CONCLUSION

Here we are engaged in independent analysis of events in any part of the world. We are free to use any ideological standpoint we feel like. Nobody ever rams these down our throats. We think and decide on our own.

Andrew Young,
in Daily Mail. 27 May 1977
The dramatic differences between the experiences of student activists in the industrialized nations and the Third World are perhaps the key analytic variable in the study of student activism. Indeed, if a theoretical framework is to be developed, it will have to be divided into at least two broad categories.

One can see many similarities among the industrialized nations of Western Europe and North America. The movements of the 1960s developed at about the same time, in response to similar stimuli, and they declined at approximately the same period (with some variations). There are similarities in academic traditions, the role and functions of the universities and the like (Ben David, 1977).

Third World student activism is more difficult to categorize and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide altogether a theoretical framework for the Third World activism. It is clear, however, that while students in the industrialized nations have never been responsible for the overthrow of a government (although they came quite close in Japan and in France in the 1960s), students have directly caused political upheavals in a number of Third World nations. In other words, Third World students have, from-time-to-time been effective in stimulating revolutionary social change and, on a few occasions, such as the 1918 Cordoba reforms in Latin America, and have also effected major changes in the University system. Further, the students in the Third World are a consistent, important, and even legitimate part of the political equation. They are, in many cases, the “fourth branch” of
government thus constituting the campus is a key part of the political system. It is surprising that Third World student movements have received so little analysis from scholars, given their crucial political and social importance.

An analysis of noted American political scientist Levy reveals that internal political conditions within a Third World nation can alter the scope and impact of student political involvement. Recent military dictatorships in Latin America, for example, have by and large kept students from playing an active political role through active repression of these movements. Nevertheless, student activism in the Third World remains an important factor. Some of the principal factors could be illustrated in highlighting this aspect.

The Third World nations often lack the established political institutions and structures of the industrialized nations, and it is easier for any organized group, such as the student community, to have a direct impact on politics.

The Students have, in many cases, been involved in the independence movements from the beginnings of the state and have per se been a recognized as part of the political system. Thus, in contrast to the West, where activism is seen by most people as an aberration and an illegitimate intrusion into politics, the Third World students are obtained to participants direct to the interplay of politics.
Besides, the Third World university students constitute an incipient elite and have, come to believe that they are "conscience keepers" of the social system. They belong to a tiny minority with access to post-secondary education and opportunities for positions of power and authority. The differences between those who have had post-secondary education and those who have not in the Third World, are very substantial. The advantages have been somewhat diminished as unemployment of graduates has risen in a number of nations, but the generalization still holds true. These advantages, real or imagined, the small size of the student community and the historical sense of eliteness have all contributed to the possibility of student activism.

The location of the major universities of the Third World, contributes to the possibilities of activism. Many are based in the capital cities, and a large proportion of the student population is within easy reach of the centres of power. This simple fact of geography makes them organize demonstrations easier and gives the students a sense that they are at the centre of power and have access to it.

Relatively few Third World nations have effectively been functioning in a democratic political system. As a result of this, and of the widespread problems of illiteracy and poor communications, students are often seen as spokespersons for a broader population. They have, in a sense, authority beyond their small numbers, and those in power often take student demonstrations and grievances seriously for this reason. In many cases, seemingly small student demonstrations have been
effective in quickly mobilizing larger social movements or have had a surprising impact on the authorities. In a sense, the Third World students do act sometimes, if not always, as a "conscience" of their societies.

The Third World students, on an average, come from a higher socio-economic background than their compatriots in industrialized nations, they have an added advantage in making an impact. While there are significant national differences with situational changes as the higher education systems expand in the Third World, a substantial portion of the student population in many Third World nations, comes from urban elite background and they have, through their families, a somewhat direct access to powerful segments of the society.

These factors are a partial explanation for the relative effectiveness of student activist movements in the Third World in the past twenty years. All Third World student movements have not been effective in creating mass movements. Indeed, violence against students and loss of lives have been much greater in the Third World than in the industrialized nations. Brutal suppression of All India Sikh Students Federation in Punjab and Naga Students Federation in Nagaland provide recent examples of massive repression of students.

The Students in industrialized nations on the other hand have, been effective as agents of social changes in a different way. When they are compared to direct
activism and effectiveness of Third World students, they pale into insignificance. However, their impact of activism in the industrialized nations cannot be ignored. Perhaps the cost effective role these students have played has been in the cultural and social realms. Avant-garde Movements, from Women's Liberation and Civil Rights to changing sexual mores and innovations in musical Styles, have begun, to a considerable extent, in the universities.

The Students have also had an impact on politics in some industrialized nations, but in dissimilar ways which have been fairly indirect. In the United States, the movement against the war in Vietnam emerged from the campuses after being confined there for a number of years. It did, in the long run, have an impact on the societal consciousness. The Students were influential in forcing President Johnson not to seek a second term in office. While the American student movement was unsuccessful in ending the war, its role as a catalyst for the anti-war movement was quite important. Similarly, the movement for civil rights for blacks and racial equality generally emerged from the universities and later became a powerful social movement in its own right.

In Western Europe, students were also influential in the 1960s. In both France and West Germany, students brought the problems of a lack of parliamentary opposition to public attention during the late 1960s. They also had an impact in stimulating reform in academic systems which were under considerable strain at that
time, as a result of expansion without much structural change. Students in Eastern Europe have also been important as political catalysts in countries like Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia from time to time. In the United States and in Western Europe, the period of student unrest and effectiveness was limited to the 1960s, although it had left an indelible mark on the US social psyche, as discussed earlier.

The Decline of the 1970s

The contrast between the high level of student political activism in many countries during the 1960s and its gradual decline during the mid-1970s is dramatic one. An attempt has been made in the thesis to indicate this contrast, but an analysis of the causes for the decline may also be appropriate at this stage.

It is extremely difficult to sustain a high level of political and organizational activism for a long period of time in any movement. Mass mobilization cannot last forever, much less the vortex point of a volatile movement as illustrated by the unrest of the 1960s. The Student Community also realized that they have to return their studies, careers beckoned, and the leadership of the movement did not have the energy to pursue the struggle permanently.

In part, the “decline” of the 1970s is an artefact of the mass media. Great attention was paid to campus unrest during the late 1960s by television and other
media, and this helped to bring student activism to public attention and helped to transmit it internationally. The mass media did not show any especial interest in student unrest the subsequent years, and thus the activism did not become a widely publicized matter. In a sense, the lack of mass media attention had inhibited the rapid expansion of localized student movements since communication was not so easy and there was much less direct impetus to sustain it.

As Arthur Levine and Raymond Boudon pointed out that the focus of student political concern has now changed. The topics which concern students now lend themselves less dramatically to mass movements. In France, the 1968 university reform provided students with institutional participation and an element of the student movement has concentrated on university involvement. In the United States, student concerns have become linked to personal and spiritual improvement, and to the betterment of campus conditions. Such issues are not the stuff of mass movements.

Most analyses indicate that student attitudes have not changed very much in recent years and that the student community remains well to the left of the general population. Boudon supports this notion for France, Statera for Italy and Levine for the United States. Students may not be engaged in mass movements but they do remain left-of-centre in their attitudes at least in most of the developing countries. Both Boudon and Statera are concerned about the lack of student commitment to the
established political system, since this increases the potential for anti-regime activism at a future date. Several analysts have also pointed out that student attitudes towards "life style" such as the use of drugs, music styles, divorce, are significantly more liberal than those of the mainstream of most societies. This is especially true in the industrialized nations, and may well have an impact on the future direction of society. It may, however, catch up with other societies, like India at a later stage.

The economic situation of the 1970s has also had an impact on the student population. This has diminished activist movement in the industrialized nations. The first wave of graduates from the enlarged universities encountered an expanding economy which needed their skills during 1960s and 70s. This sense of economic security encouraged students to engage in political activism without major worry about future job opportunities. This situation changed dramatically in the 1970s. The combination of inflation, the oil crisis, and a general slowdown in Western economies placed professional jobs at a premium. Social science and humanities graduates, those most active in student politics, had a particularly difficult time finding jobs. Students turned from the social sciences and humanities to professional fields in order to ensure brighter career prospects. The political activism began to appear a risky undertaking. The economic downturn brought a change in the priorities of many students, and clearly had a role in diminishing student activism.
The very success of the university reform efforts of the 1960s in several countries diminished the activist thrust. In some countries, including the United States, academic regulations seen by student activists as onerous (such as in loco parentis) were removed and the curriculum liberalized. In other countries, such as France and West Germany, patterns of governance were changed and students now participate in university affairs. This institutional participation which has also been brought on a limited scale in India has, also involved students in internal university politics and has kept them, to some extent, away from external politics. While the results of the reform efforts differ widely from one country to another, with the United States and Britain ranking quite low on the scale of academic change, many of the changes that have occurred have contributed to a diminution of activism.

Demographic factors have helped to influence the current of student life. In the industrialized nations, a decline in the university age population and fiscal problems in higher education have combined to decrease substantially the expansion which was characteristic of the 1960s. There is less pressure for university places in many countries, and conditions in the universities are, in some cases, less crowded than during the previous decade. During the 1960s, new universities were being established at a rapid rate, and existing institutions expanded as well. This created strains on both and academic staff, and may have contributed to the crisis. The expansion has abated in many countries and ended in several.
The student movement itself perceived that it had "failed" in the most basic respect -- it did not achieve massive social change and revolution. While the movement in some countries, stimulated social crises and in others brought about university reform, it did not achieve its basic goals. This caused some activist organizations, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to shift to increasingly radical tactics and ideologies, and they often alienated most students in the process. These tactics not only failed to gain the desired results; they also lost mass support and in some countries engendered repression from the political authorities. In Indian context, some Students embarked on a stand of "ultra leftism" and often turned to terrorist tactics to achieve their goals. Peoples War Group in Andhra Pradesh has established peoples court in Telengana region where 'instant justice' is meted out to exploiters. They even possess enough arms and ammunition in their command to meet the challenges posed by the police. Bihar peoples Army is yet another ultra left outfit running parallel courts and administration in eastern Bihar.

The "Weathermen" in the United States, the Baader-Meinhof gang in West Germany and the Red Army in Japan all reflected this current in Western countries. In all these cases, terrorism has the effect of weakening the movement.

Finally, and perhaps most important factor happens to be the change in external political realities. Earlier the Student activist movements were primarily stimulated by societal politics rather than internal university-based matters, and
changes in politics naturally have a key impact on the student movement. Where issues have changed, as in the United States, the student movement has been directly affected. In the United States, for example, the end of the Vietnam War and particularly the end of the military draft removed the major stimulating element for the activist movement. No other issue has replaced the Vietnam War for a student movement which has been historically stimulated by foreign policy-related matters.

The perceived or the "flawed style" of the parliamentary system in Indian democracy and the coalition governments formed have led to student activism and have generated "left polities" apart from the extreme "rightist position" also.

It is difficult to have a surmise on the future of student activism either for India or the US. The distinction between the Third World and the industrialized nations is a key variable. National differences in terms of educational systems, political traditions and realities, and other factors also make cross-national generalizations very difficult. Even in the national context, it is difficult to predict activism or campus unrest. Most of the student movements of the 1960s took everyone by surprise. Administrators and other responsible for universities did not expect the student movements of the period and, almost without exception, did not respond constructively to them, thereby exacerbating the difficulties.
Social scientists and observers of the mass movements are also caught off guard sometime. It seems, too, that the student activists themselves do not expect the scope of the response to their protest movements. Student leaders in a sense, try to keep up with their followers.

In the industrialized nations, many of the currents described in the previous section, which have contributed to the decline of activism in the 1970s, are still evident. But there are many imponderables. In the United States, for example, foreign policy has been the main stimulus for student activism. While there are no foreign policy issues at present which seem to have the potential for mobilizing large numbers of students, such issues may develop. The re-establishment of registration for selective service, which has engendered some activism, has some potential for creating further struggle.

Non-political aspects of student culture deserve more careful attention. The growth, in the United States, of religious movements on campus, the revival of fraternities and sororities, the continuing impact of avant-garde cultural and musical styles, and other facts are all important. They have, almost without exception, not been carefully considered by analysts. Students, after all, are an important part of the academic enterprise whether or not they are involved in political activism and disruption.
Activism is even more unpredictable in the Third World in general and India, in particular. It can be assumed that political regimes which have engendered the opposition of the educated groups in society and which are not effective in meeting perceived social needs will face some opposition. The universities are traditionally among the first to react to social discontent and often play an active role. Thus, while it is exceedingly difficult to predict the exact nature of student unrest in India it is very likely that students would continue to play a very active and at times effective role in political affairs.