

CHAPTER 3

A Place for Rebels?

The Limbo Years, 1966–1989

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Introduction

The period spanning the mid-1960s to the late 1980s was a time of profound change for the Government Department at the LSE. While it had recently matured into a fully-fledged division within the School under Oakeshott's leadership, intra-departmental friction had already started to surface. Between 1966 and 1969, divisions were triggered by a series of student protests at the LSE that made national and international headlines. The emergence of a student 'New Left' turned the university campus into a flashpoint of political activism, and students were determined to capture the high ground. It was a time of youth activism and the rise of counterculture, marked by a propensity for direct action against established authorities.

The protests began as a campaign against the appointment of the new LSE Director, Dr. Walter Adams, but as time went by students took to the streets to protest a number of issues, leaving deep scars on the relationship between students and staff. Tensions were high: as Lord Dahrendorf described it, it was 'a less happy age for the social sciences and their practitioners'¹—perhaps even

¹ Dahrendorf 1995: 445.

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the unhappiest years in the history of the LSE. The protests also shaped the reputation of both the School and the Department. The LSE was now to be popularly known as a ‘School for Rebels’, a breeding ground for far-left radical thought—a perception that was in reality far from the truth considering the myriad of scholars from different ends of the political spectrum housed by the Government Department in the late 1960s.²

At the turn of the decade, a clear intellectual divide had solidified in the Department. Oakeshott retired in 1968, but the two camps—the ‘Oakeshottians’ versus the ‘non-Oakeshottians’—endured into the following decade. The 1970s was a period characterised by division, mediocrity and dissonance; the two groups disagreed vigorously on their approaches to the study of politics, with the Department consequently lacking a cohesive vision or unified strategy. Its glory days under Laski and Oakeshott had reached an end, and it now attempted to reorient itself amid a string of significant and tumultuous changes. By the 1980s, policies enacted under the Thatcher Government helped unify and professionalise the Department, although these would not truly come to fruition until this cohort came to prominence in the early 1990s. And, while these reforms were met with criticism from some in the Department, most notably Elie Kedourie, the introduction of new formal administrative structures, including the Research Assessment frameworks, marked the beginning of a more modern, more professional and ever-growing Government Department.

Revolution is in the Air

The 1960s marked a time of inchoate global disruption, with a wave of student protests erupting around the world. They began at the University of California, Berkeley, where students began campaigning for the civil rights movement in 1964. By 1968, this radical spark had reached academic institutions in Europe. On 22 March 1968, student revolutionaries at the University of Nanterre had occupied the university’s administration building, protesting male–female dormitory restrictions.³ By early May of the same year, protests erupted at Sorbonne University. What at first seemed like innocuous student strikes had quickly transformed into nationwide civil unrest. Between 2 May and 23 June 1968, 11 million *soixante-huitards* stormed the streets of Paris with barricades and tear gas. Workers were demanding higher wages and occupied factories across France, while students continued to violently push for greater levels of student self-government and autonomy in university administration. The impulses flowing from the events in France provided impetus for a revolutionary movement in the United Kingdom. Between 1968 and 1969, the universities of

² Dahrendorf 1995: 456.

³ Crouzet 1969: 332.

Essex, Hull, Birmingham, Warwick, the LSE and the Hornsey College of Art saw a spike in campus revolts and occupations, with some institutions—including the LSE—temporarily closing. The student protests at the School undoubtedly garnered the most media attention in the United Kingdom, and not with favourable connotations. With headlines such as ‘Rebellion at the School for Rebels’,⁴ the LSE became notorious as the United Kingdom’s hotspot for delinquency and political radicalism—an image from which the School would not easily recover.

An account of the events leading up to and during the student protests is necessary to understand the context of the Government Department at the time. The series of disturbances which occurred from 1966 to 1969 had a profound impact, most notably on relations between students and staff. The troubles at LSE began with the appointment of a new LSE Director. In the summer of 1965, a Selection Committee was established with the mandate of selecting a new School Director to replace the retiring Sydney Caine from October 1967. The Committee—which included two professors from the Government Department, Michael Oakeshott and Leonard Schapiro⁵—spent almost a year sifting through potential candidates, before settling on Sir Walter Adams.

The appointment of Adams led to historic turbulence on the LSE campus. Students began by condemning Adams’s administrative record, particularly his passivity during Rhodesia’s illegal unilateral declaration of independence (UDI). Adams had previously served as the Secretary of the LSE in 1938, but joined the Foreign Office during the war as Assistant Deputy Director-General of the Political Intelligence Department.⁶ After the war, he became Secretary of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies, a position he held from 1946 to 1955, before being appointed the Principal of the College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. A number of students, who were in strong opposition to Adams’s association with the racist regime of Ian Smith in Rhodesia,⁷ felt excluded from his appointment process.⁸ On 19 August 1966, *Private Eye* released a comment on Walter Adams and Rhodesia, stating that: ‘No one would call him a racist. But he has exhibited a constant willingness to compromise, and accept the status quo, even in an unconstitutional de facto regime.’⁹ In October 1966, the LSE Socialist Society published a 20-page exposé on Adams in the *Agitator*, entitled *LSE’s New Director: A Report on Walter Adams*, which lambasted Adams for failing to oppose the UDI.¹⁰ The exposé concluded with a

⁴ Dahrendorf 1995: 456; Headland interview 2020.

⁵ Dahrendorf 1995: 445.

⁶ No author 1967: 312.

⁷ Donnelly 2019b.

⁸ LSE 2019.

⁹ Dahrendorf 1995: 447.

¹⁰ London School of Economics Students 1966, (as quoted in Dahrendorf 1995: 448).



Figure 13: Free LSE Banner; Credit: The Beaver, 1966.

biting remark, that Adams is ‘a Principal unprepared to defend the freedom of his staff and students’ and was therefore ‘not a suitable person to be in charge of any centre of higher education’, especially ‘a multi-racial college like L.S.E.’. While the authors could not have predicted it, this essay would help foment a conflict brewing within the Government Department, igniting the troubles that were to plague the School for several years to come.

David Adelstein, then-President of the LSE Students’ Union, sent a copy of the pamphlet to the Chairman of the Court of Governors, Lord Bridges, enquiring whether the Selection Committee was aware of Adams’s background when they made the decision that Adams was eminently suitable to become the next LSE Director. In his response, Bridges noted that ‘appointments were confidential and that there would be no public debate on the merits of the case.’¹¹ Lord Bridges wrote to *The Times* on 25 October claiming it would be inappropriate to enquire into Adams’s role in Rhodesia as this would mean meddling in the internal affairs of another institution.¹² Adelstein, although advised not to write to the press about School matters without the permission of the Director, wrote to *The Times* in response to the letter published by Lord Bridges: ‘it is difficult to understand how one can avoid discussing a man’s record as an administrator in one college when he is being considering for the post as Director in another.’¹³ Adelstein was inclined to write as a private citizen, and not in his official capacity as President of the SU, but the School reacted swiftly to his public letter.¹⁴ Ultimately, the Board of Discipline decided not to impose

¹¹ Ibid.: 449.

¹² Donnelly 2019b.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Dahrendorf 1995: 449.

a penalty on Adelstein, but tensions between the administration and students continued to soar.

The campaign against Adams resumed in the Lent term of 1967. A number of students were dissatisfied with how the administration had handled the situation thus far. As a student wrote in *The Beaver*: ‘if the Adams affair is not ventilated, there will be a loss of confidence in the democracy of the LSE’.¹⁵ In response, students planned a sit-in in the Old Theatre, and on 31 January began gathering in the foyer of the Old Building. An off-duty porter, Edward Poole, arrived at the scene to help his colleagues control the crowd, yet amid the confusion Poole suffered a heart attack and tragically died. Although he had an existing heart condition and there was no suggestion that he had been directly assaulted, the death rocked the School, which closed that day in response. The Board of Discipline, chaired by Lord Bridges, decided to take disciplinary action against Bloom, Adelstein and four other members of the Student Council. While the four members of the Student Council were exonerated, Bloom and Adelstein were both found guilty of disobeying the instruction forbidding the use of the Old Theatre for a meeting, and subsequently suspended until the end of the summer. In response, students began a boycott of lectures to demand that suspensions for Bloom and Adelstein be lifted, escalating tensions further.

In what was described as the ‘first major student strike [the UK] has known’,¹⁶ 800 students occupied the Old Building during a sit-in which lasted eight days in March 1967 until the end of the Lent term. In the lobbies and corridors of the main building, students were found sitting on floors, singing songs, ‘holding endless discussions ... reading, eating or just sleeping’.¹⁷ Student-made banners were draped from the walls and slogans plastered across the blackboards that once neatly displayed official notices of school functions. Lectures and seminars had been cancelled due to low attendance, with up to 40% of the student body estimated to have been involved in the boycotts.¹⁸ It was a peaceful takeover, a ‘good-humoured affair’, with some students reminiscing that it was a fun experience—perhaps even the highlight of their LSE years. The March occupation generated a unique sense of community among the 1966–1969 generation, an ephemeral feeling of camaraderie. The ‘early revivalist’ atmosphere of the era, as described by 1968 SU President Colin Crouch, is fondly remembered by those who were actively engaged in student activism.¹⁹ Interestingly, although the occupation of 1967 created rifts between academics and students at the time, it fostered a sense of collective identity among students and forged vivid memories that some alumni still hold.²⁰ By the beginning of the summer

¹⁵ *The Beaver*, 3 November 1966, p. 1.

¹⁶ Dahrendorf 1995: 455.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Donnelly 2019b.

¹⁹ LSE 2019.

²⁰ Wain & Sturdy 2015.

term, the Court of Governors had granted clemency to Adelstein and Bloom, suspending their penalties, and the occupation was adjourned.

By 1969, however, unrest on the LSE campus had taken a more sombre turn. As the protests continued, students were fervently and vehemently campaigning on a number of different issues. Energetic campaigns were held against the atrocities in Rhodesia and South Africa in 1968, and students were prominent in the anti-Vietnam War demonstration outside the US embassy in March 1968²¹—a protest that required 1,000 London policemen to be on crowd control duty. What became perhaps ‘the unhappiest in the history of the School’ began two weeks before the beginning of Michaelmas term of 1968.²² The School authorities had begun installing security gates around the campus to protect the school buildings in the event of another, and more violent, sit-in. Collective paranoia grew and the gates became the symbol of oppression in the eyes of the student radicals. On 17 January 1969, the Students’ Union passed an emergency motion demanding that the gates be removed. On 24 January, a jostling, clamorous mob of students stormed out of the SU meeting and started dismantling the gates with crowbars, pickaxes and sledgehammers. Over 100 policemen were called in by the School authorities and 30 students were arrested for criminal damage. The School closed and remained closed for another 25 days between January and February 1969. As Professor George Jones recalls, ‘it was a very unpleasant time’,²³ one that left a legacy of distrust and suspicion between staff and students, and which had deep implications for the dynamic between staff and students in the Government Department and the wider School community.

Students versus Staff

The student protests resulted in clear divisions on the School campus, manifesting primarily in two forms: internal clashes between academics *within* departments, and discord between faculty and students. In the Government Department, the main source of division was between students and staff. In a podcast entitled ‘Red Flag over Houghton Street?’, Professor Michael Cox affirmed: ‘most of the staff were not on the radical students’ side’ during protests of the late 1960s.²⁴ This was true—the views and beliefs held by academics, particularly within the Government Department, were generally not reflective of those held by the radical students. The academics who *did* display public support of the protests were chastised, with some having their contracts terminated for encouraging protesters during the demolition of the gates in the Old Building

²¹ Donnelly 2019a.

²² Dahrendorf 1995: 460.

²³ Jones & Cook 2015.

²⁴ Cox 2019.

(albeit none from the Government Department).²⁵ Some of the academics remained neutral during the rebellion, wanting a quiet life with minimal disturbances to carry on with their teaching and research.²⁶ Others were strident opponents of the demonstrations. The late Professor George Jones, a member of the latter camp, narrated the occurrences at the School and the reactions within the Department at the time. Having joined the Department in 1966, Jones recalled how he and Professor Imre Lakatos—who had been trained by the KGB and was active in the Communist Party in Hungary prior to joining the LSE—had drawn up lists of those who were on their side, and those who were against. As Jones remarked, the protests ‘poisoned relations and people remembered for many years afterwards who was on which side.’²⁷

The majority of academics in the Government Department were staunch opponents of the student protests. Professor George Jones remarked that nearly all of his colleagues disapproved of the use of direct action and protest by students—unlike in other departments, most notably Sociology and Law, where a higher number of faculty endorsed the student demonstrations.²⁸ He attributed this to the fact that, as political scholars, the Government Department believed that ‘you should conduct public affairs rationally.’ There was consensus among the faculty that instead of protests and violence, students ‘should work through representations and have reasoned argument.’²⁹ There was one individual in the Department, however, who did not share this viewpoint: Ralph Miliband. By demonstrating his support for the student protestors, the Marxist professor quickly became the lone wolf of the Department, and by the early 1970s, Miliband felt so alienated that he decided to leave the School.³⁰ Jones went so far as to declare that Miliband had been ‘encourag[ing] disorder’³¹ by supporting the student zealots. Emeritus Professor John Charvet recalls how the protests left Miliband feeling estranged: ‘Miliband wouldn’t speak to us after [the student protests], and he certainly wouldn’t speak to me because I made a speech [in opposition of the student protestors]. He then left the school. It was a tense time.’³²

Oakeshott, a man who habitually chose to remain uninvolved in the politics of the university, became unable to refrain from involving himself during the discontents of 1968. He was unconvinced by the character of the rebellions, believing the student protesters to have ‘no genuine grievances,’ and going on to say that ‘when you are dealing with thugs [staff and students], you must

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jones & Cook 2015.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Charvet interview 2020.

shoot first', perfectly encapsulating the attitude among the upper echelons of the Department in response to the student demands. In a letter to the then-Director, he wrote:

There are a small number of English boys and girls who regard university life as an opportunity to impose what they think as their political opinions upon captive audiences. They are highly organised and completely intolerant, and are dedicated to the destruction of 'bourgeois society', and regard universities as the soft underbelly vulnerable and defenceless.³³

Oakeshott saw in the protestors a streak of revolutionary practice that would never be satisfied, regarding them as a destructive force, and believing School authorities and staff had the duty to put an end to the student delinquency. This belief was shared among those in his inner circle, including Professor Ken Minogue. In an article published in *The Beaver* on 1 February 1968, Minogue—Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the time—responded to a student who had written a piece demanding greater student involvement in the government of the School, published in the preceding issue. Explaining why power and administrative authority should not be proportionally distributed among students and staff, he argued that 'government of the School and the style of student politics don't get along very well together.'³⁴ In his view, the university should never be governed in the style of student politics—a style which he described as 'convulsive twitches' in response to 'enthusiastic inexperience.'³⁵ He wrote:

LSE politics appear mainly to consist of faction meetings in smoky rooms, and dashing postures on the stage to the Old Theatre ... Might be good for cheer in the Union. But try and marry these two styles and there will be endless walkouts, accusations of bad faith, and all the petulance of those who are not getting what they want.³⁶

In the same article, he described himself as one of many 'Political Apathetics'—those who do not wish to spend their life in politics and prefer to 'limit the application of democracy in institutional life'. Minogue stated 'Our beliefs arise, not from the lifeless pallor suggested by our enemies but because we have better things to do than deploy ourselves for the pseudo-excitements of the mass meeting.'³⁷ Minogue was one of several in the Department who held

³³ Oakeshott 1969.

³⁴ *The Beaver*, 1 February 1968, p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

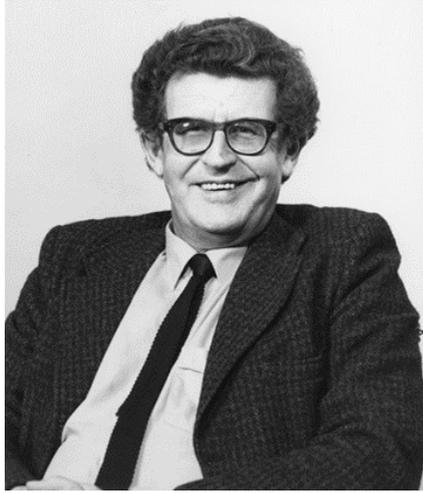


Figure 14: Professor Kenneth Minogue, Circa 1980; Credit: LSE Library.

this viewpoint. In the eyes of the faculty, the student protests were futile and juvenile. Moreover, Minogue proceeded to draw parallels to the ‘Laski Legend’ in his response to the student: ‘As I say, I found this passage puzzling in many ways, and wondered if I could not detect here the echo of the Laski Legend—one of those devices by which we flatter the dead in order to denigrate the living.’³⁸ What was already becoming clear by the early 1960s became even more apparent during the protests of 1966 to 1969: the Laski ethos was most certainly of a bygone era in the Government Department. His spirit, however, had been replaced by that of Oakeshott and his coterie of ‘political apathetics’ who vociferously opposed student rebellion.

While the LSE student protesters might have had their critics within the Government Department, they received praise from New Left activists at the time, such as Gareth Stedman Jones, Anthony Barnett and Tom Wengraf,³⁹ for engaging students in a novel way. As Troschitz notes, it was the ‘first time students had shown unprecedented collective solidarity in their role as students.’⁴⁰ This common student identity, characterised by a shared propensity for direct action in the name of democracy, was central to the protests. Although students shifted their focus onto a number of different issues over the years—from the Adams affair, to the American involvement in Vietnam, to the imposition of the gates in the Old Building—the protesters were united by shared values and a common mode of expression.⁴¹ The protests were thus the expression of a

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Troschitz 2017: 106.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

collective student identity, but also a means of fostering it. However, to say that the protests led to the emergence of a common LSE student identity for the first time would not be entirely accurate. A common student consciousness had already existed for decades,⁴² but by the 1960s, this collective student identity had transmuted and taken an entirely new form: one that saw the administration as the enemy. The protests had revealed power imbalances within the School and within the Department, and differences in outlook and principles between faculty and students had become the major dividing factor on the LSE campus.

The student protests of the late 1960s also had a significant effect in shaping the reputation of the LSE as a radical and socialist-leaning institution. However, the popular image of the Department as a bastion of radical and socialist thought might have held little truth to it. When Ralph Miliband decided to leave the Department for Leeds in the early 1970s, Cox notes that the Department was in ‘no hurry to replace him with someone of similar theoretical disposition or—I might add—of equal intellectual stature.’⁴³ Professor Tony Travers remarked that the LSE is often perceived from the outside as a ‘sort of left-wing institution’ and that this perception is particularly a result of what transpired in the 1960s.⁴⁴ Matt Matravers, an alumnus of the Department and Professor of Law at the University of York, echoes this sentiment: ‘The reputation of the LSE had been far-left because of 1968, but I don’t think LSE was actually right-wing or left-wing. It was even then a massively international, pluralistic place.’ Matravers reflects that despite the external perception of the LSE and its political thinkers as ‘radical socialists’, the Government Department housed a number of figures from different ends of the political spectrum at the time and its syllabus was in fact ‘pluralistic’ and somewhat ‘international’—at least, relative to other Political Science departments in the United Kingdom at the time.⁴⁵

The Government Department did in fact host a multitude of scholars across the political spectrum, and the popular perception that the LSE was a hotbed of radical, socialist thought remained an exaggerated reputation. Conservative theorists such as Oakeshott, Minogue and Kedourie remained influential figures in the Department throughout the decade, mainly in charge of teaching political theory.⁴⁶ On the other side of the spectrum was George Jones, described as a ‘kind of classic Wilsonian Fabian Labour’ by his colleague Paul Kelly.⁴⁷ Finding themselves somewhere in the middle were academics such as Robert Orr, Ernest Thorp and John Charvet, all of whom would remain on the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cox 2019.

⁴⁴ Travers interview 2020.

⁴⁵ Matravers interview 2020.

⁴⁶ LSE 1962: 421–436.

⁴⁷ Kelly interview 2020.

faculty until the early 1990s.⁴⁸ H. R. G. Greaves, who had lectured undergraduates in ‘Contemporary Political Thought’ and the British constitution since joining the School in 1930, included a wide range of thinkers on his syllabus: Bentham, Marx, Hegel, J. S. Mill, Lenin, Schumpeter and Wallas (and other Fabian texts).⁴⁹ Leonard Schapiro, who took up his three-year term as Convener from H. R. G. Greaves in 1969, taught modules on the Soviet Government, while Keith Panter-Brick tailored his research focus primarily towards civil war and decolonisation in Africa.⁵⁰ While the more radical emphasis Laski had once placed on the Department had long since disappeared, it remained a pluralistic centre for a range of political studies.

While the protests of the late 1960s created a tense time for the Department, they also resulted in some positive changes. First, Professor George Jones recalls how the troubles formed friendships and alliances across departments. It brought together staff members, who previously did not have much contact, but were united in the fight against the student rebels: ‘because of the [protests] we got to know each other across departments ... I think it was really good for the cohesion of the School.’⁵¹ The protests also prompted the Department and the School authorities to improve student–staff relations by increasing communication and feedback channels, such as frequent meetings between students and staff, and greater representation of students on School committees. Although the initial student demands were not met, and Sir Walter Adams did in fact take up the position of LSE Director in 1967—a position he retained until 1974—the protests permanently changed the dynamic between students and staff. A new era for the Department had begun, one where students were to become more active players in shaping its course.

Post-Oakeshottian Divide: Two Visions in Conflict

Alongside the changes which took place at the School in the early 1970s, one event was of particular significance for the Government Department—the retirement of Michael Oakeshott in 1968. Although he continued to attend various social and departmental meetings until his death in 1990, his departure marked the end of an era, and signalled an uncertain period for the future of the Department as an institution. As seen in Chapter 2, Oakeshott was a strong and charismatic figure with distinctive views, who not only managed to establish himself as one of the leading conservative political theorists and British public intellectuals while at the LSE, but also to attract quite a few disciples in the Department. After he stepped down, these scholars formed a group

⁴⁸ Travers interview 2020.

⁴⁹ LSE 1962: 429.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 426.

⁵¹ Cox 2019.

of political philosophers and historians with a shared intellectual identity and similar academic interests, but perhaps foremost a scepticism towards modern political science.

Oakeshott was the driving persona of the Department by the mid-1960s. Charvet recalls him to have been ‘the dominant figure’ at that time, with ‘distinctive and actually very original views’ that ‘very much influenced the way he’d run the Department.’⁵² His strong position was not only the result of his distinctive character, but also reflected some structural features. His long tenure as Convenor of the Department occurred before regulations were in place that limited the position to a three-year term, allowing him to exercise significant authority compared to his successors. The first of these, Professor Harold R. G. Greaves, took up the position in 1966, although Oakeshott would remain the informal head until he retired.

Although Oakeshott’s retirement marked a historic moment, with the Department losing its guiding beacon, it was not the end of the Oakeshottian story in the Department. One of his lasting contributions was that he created several prominent academics in his own image; scholars trained by him, committed to the continuation and preservation of his way of thinking. Quite naturally, they became the Department’s leading figures in the 1970s and 1980s. These individuals inherited a deep scepticism from Oakeshott towards modern political science, which was at the time already popular in the United States, but still relatively new in the United Kingdom. They considered political science to be a profound misconception of how one should analyse political life and human nature, arguing that the study of politics should consist of a historical investigation into the essence of human association with a particular focus on the well-established political and philosophical traditions.

As a result, in the early 1970s, the existing ideological divisions within the faculty had deepened. The Department had lost its natural and long-standing leader. Without Oakeshott, the split between academics trained or at least inspired by him and the rest of the faculty, particularly scholars in public administration and public policy, became apparent. Perhaps the most prominent of the so-called ‘Oakeshottians’ was Kenneth Minogue, unkindly called by his departmental colleague Bernard Crick ‘Oakeshott’s parrot.’⁵³ Within this circle were theorists and historians appointed in the 1950s and later, figures like Maurice Cranston, Leonard Schapiro and Elie Kedourie—all of them academics of an ideological orientation very much resembling that of Oakeshott.

Considering the Oakeshottians during the 1970s and 1980s, one cannot omit two distinctive men, Ernest Thorp and Robert Orr. Both were experienced lecturers, brought at a young age to the Department by Oakeshott in the 1960s, but both were, as we would now call it, ‘research-inactive.’ They rarely published, but appeared to be brilliant in ‘transmitting the history of political

⁵² Charvet interview 2020.

⁵³ O’Leary interview 2020.

thought from Oakeshott to the unwashed who appeared in front of him from time to time,' particularly Ernest Thorp.⁵⁴ Brendan O'Leary mentions that Thorp 'rarely changed his notes and was always scrupulously accurate about the history of political thought.'⁵⁵ That accuracy was certainly useful for the role he had within the Department. Having an immense knowledge of the university regulations, he was a brilliant exams officer. Apart from that, starting in 1972, he sat on the School's Admissions Committee, managing undergraduate admissions at the Department.⁵⁶ He continued to be a member of this body throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, when he was also appointed Departmental Tutor.⁵⁷ The story of his appointment serves as a perfect example of how differently universities were run half a century ago. After completing his undergraduate degree at the LSE, Thorp worked for a bank. One day, Michael Oakeshott came into that same bank and appeared to offer him the position of a lecturer. After a short and inconclusive conversation over lunch, the young Thorp was convinced his candidacy had been rescinded. Yet, a couple of months later, he received a short letter from the LSE bursar with the key to the staff lavatory. This was how Thorp discovered that he had been appointed and was emblematic of the Government Department hiring procedures in place at the time.⁵⁸

Among figures personally related to Oakeshott, there was also William Letwin. He was appointed in 1966, concentrating his academic work on economic theory and the history of economic thought, with a particular focus on the United States. Apart from being a lecturer and a scholar, he was also a central figure in the liberal intellectual salon in Kent Terrace, Regent's Park, visited by, among others, Isaiah Berlin, Friedrich Hayek and Oakeshott himself.⁵⁹ Letwin sustained it with his wife, Shirley. The couple played an important role in London political and cultural life and also in the Conservative renewal associated with Margaret Thatcher.⁶⁰ Shirley, being an academic herself and a close friend of Michael Oakeshott (who had devoted his central work, *On Human Conduct*, to 'S. R. L., Shirley Robin Letwin), helped in a sense introduce many of the Oakeshottians, like Kenneth Minogue, to the prominent members of the political society. She also served as the Director for the Centre of Policy Studies, and though her role in hosting and shaping the conservative intellectual community of London was largely informal, it is hard to overlook the indirect impact the Letwins had on the Government Department and people associated with it around that time. Both were also influential in the operations of the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ LSE 1972: 47.

⁵⁷ *LSE Calendars*, from 1972–73 to 1989–90, LSE 1995.

⁵⁸ Matravers interview 2020.

⁵⁹ *The Telegraph* 2013.

⁶⁰ Minogue 1993.

Bruges Group, a think tank which advocated against British membership of the European Union.

On the other side of the divide within the Department were those we might describe as the ‘non-Oakeshottians’. These were scholars like George Jones, an acclaimed figure in public administration and a recognised expert in local government. Along with William A. Robson, Jones was one of the founders of the Greater London Group, a research centre at the LSE that played a crucial role in the establishment of the Greater London Council in 1965. As Tony Travers, now professor at the Government Department and a former close colleague of George Jones, recalls, his work represented the tradition of the LSE from the activity of Sidney Webb and his engagement in the governance of London.⁶¹ In cooperation with Bernard Donoughue, Jones wrote a biography of ‘their gorgeous great hero,’⁶² Herbert Morrison, a Labour member of the war cabinet and a power behind the London Labour Party. Besides George Jones, strong figures in the public administration wing of the Department were accomplished academics like Peter Self, who would remain an influential member of the Greater London Group until his retirement in 1982.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, new ideas were brought into the Department with the arrival of figures like Patrick Dunleavy in 1979 and Brendan O’Leary in 1981, both young and with academic interests contrasting to those of the Oakeshottians. Dunleavy, who retired from the Department in 2020 and whose research has focused on public policy, government and rational choice theory, describes his appointment as causing ‘a big dispute in the appointment committee between him [Peter Self] and an Oakeshottian person who didn’t want anybody to do public policy at all, thought it should be anathematised’.⁶³ This dispute illustrates the practical implications of the divide. O’Leary, appointed initially for a position in public administration, later became the Convenor of the comparative politics group within the Department. As an expert on Northern Ireland, he also played an important role in shaping government policies. Later he would serve as the Convenor of the Department, from 1998 to 2001.

Divisions in the Department are even apparent in the courses taught during the 1970s and 1980s. Oakeshottians specialised in lectures and seminars in political theory, which constituted a large part of the undergraduate and graduate courses at that time. Among the undergraduate courses was ‘Political Thought of Hegel and Marx’, delivered by Elie Kedourie, ‘Political Thought from Hobbes to Burke’, delivered by Kenneth Minogue, ‘French Political Thought’, led by Maurice Cranston, and ‘Modern Political Thought’, taken by Ernest Thorp.⁶⁴ Graduate students could also attend, among others, Oakeshott’s flagship ‘History of Political Thought’ course, which he ran himself

⁶¹ Travers interview 2020.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Dunleavy interview 2019.

⁶⁴ LSE 1975: 373–375.



Figure 15: The LSE Department of Government in 1975; Credit: LSE Library.

alongside Kenneth Minogue, Elie Kedourie, Robert Orr and John Charvet.⁶⁵ Non-Oakeshottians were involved in lectures in ‘Modern Politics and Government with Special Reference to Britain’, an introductory course for first-year students, given by George Jones, Rodney Barker and Bernard Donoghue, as well as ‘Administrative Behaviour and Organisation’, led by Peter Self, and ‘Aspects of Comparative Local Government’, given by George Jones.⁶⁶ Later in the 1980s, seminars in ‘Public Policy Analysis’ and ‘Public Policy Formulation’ were given by Patrick Dunleavy, and a seminar in ‘Public Administration’ began being taken by Brendan O’Leary.⁶⁷

The disagreement between the Oakeshottians and their opponents was more about the general approach to political enquiry, which was touched on in Chapter 2. Oakeshott ‘packed the Department with historians’,⁶⁸ perceiving the study of politics as an attempt to reach ‘the rich historical text understanding of mature traditions’,⁶⁹ while maintaining ‘a scepticism about what it didn’t

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 376–379.

⁶⁷ LSE 1987: 488–489.

⁶⁸ Charvet interview 2020.

⁶⁹ Kelly interview 2020.

regard as mature traditions.⁷⁰ Oakeshottians stood against the idea of trying to measure things and employ precision to make political studies as scientific as possible. They saw the essence of the study of politics to consist of addressing broader questions concerning human activity for which no quantitative evidence may be found. This was the foundation for the opposition to modern political science, which was at that time taking hold, particularly in the United States. They also remained sceptical of public administration and public policy, as practised within the Department, often with direct historical reference to the Fabian ideals. They regarded this approach as too engaged in the running of political affairs. In short, the split within the faculty was in a sense part of a broader discussion between two approaches to the study of politics, one more qualitative, the other more quantitative, which continues until today. The historical circumstances of the 1970s, however, made it particularly salient.

This brief outline reveals the split into two camps across the period—political theorists and public administration and policy scholars. While the Oakeshottians certainly held a strong influence, they began to be joined by other groups whose interests lay outside the traditional focus of the Department. Rather than dominating the research agenda as they had during the 1960s, they now formed a dense circle of distinctive scholars with a strong representation among the staff. John Charvet, initially affiliated with that group, speaks about the time he joined the Department in the 1960s, noting that ‘naturally, as a political theorist, I was absorbed in to what became clear to me was really an Oakeshottian coterie: a little band of Oakeshottians.’⁷¹ Paul Kelly, now Professor of Political Philosophy at the LSE, remarks that even when he arrived in 1995, ‘most of the political theory faculty were Oakeshott-trained or Oakeshott-inspired. Oakeshott was very much respected.’⁷² However, with new academics joining from the early 1970s, many of them pursuing studies in comparative politics or rational choice theory, the dividing line between the right-wing group of political theorists and the rest of the faculty became less discernible.

However, while several prominent professors continued to teach throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the Government Department was not considered a leading centre of political research. It still bore the reputation gained during 1968 for socialist activism and political radicalism, which cast a long shadow on the reputation of the School. Rodney Barker, Emeritus Professor of Government in the Department, notes it was commonly believed that when he arrived at the LSE in 1971 it was ‘a communist-dominated’⁷³ institution, despite the internal dominance of the Oakeshottians. In 1981, these opinions had shifted, with the *Wall Street Journal* critically writing that ‘the school renowned as a Socialist breeding ground actually harbours what may be the most right-wing

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Charvet interview 2020.

⁷² Kelly interview 2020.

⁷³ Barker interview 2020.

department of government in the West.⁷⁴ These contradictory opinions on the character of the Government Department during the period demonstrate its internal divisions well. It lacked a clear and dominant intellectual identity, let alone a focus for future research. Paul Kelly even notes that in the 1980s it was even considered ‘a hotbed of mediocrity’,⁷⁵ an institution that trained many good academics, but was living off its past glory. Part of the reason for this was that its leading academics, like Elie Kedourie and Kenneth Minogue, were at the end of their careers and close to retirement. Michael Oakeshott would still convene his ‘History of Political Thought’ seminar until 1981, and attended many events until his death in 1990, but he was no longer the driving force within the Department or the School as a whole.

Thatcherism and the Transformation of Academia

The 1970s and 1980s brought the collapse of the post-war consensus in Britain, marking the end of a shared belief of both Conservative and Labour Party in Keynesian economics, an expansive welfare state, strong trade unions and nationalisation. The deep recession of 1973 and the following years of economic stagnation forced governments around Europe to find savings in various sectors, including higher education. The beginning of the Thatcher government in 1979 amplified the existing trends towards free markets, deregulation and privatisation. Growth in numbers of student enrolments, deep cuts in higher education funding and the introduction of Research Assessment frameworks resulted in what is now referred to as the marketisation of academia. These wide-ranging changes in higher education in the United Kingdom altered the nature of the academic community and intellectual work itself. They also fundamentally changed the character of the LSE Government Department.

To better understand this period, one must take a closer look at the British higher education reforms in the early 1960s, particularly the Robbins Report of 1963. The recommendations of the government commission chaired by Lord Robbins, himself a prominent economist at the LSE, which met between 1961 and 1963 to discuss the problems of Britain’s higher education, were simple—universities needed an immediate expansion to become more accessible and meet the challenges of the growing post-war economy. The Robbins Report in a sense only endorsed what was already happening. In 1961, the University of Sussex, the first of the eight planned new university campuses, later referred to as ‘plate-glass universities’ owing to their modern architectural design, was opened.⁷⁶ One year later, in 1962, fees were abolished in order to help students from poorer families obtain access to higher education. The number of

⁷⁴ Newman 1981.

⁷⁵ Kelly interview 2020.

⁷⁶ Anderson 2016.

university enrolments increased annually. Overall participation in higher education, measured as a proportion of students obtaining university degrees, rose from 3.4% in 1950, to 8.4% in 1970 and to 19.3% in 1990.⁷⁷ The 1972 Education White Paper, produced by Edward Heath's government and presented to Parliament by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, Margaret Thatcher, entitled 'Education: Framework for Expansion', predicted that this trend would continue for at least the next 10 years.⁷⁸

The growing number of students meant that the sum of teaching grants transferred to British universities each year by the University Grants Committee (UGC), a central body consisting mainly of academics deciding on where public money needed to be spent in higher education, had been steadily increasing over the 1970s, making universities almost entirely dependent on state funding.⁷⁹ The shock of 1973, caused by the OPEC oil embargo targeted at nations supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War, including the United Kingdom, resulted in drastic rises in global oil prices. The British Government had to find savings somewhere, and this in turn had a significant effect on the budgets of universities. In 1979, the newly formed Thatcher cabinet announced that the UGC would no longer pay the universities for foreign students, who would subsequently be charged with full fees,⁸⁰ an announcement that 'shook the very foundations of the School's funding structure.'⁸¹ The reaction of the LSE, at which the proportion of overseas students accounted for 37% at that time,⁸² was to limit spending per student, freeze new appointments and further increase the number of enrolments. Consequently, the School started to grow at an unprecedented rate. In the academic year 1967–1968, it had 3,439 regular students.⁸³ By 1984–1985, this number had reached 4,447.⁸⁴ Budgetary pressure on universities forced them to focus on increasing the number of students rather than teaching quality which, as Dahrendorf writes, had to result in 'a decline in standards.'⁸⁵

In line with cost-saving measures, the Thatcher government also brought the beginning of what was to become known as the marketisation of higher education, with its new models of funding based on research and teaching excellence assessments. Cuts were often accompanied by a narrative which accused universities of being 'cartels of producers interest', which followed monopolistic practices

⁷⁷ National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997: Table. 1.1.

⁷⁸ Department of Education and Science 1972.

⁷⁹ Anderson 2016.

⁸⁰ Williams 1984: 265.

⁸¹ Dahrendorf 1995: 497.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ LSE 1967: 141.

⁸⁴ LSE 1985: 144.

⁸⁵ Dahrendorf 1995: 498.

without consideration to students and the taxpayers who funded them.⁸⁶ In 1985, as a pilot exercise, funding for research and teaching was separated within the UGC regime,⁸⁷ followed by the establishment of the Research Assessment Exercise in 1986, a peer-review-based research exercise scheme to define the research quality at each university. The next year, in a policy paper entitled 'Higher education: meeting the challenge,' Thatcher's government mandated that universities should 'serve the economy more effectively and have closer links with industry and commerce, and promote enterprise.'⁸⁸ Following these recommendations, the 1988 Education Reform Act abolished the University Grants Committee regime, replacing traditional grants with 'contracts' which contained precise performance goals and indicators. Under the new policies, which were aimed at promoting a strong research culture and incentivise productivity, universities receiving poor assessment on research and those with numerous 'research inactive' scholars were to receive little or no funding, which meant that some of them would find themselves in a very difficult financial situation.⁸⁹

These profound changes in the approach to higher education were met with serious criticism from the academic community, particularly among experienced scholars, who judged them to be an assault on the culture of academic freedom. Academics in the Government Department were at the centre of that discussion, particularly the representatives of the Oakeshottians for whom the proposed reforms were just another step in the continuing expansion of 'managerialism,' an idea that ran counter to the very essence of academic activity. In his 1988 and 1989 essays entitled 'Diamonds into Glass: The Government and the Universities' and 'Perestroika in the Universities,' Elie Kedourie strongly criticised the Research Assessment Exercise for increasing government control over universities, replacing accountability with factual management, and establishing arbitrary assessment criteria.⁹⁰ His essays not only criticised the government for wrongly seeking to quantify academic excellence while neglecting a whole spectrum of criteria that may not be expressed in numbers, but also for pursuing an irrational and destructive policy of increasing the number of enrolments while reducing the cost per student.⁹¹

To a large degree, Professor Kedourie's essays were a reaction to the broader transformation of the Department over the 1970s and 1980s, as it sought to adapt to the requirements of a new model of university education. This new model promoted egalitarianism and opening higher education to a broader mass of students. The process of turning 'diamonds into glass,' as Kedourie puts it, meant that universities were to be run more like businesses in order to stay

⁸⁶ Kedourie 1993: 60.

⁸⁷ Anderson 2016.

⁸⁸ Department of Education and Science 1987.

⁸⁹ Barnard 1998.

⁹⁰ Kedourie 1993: 91–92.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: 81.

in a good financial condition, ‘producing’ graduates and providing them with skills necessary in their further careers. The Oakeshottians were not the only scholars to notice that the Department was adapting to this new model. As George Jones, a prominent figure in the public administration group, mentions, the Department used to be a close community of scholars governing themselves and doing research, with students coming to learn from them. From the 1970s, this model was giving way to one founded on ‘professional managerialism.’⁹² The very structure of the School had changed, so that academics were perceived to be employees in a large educational corporation with limited participation in the governing bodies.

The location of the Department also in a sense reflected its different character prior to the transformation under the new policies. First, the Government Department was not located in one singular place, as it later came to be. Academics had their offices around the campus, although it is true that most of them resided in King’s and Lincoln’s Chambers. Paul Kelly mentions that the community would group around activities and that ‘very important were the key seminars that used to bring students together or even faculty or both, because that was where you saw your colleagues ... That was where you got together.’⁹³ There was little need for office space for the administration personnel, since at that time these consisted of just a few secretaries. Small and quite shabby rooms in King’s and Lincoln Chambers, filled with the smell of coffee and cigarettes, and with its steep and dangerous staircase, were hardly a suitable quarters for an efficient administration, yet this was the first home for a group of people with a shared passion for the study of politics. What is also significant is that for most courses at that time there was no distinction between lecturers and class teachers. Senior academics were engaged in teaching, having direct contact with students, which helped build a sense of a close community.

With the expansion of academia and growing cohorts of students, that model had become unsustainable. The Research Assessment Exercise (later the Research Excellence Framework) enforced a deeper academic specialisation and professionalisation. As Nicholas Barr remarks, ‘even before the REF, departments were sort of increasingly becoming salient.’⁹⁴ Subject-specific assessment criteria further strengthened their role as independent and large entities, particularly from the late 1980s. As a result, the sense of community was partially replaced with more formal administrative structures. A more effective division of labour prevailed. Teaching became mostly the responsibility of junior staff, with senior academics concentrating on conducting research and writing publications to help the departments gain sufficient funding. This was a natural response to the new expectations towards higher education. It

⁹² Jones & Cook 2015.

⁹³ Kelly interview 2020.

⁹⁴ Barr interview 2020.

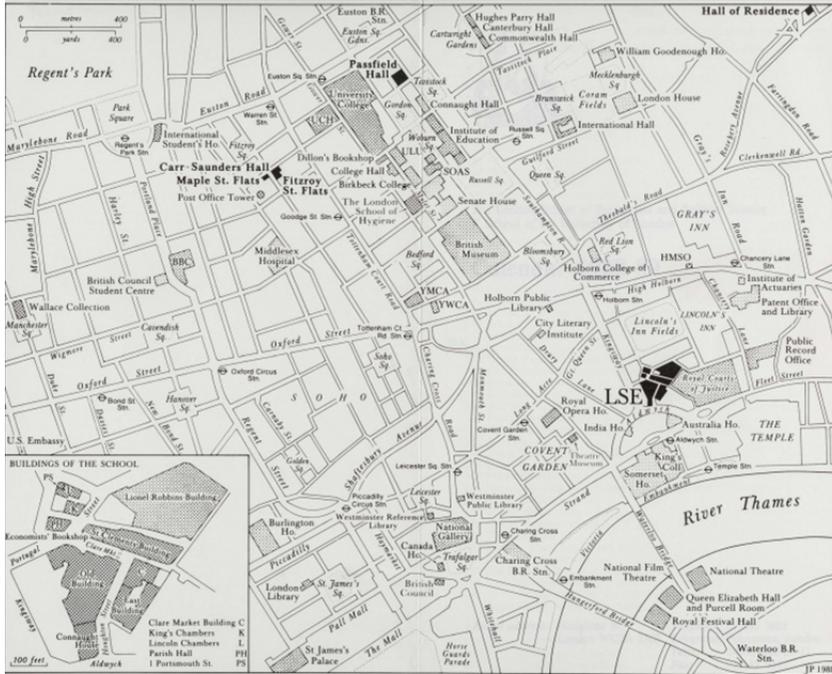


Figure 16: Map of the School, 1988–1989: Credit: LSE Library.

helped the Government Department emerge as a leading global centre of political science in the 1990s, but something precious was also irreversibly lost.

Conclusion

What had begun as a small-scale protest against the appointment of Sir Walter Adams soon escalated into perhaps the greatest turmoil in the history of the LSE. Events of the late 1960s not only affected the School's reputation, but revealed deep political divisions between academics, who expressed support for the protesters and those who adamantly opposed their activity. Scholars at the Government Department, dominated by mostly conservative thinkers like Oakeshott, in majority stood against the student revolt. The memory of the 'dense' atmosphere of that time, which encouraged Ralph Miliband to leave the School, prevailed throughout the 1970s. Protests had proven to be a great test for the unity of the Department. They also served as an impulse to democratise relations between staff and students.

Intellectual divisions remained the hallmark of the next two decades following Michael Oakeshott's retirement. The Department had many distinctive academics, but lacked a clear identity and, as a result, found itself divided between

two different approaches to political science. With time, these divisions started to disappear, but there was a strong feeling during the 1970s and 1980s that the Department was living on its past glory. It was filled with distinctive personalities but ceased to be a leading research centre. With new scholars joining and bringing new approaches, these dynamics began to change, but this was also the product of external factors. In 1979, the Thatcher government started to reform British academia and the Government Department became a part of that process. The policies of the 1980s helped initiate the developments that eventually transformed the Department into a leading global centre of political science. However, this was only to take shape a decade later under the mentorship of Brian Barry.

These cross-currents left the venerable Department of Government in a state of uncertainty as the 20th century entered its final decade. By now, it had reached maturity, yet the influential figures that had shaped its rise had begun to disappear from its ranks, and internal disagreements over political and philosophical matters placed great strain on those who now took charge. The older band of Oakeshottians still dominated its image and agenda, yet their influence was to rapidly diminish over the coming decade. A quiet revolution had begun on the public policy side of the Department, building up a new body of expertise in analytical and research-heavy matters which fundamentally conflicted with the Oakeshottian vision of a liberal education. As the 1980s rolled over into the 1990s, these voices began making themselves heard, setting the stage for a rejuvenation of the Department's image at the turn of the millennium.

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