

Károly Kiss:

Is the great American cultural revolution suffocating?

Perhaps the reports about American universities have escaped the attention of most readers in recent years, since what happened there verges on improbability, and due to their incredibility, they seem unworthy of even reading. It is true: a cultural revolution similar to that of Mao Zedong's China in the 1960s took place at the most famous universities in America which are the most famous in the world as well. The phraseology of woke, cancel culture and LGBTQ became mandatory, and famous professors were dragged and persecuted for such innocent statements as e.g. that giving birth to children is a woman's job, or that homosexuality is unnatural. Between 2014 and 2023, more than a thousand university lecturers were prosecuted for their "incorrect" statements, and a fifth of them were stripped of their jobs.

This extreme left-liberal political activism transformed the organizational framework of the universities. We mention a frightening but common example that speaks for itself. At the University of California, San Diego, the full-time vice chancellor's office established to oversee "equity, diversity and inclusion" included the following persons, offices, and duties: the chancellor's office of diversity, the associate chancellor for faculty equity, the associate vice chancellor for diversity, faculty equity advisors, graduate diversity coordinators, staff diversity liaison, undergraduate diversity liaison, graduate student diversity liaison, chief diversity officer, director of diversity initiatives development, office of campus diversity and equal opportunity, with gender identity and gender (sexual) orientation issues committee, status of women committee, campus council on climate, culture and inclusion, diversity council, director of the intercultural center, director of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender resource center, director of the women's center.¹

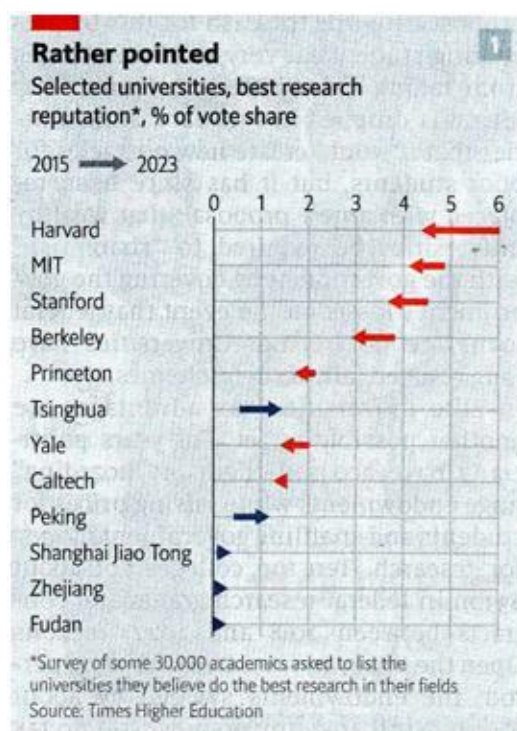
This institutional system literally censored all the statements of the faculty. It is common to be forced writing humiliating "diversity statements". All this reminds me Chinese university students from the 1960s waving Mao Zedong brochures in their hands and criticizing their teachers and forcing them to self-criticism.

Those party and youth organizations that operated in Eastern Europe during the most brutal communist times did not have even close to such an extensive organizational structure in the universities to enforce their policies. Communist indoctrination of those times could not even approach this thorough, widespread brainwashing. (True, it extended to the entire society and the economy as well). And this country wants to shape the world in its image and likeness! And Western Europe is blindly following its steps!

This university activism, which puts diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on its banner, has now come to the forefront of American domestic politics because it had not a word to say

¹ Gazdag István, Magyar Demokrata 2023. ápr. 26.

about the 1,200 Jewish victims murdered by Hamas terrorists, but responds to Israeli retaliation with demonstrations and strong anti-Semitic undertones. It got so bad that a congressional committee was formed to investigate anti-Semitism at Harvard. (How much the world has turned! In the early 1990s, when I was a visiting scholar at Harvard, my colleagues there – mostly of Jewish origin – complained that Asian students were gradually dominating the university instead of their talented children...) And Columbia has just been hit with a lawsuit alledging “endemic” hostility towards Jews.



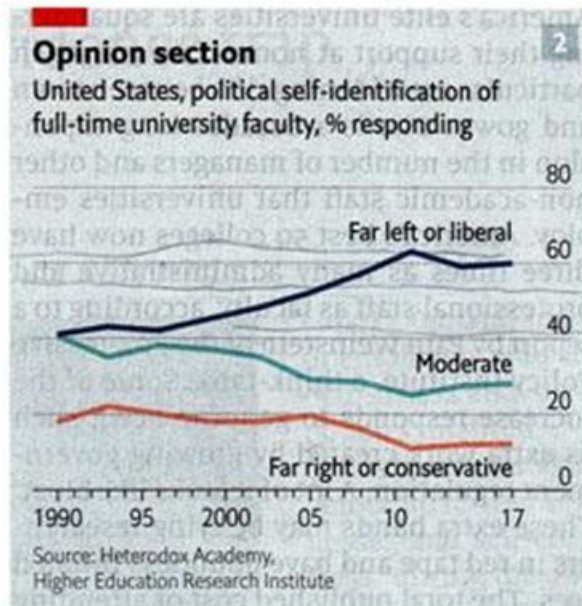
America has just started to worry: what will happen to its universities, the supply of intellectuals and specialists. According to extensive international surveys (which primarily take into account research conducted at universities), the international reputation of all famous American universities (Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Berkley, Princeton, Yale, Caltech) has declined, while Chinese universities have appeared among the best. Their position is weakening especially in mathematics, computer science, engineering education and physics, and Chinese universities are catching up. The number of foreign students studying at American universities has decreased significantly. In recent decades, American university students have spent a third less time studying, yet their average grades have improved significantly.

So far, only the US Supreme Court has tried to put a stop to the madness: last year, it forbade racial origin to be taken into account during admission. Now there is a debate about whether performance and academic results should once again be the authoritative aspect, and strict entrance exam tests must be reintroduced (!). (But for the sake of completeness, we should also mention that they also want to abolish the practice of automatically admitting the children of parents who graduated from a given university.)

The return to normality is also necessary because the Republican representatives in the Congress are threatening that if no changes are made, they will end the tax relief for the foundations operated by the universities. The most famous private universities have huge endowment assets and derive enormous income from them. This was tax-free until 2017, when a 1.4 percent tax was imposed on it during Trump's presidency. The incomes of the most famous American universities - in addition to the hefty tuition fees - come from private donations and from the income of the foundations created from them, some do not even accept state support in order not to be influenced by state politics. Thus, this measure can be a significant coercive tool in the hands of the central government or Congress.

The creation of a university "infrastructure" of social justice activism (ie. the plethora of positions and departments mentioned above) has led to the fact that there are now three times as many administrative staff as faculty. And this increases the tuition fee, which e.g. at Harvard, in real terms, has risen by 27 percent to \$80,000 per year in the basic (bachelor) education.

Conservative-minded teachers are leaving the academic-university career - there are only one or two of them at Harvard - while the proportion of those who declare themselves to be liberal is 75 percent. This inevitably reduces the quality of education. (And all this is done in the name of celebrating diversity!)



The first signs of sobriety have already appeared. At Yale, the faculty stated that the university must return to its original mission of teaching and research over political engagement and activism. Among state universities, the University of Florida is the first swallow. It applies the law enacted by Republican Governor DeSantis: eliminates all organizational and personal positions created in the spirit of "social justice activism."

(I have used the articles of The Economist March 9th 2024, discussing this topic.)

Köln, 15th March 2024.