

Drake is really at his best not when he is mouthing the voices of old women but when speaking in his own voice, wittily and urbanely. In four of the stories he has done this. "The Music Lover" has already been mentioned. "Will the Merchant Prince's Son Come Down the Sawdust Trail?" is a funny story about a tent evangelist who gets his fair comeuppance. "You Scoundrel of a Beast" evokes a tender and touching picture of the author's childhood relationship with his father. "The Tower and the Pear Tree," published originally in *The Georgia Review*, is a tale of going home to the South. It is beautiful and it is Robert Drake's own voice. I hope we hear it again soon.

Reviewed by ALMA STONE

The Paris Insurgents

Student Politics in France: A Study of the Union Nationale des Etudiants de France, by A. Belden Fields, *New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1970. viii + 198 pp. \$7.95.*

IN RECENT YEARS Americans have been disturbed by the amount of student unrest that has shaken their way of life. They have got accustomed to hearing that this unrest is an angry response to the domestic policy of racism and the foreign policy of imperialism for which the nation as a whole is responsible. But this kind of explanation almost automatically arouses a healthy skepticism because of the many apparently similar troubles occurring in nations that have few ethnic problems at home and no military involvements abroad. For their part, Europeans and Asians may have

doubts about the alleged particular grievances of their own student movements when the world student movement is scrutinized in its entirety. The high common denominator to be recognized almost everywhere is a furious moralism, an uncritical elitism, and an intolerant political evangelism. The outsider, seeing the usual standards of judgment rejected, necessarily asks the big question whether this common denominator is indicative of something profound or indicative merely of a pose that hides real motivations. The answer will not be quick in coming, but Americans remembering their convulsions of 1970 will look for it, and the French remembering their worse ones of 1968 will look for it as well. When the work is done, the investigators may compare notes.

A preliminary sketch of the French situation has been provided by the American political scientist, A. Belden Fields. The university students, as he sees them, try to remain loyal to the revolutionary leftist tradition. They want to appear fresh and uncorrupted, and yet even Fields might do well to admit that the sentiments involved—human equality and individualism—were stale and tired a century ago. Long since have they been soiled by association with political opportunism and totalitarian demagoguery. French students of today, however, remain determined. They want the world and the university to be readjusted to fit their ideals. The world has been bad for the expected reasons: French policy in Algeria, Gaullist capitalism with its maintenance of both misery and privilege, Gaullist policy on nuclear weaponry, American policy in Vietnam, Soviet policy in Hungary, Soviet policy on Jews, and white racism in South Africa and Angola. Closer to home, higher education is bad because it is limited to a small élite that reflects continued inequality in French society and because educational methods are based on authoritarian principles akin to those which the student has already lamented in his family life. In a practical sense higher education is bad because

academic facilities of all kinds are so distressingly inadequate.

What the students want from their government is full financial support so that they may develop their vocations in a spirit of complete independence. They even want to be supplied with free copies of classroom lectures. But this is not all. The students, especially those in the humanities, who want the government to give them an education today want it to give them careers tomorrow. The problem is serious. The very students who complain that too many qualified young people are denied higher education in France are discovering that the public sector in which they want to find jobs is already overcrowded. And so students are frustrated. They tend to become—as Fields should admit—maladjusted and quite willing to flail out against the whole existing order of things. In their uneasiness about the future they live more thoroughly in the immediate present than the kind of person who is confidently preparing himself for a position in law or business.

French student organizations may have uncertain prospects of success and development in the years that lie ahead, but it is probably true that these organizations are at least livelier than any comparable organizations in the USA. French organizations very obviously try to express and sometimes to intensify much of the emotion and the idealism of their constituencies. There is a wide variety of organizations to serve a wide variety of causes and whims. The largest is probably the *Union Nationale des Etudiants de France*, to which the French government has occasionally given official recognition and support. Its leading but smaller rival is the *Federation Nationale des Etudiants de France*, which tries to attract members who are academically rather than politically or ideologically inclined. The Catholic Church, too, maintains one or more student organizations and tries with dubious success to control them. So also the Communist Party which has an affiliated student group. However different all these student organizations may be in

some respects, they seem to share one great failing—strong-willed factionalism. Efforts to maintain a sense of direction within organizations can easily break down, all the more because French students frequently make a fetish of their ideal of personal independence. Within the Communist student organization, for example, there has been so much defiance and so much bickering on the part of so-called Italians, Thorezians, Maoists, Syndical Leftists, Frankist Trotskyists, and Lambertist Trotskyists that the Central Committee has almost been brought to despair.

Running all the way through Fields' book are tables and charts which deal with student activity and which show that the working tools, apparatus, and jargon of contemporary political science have been widely used to make the investigation appear sound. But these things are superficial. The important factor is Fields' own disposition which suffuses the whole picture and with which it would be futile to argue. Basically he likes the restless students wherever they are to be found. He likes their turbulent spirit. On the subject of the situation in his own country he has the following trite and emotional thoughts to offer:

There is little doubt that so long as the United States persists in its misadventure in Vietnam the ranks of student activists will continue to swell and instances of confrontation will become progressively more serious. But even if the war were to end relatively soon, the continued toleration of racism and poverty in our society, the perpetuation of the cold war and international insecurity, and the impotence and frustration of the individual within the systems which entangle him would still continue to disturb the university communities.

For the French students and their organizations, Fields has an equal sympathy. In fact he is by no means unhappy to report that their wild mêlée in Paris in 1968 led to the removal of objectionable policies and of

ficials and finally to the end of the Gaullist republic itself, but he never questions whether this kind of behavior is really compatible with the love of democracy, individualism, and egalitarianism which he attributes to the student movements. In fact, the *mêlée* of 1968 was as frenetic a display of political arrogance as France has seen in this century. Moreover, Fields own account leads to the impression that despite ideological pretentiousness student organizations are as self-seeking on behalf of their members as any business or labor organizations. But they are by no means equally adept in their tactics. Thus in one case the *Union Nationale*, eager to protest against conditions at the Sorbonne, did not hesitate to stage demonstrations during an official visit of the president of Italy. In the aftermath of this embarrassment public opinion and official opinion were more hostile than ever to the student movement. The *Union Nationale* gained little in the process for its cause and simply managed to lose its government subsidy.

As for its much vaunted idealism, the *Union Nationale* has had a way of getting deeply "involved" in big public issues, the real burden of which has had to be borne

by almost anyone but the students themselves. And here, too, student agitation has hardly been the key to policy formation. Algeria is the classic case in point. The financial, emotional, and other costs of the French withdrawal in 1962 had to be met not by university students in Paris but by the *colons* of Algeria, many of whom felt they had to flee for their lives. Good or bad as it may have been, this establishment of Algerian independence was certainly not a victory for the pro-Algerian student activists but was instead the product of the well-calculated policy of the very President de Gaulle whom the students were eager to depose. Not even Fields can say otherwise. He does not claim that here and elsewhere the student movement has been a dominant element in national politics. Very honestly he admits that in recent years membership in the *Union Nationale* has gone down seriously and that only a small minority within it plays an active role, but he seems reluctant to conclude that maybe this situation has arisen largely from the ineffectiveness and even inanity of the organization's policies.

Reviewed by BRENTON H. SMITH