

21. FOUR MOMENTOUS YEARS, BERKELEY, 1968-72

We lived in Chicago and I taught at the University of Chicago. It was Phil Hauser whom I knew well and respected greatly, who organized my coming there, and I had some doubts but in the end I resigned from the University of Toronto and came. I thought and still think that at the time I was there Chicago was the greatest assembly of scholars in the country. Why did I ever leave, despite my gratitude to Phil for bringing me to so distinguished a place? It looks as though I was just restless. Having spent the first 23 years of my working life in a bureaucracy in which I was steadily promoted, nearly reaching the top, but in which I always fitted badly, and learned very little, I wanted adventure from then on.

And I got it. Little did I dream that my four years at Berkeley would give me a front-row seat in a theater in which history would be acted out. Those years would change for all future time the nature of academic life in the US. They would divide the young from the old and not since have the generations been quite in the pre-1968 relation, a relation in which the young took for granted the wisdom of their elders. What was going on in Berkeley would reverberate around the world. The example set by the Berkeley students was followed up by protests against globalization in Seattle, protests against a war in Iraq today, all arising from the fact that Vietnam, called to attention by the Berkeley students showed how far from infallible the older generation was. Mention May 1968 anywhere in the United States or Europe, and people will know you are referring to the new relation between the generations with which we are now living.

In any case I was persuaded by Kingsley Davis and his wife Judith Blake Davis to go west. They had founded a Department of Demography, the only one in the United States. It had branched off from the Department of Sociology, and for the first time demographers were on their own--they would be able to decide who was a demographer. The Berkeley Department of Sociology was no disgrace; indeed at one point it was rated first in the country. But just as nations want to be independent, so do academic disciplines.

When we got to the West Coast, we found the climate all that was promised, the University of California at Berkeley was on a fine campus, the nearby city of San Francisco as colorful as anyone could want. After a short stay in rented premises near the University, we bought a house on the Alameda, and there we settled with our dog Bonnie. It was a good spot, a few blocks below the home of Jerzy Neyman, by then arguably the world's most eminent statistician, whom we visited often. He never spoke of himself but under questioning admitted that he was a member of the Polish aristocracy, the minor aristocracy, he insisted. .

Aside from the Davises I was the senior member of the new Department. It included Sam Preston, then just married to Winnie, and a year or two later it brought in Etienne van de Walle, a

senior scholar of Flemish origin who came to us from Princeton on a one-year invitation. Altogether a small but promising group.

Two years after our arrival the campus exploded. The local police could not keep order, and the National Guard had to be called. I remember one morning when I arrived in the usual way and found the campus closed. It was surrounded by the National Guard, grim, silent men in uniform with fixed bayonets. When I tried a witticism no one cracked a smile and I went back home.

A few days later the campus opened up again. I had been assigned a classroom half under ground level. Tear gas was being used to disperse student protest meetings, and this particular day the National Guard released it from helicopters. Clouds of yellow gas drifted across the campus. Those in buildings well above ground were safe, but we were below ground level. We rushed to close the windows. The authorities had ordered lecturers to keep talking whatever happened, and I managed to obey with a minimum of coughing.

Finally peace was restored; the disturbances came to an end. What had all this fuss been about? Though there were a number of lesser complaints it was principally about the Vietnam War. The students saw that war as unjust--we had no business in Vietnam--and that it was bound to fail. After all the French, with a long history of relations in Southeast Asia, had tried, and in the end had been forced to retreat before stubborn and well organized resistance.. For us to think we American newcomers could do it was sheer arrogance. But it was not the military side, it was the ethical side that aroused young people across the United States.

Why did we fight so long? Because no political party wanted to admit the inevitable defeat. For the same reason that the French stayed in Algeria. It took a Frenchman of exceptional courage, historical understanding, and leadership, Charles de Gaulle, to end that war when there was no chance of winning it. We had no de Gaulle, and the war dragged on until an American student uprising forced it to an end. By then 50,000 American soldiers had died, and perhaps ten times as many Vietnamese. We seemed to have forgotten all the rules of civilized warfare, treating the Vietnamese as subhuman in Mylai and other places. A considerable part of the adult population wanted the war to be pursued to a victorious conclusion. At the lunatic fringe idea of dropping a nuclear bomb was circulated.

Our young had only the newspapers to go on, but they read them more intelligently than did their elders. The students had nothing but contempt for elders who could support such goings on as the press reported. This sense that their elders did not know anything and had no morals was an outcome that far outlasted the war. "You can't trust anyone over 30" was the watchword. And it was not confined to the Vietnam issue--the distrust of authority spread to all issues and all continents. "May, 1968" symbolizes the revolt of youth in Europe as in the U.S.

The revolt reached down to our Department of Demography. Sam Preston, with some support from myself and Etienne, seemed to be the voice of the students, and Judith Davis the voice of authority. I joined Preston, and when we had a meeting of faculty and students, questions of wider political orientation merged with those of the administration of the Department.

Judith and I were still talking to one another, but a further incident brought all civility to an end. An eminent legal scholar, John Noonan, a liberal Catholic who had written a book on contraception, called on me one day and suggested that we share a course. I knew that we would differ on many subjects; he would argue against making contraception more widely available and I in favor. This would add spice to the course and be informative to students. His suggestion was extremely flattering to me; he was one of the most distinguished scholars on the Berkeley campus. He was even spoken of for the Supreme Court.

In any case Judith was scandalized. To her birth control was a sacred matter and debating it was sinful. She went to the extreme of locking the door of the classroom where we were to teach, leaving us and the students standing in the hall. But we did give the course, and it went well. Noonan and I became friends, and I remember one great evening that he spent at our house.

The outcome of all this was a shock to Judith. I accepted an appointment to Harvard and Preston to the University of Pennsylvania, while van de Walle, having only a one-year appointment at Berkeley returned to Penn, which became one of the strongest in our field anywhere.

With we three leaving the Davis's were the whole faculty of the Berkeley Department of Demography. Now we will be able to get three really good people, Judith said in effect. Not so fast, the authorities responded, that is not the way we do things. The Administration will appoint a committee from other Departments, and it will recommend new personnel. Judith said she would rather dissolve the Department than lose its autonomy.

While this issue was in the air the University budget came up. Judith, threatened by cuts, had Kingsley go to Sacramento and lobby the State Legislature so that it approved a line item for the Department in the final budget. Kingsley had qualities that made him an exceptionally effective lobbyist--prestige and persuasiveness.

To the Berkeley administration that was the last straw. They forced Judith's resignation. The best she could do was an appointment in the School of Public Health of the Los Angeles campus. (When she was riding high, Judith had spoken scornfully of schools of public health.) To make thing worse the marriage with Kingsley broke up. Not so many years later I read of her death at a rather young age. I was sorry, having always hoped we could become friends again. I never had any dislike of Judith--she did what she thought most effective in limiting population and just misjudged the means.

One other incident at Berkeley remains in my mind, though I was not personally involved. The State Government, under Ronald Reagan, proposed to cut the University's budget--at a time when the rest of the State Budget was on the rise. A delegation called on him in his Sacramento office, headed by the distinguished physicist Owen Chamberlain. I remember seeing on television Chamberlain wagging his finger at the Governor. Ronald Reagan leaned back comfortably in his chair, unmoved, listened and said nothing. When the final budget was published it was even lower than the draft.

