop the consciousness of those who have not yet seen, who have not yet heard, what is going on around them. Continue and try to enlarge the demonstrations and, as far as the university is concerned, continue to watch what is going on. Ask for the resignation of the regents who have violated the laws of land. [Applause]. Who are terribly insisting that you obey the law but who seem to have far less respect for the law, if the law happens to go against them. Or, if you cannot get the resignation of the regents – and you know just as well as I do that you cannot, because if there ever was any arbitrary power, it is the power of the regents – then see to it that at least they return the authority over appointments and promotions to the faculty and to the students, and don't keep them for themselves. [Applause]

Now, I admit all these suggestions are centered on the university and on the campus. There are larger tasks, especially the forming of alliances with the large oppressed groups in this country, black and brown; a process of long-range education. But don't minimize the university as your base. Again: the function of schools and universities in this system has changed. It is precisely the change in the productive process of advanced capitalism which makes this process rely – continually and increasingly – on highly qualified, intelligent personnel. On scientists, technicians, engineers, psychologists, and even sociologists without whom the whole thing apparently can no longer function the way it is supposed to function. It is in the universities, in the schools, that the system trains its new cattles, whom they need for its reproduction, and this is you. Far from being a bunch of intellectuals, you form one of the most important contingents, important for the reproduction of the system. You have to show that you can resist, that you can refuse to be made mere servants of the system. Again, it is up to you. You are fighting for yourselves, you are fighting for all those who no longer want the life they get in this society, who finally want to be able to lead



their own lives and to enjoy their own lives with good conscience and without a feeling of guilt. Thank you. [Applause]

May I now come to my most pleasant task here. I have not yet told you why Angela Davis was the ideal victim for this repression. There are many reasons. She is black, she is militant, she is a communist, she is highly intelligent and she is pretty. [Laughter] And this combination is more than the system can tolerate. [Applause] I would like to introduce to you now, not my student but my colleague on the faculty of the University of California, Angela Davis. [Applause].

Angela Davis

4 The Berkeley campus has perhaps the most unique tradition of political activity. You have continually assumed the political responsibility of responding to acts of repression and have been capable of involving the masses of the students on this campus in demonstrative political actions. If only for this reason, I feel very proud to be able to speak to you today. During the last few weeks there has been a lot of commotion over the idea of academic freedom and, indeed, a lot of resolutions have been passed condemning the regents for their overt violation of the principle of academic freedom. Now, at first I interpreted the regents' actions as obviously a violation of academic freedom, as obviously an attempt to subvert this whole notion. But I continue to maintain that there were other labels such as racism, such as political repression. However, not too long ago, Herbert Marcuse made a statement at a rally down in San Diego. He said that he could not continue to expound all of the noble concepts of freedom, justice, and equality in the classroom, while these liberties were being continually infringed upon and violated in reality. Now, this provoked me to reevaluate that whole notion of academic freedom.

Now, those of us who have been involved in this struggle for a long time, I think, have come to see academic freedom as some kind of an empty concept which professors use to guarantee their right to work undisturbed by the real world, undisturbed by the real problems of this society. [Applause] But what we have to begin to see is that academic freedom is an empty concept unless we connect it up with social and political freedom, the real basis of academic freedom in this country. Now, the freedom to teach, the freedom to learn, is totally impotent if it is not accompanied by the freedom to act in a way that is consonant with the principles one believes in. And the many instances of the



violations of academic freedom which have occurred recently are the result of and are reinforced by the continual violation of real, concrete freedom in the society. There's Marvin X, at Fresno State, who is being denied the right to teach because he sees the path of black liberation as being the construction of a black nation. There's Dangerfield, in Los Angeles, who is being denied the right to teach, in a black high school manual arts, because he sympathized with the demands of the students and of the community to make that education relevant to the community, relevant to the black liberation struggle. There's Saul Castro, who has attempted to do the same thing for the Chicano community. He has been denied the right to teach.

Now, there is something else we have to talk about. A lot of professors think that they have a monopoly over academic freedom. Now, I think that students ought to have the monopoly over academic freedom because it ought to be an inherent process, an inherent element in the process of learning itself. [Applause] Now, another instance of this violation of academic freedom has occurred at San Fernando Valley State, where twenty four black students tried to protest the existence of racism, which was obviously interfering in the process of their learning, and they are now facing two thousand felony charges for having tried to protest this racism. Now, we therefore cannot make the mistake of saying academic freedom is in itself an useless notion. We have to be the ones who inject into it its real content, its relationship to political and social freedom. And I think especially at this juncture of history we are in need of academic freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, precisely because we have to begin to unveil – to unveil the predominant oppressive ideas and acts in this country. This is what we have to use academic freedom for. I think this is happening in the universities and the colleges and the schools. People are becoming increasingly aware that the university has to become involved with concerns that are moving the community in more ways than one. That is, we can't allow it to be a mere reflection of the atrocities and injustices which are being perpetuated in the society today, such as the fact that the University of California has – I don't know how many – research grants for developing more efficient ways of murdering in Vietnam. Sociologists attempt to explain away the existence of social problems within the universities. Psychologists attempt to discover mechanisms of rendering individuals who have, because of the fact that this society is saturated with oppression, reacted in a way which is not normal in the society – not normal in their standards. The psychologists are developing mechanisms to render them



more normal, to render them comfortable with the conditions of oppression. Now, I heard not too long ago that this professor, down in one of the U. C. campuses, who is maintaining that black people are inherently, genetically inferior to white people. See, these are the kinds of things that we have to combat. This is not a reflection of academic freedom. These people are exploiting the notion of academic freedom. The real academic freedom, the real free intellectual atmosphere of the university ought to consist in the ability to link up with concrete struggles, to link up with the black liberation struggle, the chicano liberation struggle, the struggle in Vietnam, and to not only criticize what's going on in the society but to pose solutions, revolutionary solutions. We have to have the academic freedom to continually expose the imperialist policies of this government throughout the third world.

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If we are not able to link up with these struggles, then that's when academic freedom becomes a farce. And it would mean no more than the freedom to remain unaware, to be ignorant of pressing human problems. It would mean "freedom from", not "freedom to"; freedom from the recognition of the problems in this society. It would mean the ivory tower – or for us the ebony tower – intellectual. And these people who see academic freedom in these terms, as being the guarantee to sever themselves from society, they don't realize that they are either conscious or unconscious accomplices in the exploitation and oppression of men. Now, we've struggled for open admissions in the universities and the colleges. The universities say that if they open their sacred doors – their sacred doors which are the guardians of academic freedom – if they open those doors to the wretched of the Earth, then their standards are gonna fall. They say, as one of the chancellors, as one of the universities said, the university would then become an intellectual sandbox. They tell us that the oppressed have to become mature before they can enter the sacred door of the university, so therefore, we should go to the highschoools and we should tell the highschoools to prepare the oppressed for the sacred doors of academic freedom. We go to the highschoools in the ghettos and barrios and tell them what the people in the universities have told us to tell them, but they say that they can't do anything because by the time the students have gotten to the highschoools they've already been tainted in the elementary schools. So, they tell us to go to the elementary schools and solve the problem there. We go to the elementary schools and the elementary schools say that the problem is not here, the problem is in the social environment. You know, black people, brown people, oppressed exploited white people have



been inculcated, because of their circumstances, with an unwillingness to learn, so we have to change that environment. I agree with them, they are telling us what to do, they are telling us that we have to talk about revolution. [Applause]

The enemy very often shows us the path to liberation, I think. But they cannot accept the logical conclusion of their ideas. What they do instead is they – people like Janson emerge, who say that because of the jeans that, you know, black people possess, we could never in effect correct that inability to learn. And then a vicious circle is created, there is no way of breaking out of it. It's just like when the slaves used to say, you know, the slave owners would say that God ordained certain people to be slaves and certain people to be masters. Now, I think what we have to do is, while demanding things like open admissions, we have to take their advice too. We have to go to the streets, we have to talk about a complete and total change in the structures of this society because that's the only way that a concept like academic freedom is going to be made relevant. We have to go to the streets. [Applause].

Now, I think that those who control the educational system in this country and in this state are really afraid of the fact that education can lead to something like that, that education can begin to fulfill its true function, the solution of human problems. Therefore, they deny us academic freedom when we link up with those struggles. They deny us academic freedom – and this is the paradox – by means of force and violence, you know, both physical and mental. They deny us our right to academic freedom when we say that academic freedom means nothing unless it is a reflection of political and social freedom. And, of course, of course they wouldn't accept this conclusion because it's to the advantage of the people who possess the economic power in this country that education does not fulfill its true function. It's to their advantage that students were brought out on stagnant, rigidified ideas. It's to their advantage that the minds of the future become the forced reflection of their interests – interest of the people who have the economic and political power in this country.

We have to talk about liberating the mind as well as liberating this society. Now, why do Reagan and the regents continue to thwart the real process of education? Well, you know, for one thing, I think we all realize that they are sort of stupid and they really haven't been educated themselves, so they are not even able to perceive what that process should be. And I think anyone who is so unintelligent to have made the remark that Polly made, that there is no racism involved in firing me because they have already planned to replace me



with another black person, you know, that kind of person is totally incapable of determining the kinds of things that ought to be thought in the universities today. They do not deserve to determine what form education the thousands of young people in this state are getting. Now, yet and still, you know, the regents and their Fürer [laughter] are, you know, themselves the ones who have continued to usurp the power which we rightfully have. They determine what we ought to teach, what we ought to learn, who ought to teach, who ought to learn. And I reject that immoral and illegal usurpation of power [applause] which rightfully belongs to those who have the knowledge and experience to make such decisions. And although I don't wanna put down the faculty, I think that at this juncture in history the students are the ones who really have the knowledge and experience to determine what kind of education we need. [Applause].

8 Now, you know, the regents supposedly represent the people of California, this is what is stated in the constitution. And the mere fact that Reagan appoints them completely refutes that. And I think that you would probably be very interested to know that not one black person, not one chicano, not one indian and I think only three women have ever been appointed to the board of regents. And no students, of course, either. They are talking about themselves as being the lawful representatives of the people of California. Now, who do they represent? Who do the regents represent? There is, you know, Bank of America, it has a very large representation on the board of regents. A lot of banks in California, there are a lot of corporations, political parties – the prevailing political parties – have very, very good representation on the board of regents. And I maintain that they have established an illegal tyranny over the University of California, which is just, perhaps, one small element of that overall tyranny which has been established over the people of this entire country. It's become necessary to establish that tyranny because, I feel, that they are becoming increasingly afraid of the people, of the students. They are afraid of Herbert Marcuse, they are afraid of Eldridge Cleaver, they are afraid of Marvin X and, most of all, they are afraid of the power that the students are beginning to assert throughout the universities. They were afraid when they killed and brutalized human beings, because you decided that you had the right to establish a part for the people on land that rightfully belongs to the people. They are afraid of us because we – and they have every right to be afraid of us, because we are continuously demonstrating to them that they have every right to be afraid. And we have to do this over and over again. They have every right to be afraid.



Now, radicals are emerging on the campuses, throughout the whole university system and are being attacked. This is just the reflection of the emergence of a radical movement dedicated to destroying the capitalist society all over the society. And the attacks on these radicals on the universities, these are mere reflections of the killings which occur everyday in the ghettos and on the battlefields in Vietnam. And we have to make that connection, we have to link up these struggles. They launched an attack on me because I'm in the Che-Lumumba club, which is an all black collective in the communist party, devoted to struggling for black liberation. And I think they realized that if I were allowed to teach at UCLA that I would get involved in the struggle to combat them, to combat idiots who call themselves regents. [Applause]

Now, I think that we have to view the court decision that was made a few days ago as a victory from one point of view. It is a victory because it exposes to the people the increasingly fascist tendencies in this country, it exposes Reagan and the regents as unscrupulous demagogues. We all have to consider the reason for the decision. The decision came about only because of mass pressure, only because of the fact that all over the state there were demonstrations, there were indications that we would take over. And I think the judge who made the decision realized this when he said that he wanted to effect this decision within a few hours because otherwise he knew it was gonna be decided in the streets. And I think he was right. And what we have to do at this point is to use that decision, because that decision gives us a little more flexibility, a little more movement in order to escalate the struggle in this society. Now, I think we should take some advice from W. E. B. du Bois, who wrote, in 1910, something which is very relevant to the struggle today. He said: "some good friends of the cause we represent fear agitation. They say 'do not agitate, do not make a noise, work!'. They add, 'agitation is destructive'; or, at best, negative, when there is one that is positive, constructive work. Such honest critics mistake the function of agitation. A toothache is agitation. Is a toothache a good thing? No. Is it therefore useless? No, it is supremely useful. For it tells the body of decay and death. [Applause] Without it the body would suffer unknowingly. It would think all is well when low danger lurks." And we have to take du Bois's advice, I think, and in agitating we have to realize that in order to make education relevant, in order to take, in order to make those three "r's" – reading, writing, arithmetic – relevant, we'll have to talk about eliminating, getting rid of some three "r's". And that's Reagan, Rafferty and the regents. Thank you. [Applause].



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