

The students: life and opinions

About 10,000 full-time students registered at Owens for the session of 1974–75, over 11,000 for that of 1979–80. At least 80 per cent were undergraduates. High fees and other obstacles tended to discourage research students, and the proportion of postgraduates sank from about one-fifth to one-sixth of the whole. Part-time degree and diploma students were numbered in hundreds: almost 700 in 1974–75, and over 900 in 1979–80. Most part-timers were now postgraduates; the Robbins Report had concentrated on the need to provide full-time places for a rising generation of young people, although evening degree classes in the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies had survived the Report's publication by several years.

Most undergraduates entered the University at eighteen and left at twenty-one, apart from those in the professional schools, ranging from architecture and planning to medicine and dentistry, whose student life lasted longer. Undergraduates, however, included a significant number of older recruits, known as 'mature students', who had not stepped on to the escalator which normally carried bright, conventional teenagers from the sixth-form to the university floor of the educational edifice. Greeted with enthusiasm by many tutors who found them more articulate and dedicated than run-of-the-mill undergraduates, mature students numbered about 600 in 1978–79. One of the oldest, John Hogan, obtained in 1977 a Combined Studies degree in American Studies, English and History at the age of seventy-one, to the accompaniment of thunderous applause in the Whitworth Hall. He had left school at the age of twelve to work in a mill, and had been by turns a cotton spinner, a joiner, and director of a number of small businesses. At the time of his retirement, at the age of sixty-four, he had been an insurance broker. Rod Cox, when in his early thirties, became General Secretary to the Students' Union for the session 1979-80; he had left school at sixteen, spent a little time at Plymouth Polytechnic, departed to follow the hippie trail to the Middle East, and entered the University of Manchester

to read Philosophy when he was twenty-eight. Special arrangements for 'mature matriculation', sometimes by examination and sometimes by interview alone, were made in order to accommodate candidates not equipped with the usual 'A' and 'O' level grades awarded by the usual public examining boards.

In the fields of adult and continuing education, the University provided a great number of short courses, each lasting for a few weeks. Some of these led to certificates, but many were taken for interest and enlightenment alone, and some produced other kinds of result – for example, in successful interviews for jobs. In the year of Sir Arthur Armitage's retirement, 1980, there were 30,000 enrolments in these fields.

Between the 1950s and the 1970s the proportion of women students at Owens rose from 20–25 per cent of all full-time students (undergraduate and postgraduate) at mid-century to 36.75 per cent in 1974–75 and 38.66 per cent in 1979–80. They were less prominent among the part-time degree and diploma students, for they accounted for only about 25 per cent of these in 1974–75, and 29 per cent in 1979–80 (the proportion would rise when undergraduate part-time degrees were reintroduced during the 1980s). Women gained ground in all faculties, but their preferences for certain subjects, whether for social, cultural or genetic reasons, did not greatly change.

Women accounted for more than half of the full-time students in Arts and Education – indeed, for over 60 per cent of those in the Education Faculty in 1979–80. Law and Medicine were at par, for in both those faculties, as in the University as a whole, the female contingent approached 40 per cent. But in Science, the largest faculty, only one student in four was a woman. Schools and universities were often taxed with failing to direct girls towards technology and the physical sciences, and thereby neglecting to provide for the country's needs and to promote social equality.

Closer analysis of the Science Faculty suggested that, in Manchester as elsewhere, the tendency of schoolgirls to choose biology, which did not conjure up the image of a man in a white coat, was being projected into the University. Women inclined towards the descriptive life sciences and the disciplines most closely linked with medicine – to botany, biology, biochemistry, zoology, bacteriology, virology, pharmacy and psychology. A new course on Speech Pathology and Therapy, directed by Betty Byers Brown, created a small women's world of its own. In some years places to read Liberal Studies in Science were evenly divided between women and men. On the other hand, detailed

study of the more materialistic and mathematical branches of science attracted fewer women, and they were even less likely to read engineering. In 1979 the five branches of engineering (aeronautical, civil, electronic and electrical, mechanical, and nuclear) attracted 13 women freshers to 222 men, computer science seven women to forty-six men. Neither physics nor chemistry appealed strongly to women students. Mathematics, on the other hand, claimed a substantial female minority, fielding forty-five women to ninety-five men. The new four-year Elite Engineering course, otherwise Engineering Manufacture and Management, enrolled eight men and one woman in its inaugural year.

By the late 1970s just over half the student population of the whole University (including UMIST) were engaged in the scientific, technological and medical disciplines, and just under half in what were broadly categorised as arts subjects (a term which extended beyond the Arts Faculty, and included education, law and the social sciences). Early in the decade the UGC had resigned itself to accommodating student preferences and to allowing arts and social science students to form a majority within universities in general. It was, after all, possible to educate them more cheaply than science students; for that reason they possessed certain attractions at a time of economic crisis, even if they were expected to contribute little to its resolution. Shirley Williams, the Labour Secretary of State for Education and Science, was said to be thinking otherwise in 1977, although a renewed emphasis on science and engineering would, or so some prophets complained, encourage discrimination against women students.

In Manchester, with its burgeoning medical school, it was never likely that scientists would dwindle into a minority, whatever the national trend might be. In February 1978, *Communication* informed its public that 52 per cent of the University's students were enrolled on courses in Science and Technology, and 48 per cent in Arts and Social Sciences. At times some Arts subjects seemed to have lost their powers of attraction – until reformed, modern languages were in the doldrums, and even English was forced on one occasion to keep up its numbers by raiding UCCA's clearing house in search of worthy students who had failed to get into other universities. Only History was praised for its recruiting campaigns, which involved the use of more imaginative publicity (at least one attractive secretary was falsely represented in a photograph as an eager student); much wooing at interview of promising applicants; and the abandonment after agonised debate of the traditional O-level Latin entrance requirement for

History Honours, on the grounds that many schools no longer provided for it. A new scheme for Honours in Combined Studies, intended to raise the status of non-specialists, failed at first to pull in the expected number of takers; it offered more rational combinations of subjects than the old General degree, which had been a free-for-all, but its students still suffered because their courses were juxtaposed rather than integrated with each other, and because they had no home in any particular department.

It was a matter for self-praise on the University's part, and for complaint by some critics, that increasing numbers of students appeared to be flocking into vocational courses that would offer them professional qualifications or exemptions from professional examinations. Accountancy and business finance recruited with marked success during the 1970s. Both pure sciences and liberal arts began to feel threatened as a result; some sociologists viewed with regret the rise of subjects which appeared to encourage early conformity and to deny students a broader education before they settled down to the grind of earning a living.

'You wouldn't believe the kids nowadays . . . They all seem to want to be bloody accountants!' Thus a Professor of Sociology, nostalgic for the 1960s, consuming his ploughman's lunch in the staff bar and chatting to journalists from *Punch* in the autumn of 1976. Like the ageing Oxford Fabians in Angus Wilson's story 'Such Darling Dodos', he was finding himself no longer on the side of youth, for many left-wing academics, uneasy at having their chosen party in power, appeared more radical than most of their pupils. At times, indeed, the students of the 1970s were accused by journalists, observing them from within and without the University, of being dullards and conformists, less politically aware, less idealistic, less susceptible to ideologies than their predecessors. It seemed possible that the student radicalism of the 1960s had been the child of prosperity, the product of some arrogant belief that graduates were so valuable to society that nothing could stop them in their tracks. Perhaps the spectre of unemployed graduates was whipping up, despite the University's assurances that no files would be kept on student political activities, a fear of bad references, jobs denied, and jeopardised careers. Angelos Loizides asked readers of *Manchester Independent*, 'Have you noticed how mellow and calm we have all become? It seems that despite all the fuss about our militancy and revolutionism we are one of the most well adapted and conformist groups in society.' Students, he noted, had offered little support even to the miners in conflict with Edward Heath; they seemed to want only

'better buildings and more money'. A more scathing attack on the phlegmatic student body came from *New Manchester Review*, a periodical founded by a former Union officer, Andrew Jaspan – 'My, how things have changed. The class of '78 look, in the words of one tutor, like corporals out of the Royal Engineers or the WAF . . .'

In reality the 1970s saw plenty of militant activity, and the students did not entirely consist, as Jaspan's journal complained, of 'predictable computer novices playing sport seriously and getting their essays in on time'. The campaigns of the South African Liberation Society were sustained throughout the decade and lost impetus only when eclipsed by the issue of overseas students' fees. Complaints of student apathy were not new; even in the 1960s the inertia and indifference of much of the student body had infuriated the politically conscious minority, and the public image of students had always owed more to the efforts of a small cadre of activists than to majority sentiment. But in the middle and later 1970s the activists seemed more sharply divorced from the student population at large. It was partly that higher authority, having learnt political wisdom, rarely antagonised moderate student opinion, and did not repeat the mistakes which had provoked the mass occupation of the Whitworth Hall in February and March 1970. There was a core of truth in a fictitious interview with the Vice-Chancellor on the techniques of repressive tolerance, as reported in Michael Mauss's satirical column in *Mancunian*. 'It's the same every year, one term recruiting feeble-minded first-years for their perverse pranks, one term hurling pathetically ineffective abuse at me and doing precious little else, and then, kerpow! We've got 'em by the balls in their third term . . . Old Charlie Carter up at Lancaster's got it wrong; booting 'em in the groin when they're down just makes them martyrs.' Only in the summer of 1976, in the course of a row about the Union capitation fee, did students abandon the practice of never resorting to direct action during an examination term.

Justifiably or not, critics suggested that 1970s students, even the would-be rebels and nonconformists, lacked originality and strategic imagination – that they could only mouth outdated slogans, worship vanished idols, engage in weary rituals such as occupying the telephone exchange. In search of copy, the *Punch* journalists visited the Grassroots 'alternative' bookshop in Waterloo Place (this offered, according to an advertisement of 1974, items on 'science fiction – claimants – mysticism – education' and 'politics – underground – tenants – poetry – women'). Behind the counter they found 'a vague, bearded youth',

‘wearing a Che Guevara button on his cardigan; a student image which suddenly looks as quaintly period as the homespun – sandals – parsley-wine of early Letchworth. Rhodes Boyson, thou shouldst be cheering at this hour . . .’. More profoundly, Andy Pearmain, a Philosophy graduate who became Academic Affairs officer in 1977, criticised the Union for ‘sectarianism’ – the uncoordinated pursuit of particular cherished projects, with no grand design and a hearty contempt for what anyone else was seeking to achieve. Apart from its interest in the South African disinvestment campaign, the Union had ceased to intervene in University affairs and concentrated instead on peripheral ‘alternative’ projects, which devalued the University and offered a retreat from its way of doing things, rather than seeking either to reform or to disrupt the institution.

It was possible, however, to hear more favourable opinions of the students of the 1970s. Some academics were relieved that students had reverted to realism and praised their sense of proportion. ‘This university isn’t like Lancaster or Essex,’ said Professor Cohen of Psychology, ‘little academic hot houses totally cut off from the urban realities of bus queues and slums and housing estates. It’s not so easy to fool yourself into thinking that some trivial little campus issue is a world-shaking event.’ Advising new arrivals what to expect, a front page article in *Mancunion* for October 1978 observed that ‘There has recently been a general rejection of overt politics’. Rather, ‘Students have become more involved with their own private lives – in developing more humane and caring attitudes towards each other. They are worried by the rise of fascism [in the form of the National Front], but are generally more contemplative and less active.’

Some students wanted to encourage collaboration rather than competition. Hence, in 1974 those sitting on a Senate Working Party on assessment argued against the traditional system of classifying degrees in steps which descended from first-class honours to the ordinary degree. They pleaded unsuccessfully for some kind of profiling system which would identify strengths and weaknesses without neatly putting every finalist (as the Pete Seeger song had it) into boxes made of ticky-tacky. The Union tried to establish an ‘essay bank’ which would enable students to read each other’s work and educate one another, instead of clutching their efforts jealously to their bosoms in the hope of scoring higher marks than their colleagues.

Sarah Kemp, who as Sarah Bentley read History from 1975 to 1978, remembers herself and her contemporaries as ‘very middle-class’ in the sense that ‘I don’t think very many of us took a lot of

risks; I think most of us came embedded with our parents' or our background morals and values. I don't remember a huge amount of rule breaking . . .'. Many rules, for example in the halls of residence, had been modified and were scarcely worth infringing. But her friends were keen supporters of the right to be gay, and eagerly discussed the right to abortion on demand and the use of illegal drugs. Many others shared a desire to be ordinary, a determination not to be part of a separate, recognisable student estate – a wish to merge with the people of the city, to help or entertain them without being patronising; a fear of seeming precious or arrogant. James Richardson, another student of the 1970s, found it impossible to exist in Manchester without being a football supporter. Pub culture, complete with pool, darts and card games, was a traditional way of making friends. Staying on in the city after leaving the University, he founded one of the first pub chess clubs, at the 'Albert' in Rusholme. A member of the English Department, Ray Barron, writing of the forbidding scene which met the eyes of overseas students, alluded to 'a student life devoted to beer and football in the best democratic tradition'. The cult of real ale created the phenomenon of the beer bore, indulging in the student equivalent of middle class food and wine talk; at least, however, it focused on the quality of the goods offered, rather than the quantity which could be consumed in the smallest possible time.

There were hints, too, of more raffish recreations, of the enjoyment of cannabis, suggestions that drugs other than alcohol and nicotine were becoming accepted features of student culture. By the mid-1970s cannabis was being openly smoked on Union premises, a practice discouraged by the officers, who dreaded the loss of their licence. The police did raid Union premises on the night of 25 November 1976, the first time for eight years, and a dozen offenders, who did not appear to be students, were later convicted. It was prudent to keep the indulgence private, but in some circles students took it for granted that hosts would provide cannabis at parties. Broaching a hitherto forbidden topic, much as student papers had begun to discuss birth control about 1964, *Mancunion* allowed space to a drug dealer named 'Freewheelin' Franklyn' and reported his remarks on readily obtainable hallucinogenic drugs, including magic mushrooms. One student correspondent registered strong objections to this 'irresponsible' publicity, and little was heard of the subject after Franklyn's departure for London.

Most accounts of student culture concentrated on masculine manners and customs, but some relief was afforded by the vignettes of

female student types, from the callow fresher to the formidable finalist, in 'Lines from a Dean's Leaded Window' in 1975:

'Farouche, uncertain, idle Liz,
First year in Arts, in sex, in digs,
Was quick to hear but slow to heed
The call to study and the need to read.'

'Susanna spends nights in libidinal pleasuring,
Mornings in studying History, afternoons
Speaking at women's lib. meetings. Her thesis
On Froude, Freud and freedom is practically done.'

Liz and Susanna were perhaps the same person, *en route* through different phases in the student life-cycle.

All students were members of the Students' Union; nothing came of politicians' proposals that membership should become voluntary. From the obligation of all students to belong to it the Union acquired both authority to represent the student body and the guarantee of a regular income from public funds. In dry legal terms the Union was 'an unincorporated association' and 'constitutionally separate from the University'. Individual members of the Union were also members of the University, but the Union and the University negotiated with each other as separate entities, and in Union vocabulary the term 'University' tended to mean the University administration rather than the whole community of scholars. According to the stylised picture presented by *Mancunion* during the 1970s, the University authorities were generally to be suspected of plotting to undermine the Union by starving it of funds or encouraging rival organisations and alternative social centres. The Union was jealous of its autonomy, but none the less had to depend on the University in at least two respects. It occupied a building which the University owned, and it relied for most of its revenue on capitation fees, which were in effect subscriptions paid by or on behalf of each student. After much annual discussion between the University and the Union, the University would request the fee, at a rate which it considered justifiable, from the Local Education Authorities, which paid the fee on behalf of most students.

Less formally, the Union was once described as 'a large theatre workshop for those interested in politics and administration to practise their talents'. It was the task of the Union to represent students to the University and to the world; to entertain, inform and advise them; to see to their welfare; to express their political opinions; and to campaign for the causes they held most dear. Constantly reiterated, in

tones of relief or regret, was the belief that few students were interested in the Union as a political machine or as a debating society. Most concerned themselves chiefly with the quality of the goods and services which the organisation provided, and asked only that their elected officers be competent administrators and give proper directions to their permanent staff of managers, secretaries and other supporters. In September 1980 the Union clubhouse offered students a large coffee-cum-snackbar; three drinking bars, the Cellar, the Serpent and the Solem; television rooms; a games room; reading and silence rooms; a number of meeting rooms; and a debating hall. Available in the basement were lavatories, baths, showers and washrooms, two hairdressers, a travel bureau, a newsagent, a bank, and a second-hand book shop. Membership of the Union gave access to any or all of at least 150 active societies.

Ngaio Crequer, later a journalist on the staff of the *THES*, proved to be the last officer to hold the title of President of the Students' Union. In 1974 a General Meeting of that body, as though suspicious of supreme beings, abolished the traditional hierarchy of President and Vice-Presidents and established a cabinet without a prime minister. This gave rise to the boast that Manchester's was the only students' union in the country to have no president. At first the new collective consisted of four principal officers, each with his or her own department, working together as equals. They received modest salaries, equivalent to a full student maintenance grant divided by twenty-nine and multiplied by fifty-two, so as to stretch it out across the full calendar year. They were generally called 'sabbatical' officers, for any student in mid-course elected to one of these posts would usually be given by the University permission to interrupt the course and resume it when the term of office was over. Some officers, however, were recent graduates and therefore 'sabbatical' only in name; wisely, perhaps, the University avoided asking whether they could be called students when they had ceased to be registered as such.

The General Secretary was the chief administrator of the Union building. Responsibility for relations with the University passed to the Education and University Affairs Officer; for external affairs to the External and National Union of Students Affairs Officer (who did 'all the directly or vaguely political work'); for student welfare to the Welfare Officer, formerly the Welfare Vice-President. Two other sabbatical officers joined them in 1975. One took charge of *Mancunian*, which had developed into the principal student newspaper, and with it of all the Union's publicity; the other, of Events, including the

Introductory Week and most of the light entertainment which the Union subsequently provided. Four lesser officers, who did not enjoy sabbatical status, made up the rest of the Union Executive. They were the Internal Officer, the Postgraduate Officer, the Overseas Officer, and the Ordinary Officer without Portfolio.

Apart from the Executive there was a much larger Union Council which had forty-four members in 1975 and met every three weeks during term; it was composed of a number of junior ministers, most of whom were secretaries for one concern or another, and of representatives of various student constituencies and interests. Election to the Union Council was the first step in the career of many student politicians, enabling them to claim a modicum of experience when they stood for Executive posts. In the 1970s the Union Council was not particularly assertive and did not, as it was to do in the late 1980s, provide a buffer between the Executive and the General Meeting, the two main rivals for power and authority within the Union.

In the absence of a mediator, the Union's constitution threatened to become unworkable. It made for tension between General Meetings, which were entitled to formulate Union policy, and the Executive which was charged with carrying policy out. Their antagonism was sometimes described as a conflict between the principles of 'representative democracy', embodied in the Union's officers, and those of 'direct democracy', personified by the students who assembled once a week to talk and vote like the citizenry assembled in the market place of ancient Athens. One fear was that the Executive, unless constantly called to account, would develop into irresponsible and secretive bureaucrats pursuing schemes of their own; another, that General Meetings were unrepresentative of the student body and lay in the hands of a caucus of dedicated politicians of left-wing persuasion. True, there was an important safeguard, in that General Meetings became quorate and entitled to make valid policy decisions only if 200 students were present. In the view of many critics the quorum (equivalent to a mere 2 per cent of full-time students) was absurdly low, but attempts to raise it were invariably denounced as Tory plots and seemed doomed to failure. Emergency General Meetings, summoned to deal with business that could not wait even a few days, required a quorum of 500, and the same quorum was needed to empower a meeting to pass a binding vote of no confidence upon Union officers and force them to resign.

Summoned on Wednesday afternoons, the traditional time for student sport and academic committees, General Meetings competed

with other amusements which many students found more fascinating. Direct democracy was not wholly democratic – it was almost certain to disenfranchise certain groups engaged in academic business which took them away from the site, such as senior medical students and student nurses. Many gatherings proved to be iniquitous, for many students were not apathetic so much as antipathetic to badly chaired meetings protracted by complicated procedures which nobody appeared to understand. Nevertheless, debates on one or two weightier issues with economic implications – concerned with proposals that the Union should withdraw from the National Union of Students (NUS) and with negotiations over the capitation fee – attracted audiences of about 1,200. An alternative to the General Meeting was the referendum, conducted through the ballot box; almost 4,000 students voted in 1976 on withdrawal from the NUS, but only 632 on the less interesting question of constitutional reform in 1978.

Relations between the Executive and the General Meeting deteriorated in 1977 and 1978, when a predominantly Conservative Executive held sway and was seeking both to impose tighter financial controls and to ensure that the Union observed charity law. At issue were payments voted by General Meetings which had nothing immediately to do with the well being of Manchester students. Some students objected to the practice of financially supporting, say, the Portuguese Communist Party at a time when the Union building needed refurbishment and the Day Nursery, supported by the Union, was short of funds. The Executive objected in principle to sending contributions to strikers in the long-running Grunwick dispute over union recognition in London (£25) and to the Anti-Nazi League (£99), contending that these payments would be ‘*ultra vires*’, beyond their powers as administrators of public funds conferred on a charity designed to promote student welfare. Legal opinions confirmed their misgivings, and emboldened them to argue that General Meetings had no power to order them to break the law. Their opponents urged the Union to provoke and fight a test case, but did not carry the day, despite the passing of votes of ‘No Confidence’ in members of the Executive at a General Meeting which turned out to have been iniquitous at the crucial moment.

Inflation tested the managerial and negotiating skills of Union officers. The bulk of the Union’s income came from capitation fees and a smaller but still significant part of it from the profits of trading in the Union’s shops and bars and from other sources such as juke-boxes and fruit machines; the higher the capitation fee, the smaller the need for the

Union to charge high prices to break even. In October 1975 *Mancunion* estimated that capitation fees accounted for 85 per cent of income, 'trading surplus and sundry' for 15 per cent. A year later the respective proportions seemed to be closer to 90 per cent and 10 per cent.

On two occasions, in 1975 and 1980, the Union appeared to be floundering in a financial quagmire. Indeed, in 1975 only an advance of £25,000 from the University, to be repaid when the fees came in, maintained the Union's cash flow during the summer. Some difficulties were traceable to mismanagement (usually attributed to one's political opponents), but more were blamed on a capitation fee believed to be among the lowest in the country. The Vice-Chancellor argued that in the teeth of an economic recession the University had a 'moral responsibility' to restrain its demands upon ratepayers, and others in high places spoke of a need to 'endure cuts in services in the same way as the rest of the community'. But these sentiments were attributed to a Machiavellian plan to weaken the Union by starving it of money: perhaps, in its enfeebled state, it would 'more passively accept the new emphasis on Education as a service sector providing for the needs of industry'. On behalf of the University the official journal, *Communication*, maintained that for the sake of fair comparisons with other institutions calculations should take account of the separate fee paid to the Athletic Union, the consortium of sporting clubs: add the two fees together and they amounted to a generous sum. On behalf of the students *Mancunion* retorted that the University was squeezing the Union's fee in order to get a large subsidy for sporting activities and escape the normal obligation to pay for the upkeep of grounds out of the UGC's block grant. Disputes in 1976 and 1977 resulted in direct action by some students, intended to shame the University into increasing its offers, and not always unsuccessful. But relations subsequently improved, with the University offering cash to refurbish the Union building, and even, in May 1980, exceeding the fee increase recommended by the Department of Education and Science.

In general, however, the administration had been right to urge restraint. Should local authorities find universities' demands excessive, their complaints might inspire proposals to finance students' unions by other means – for example, by treating each of them as a department of its university which would have to compete, as every other department did, for a share of the block grant. Such a system would allow the Unions far less independence. Rumour had it in the summer of 1978 that Local Education Authorities were jibbing at the high proportion of fees spent on the salaries of sabbatical officers and

permanent staff, to say nothing of the donation of public money to political causes and the subsidising of social activities.

Members of the Union were automatically members of the NUS and of the Manchester Area National Union of Students (MANUS), a 'network' which linked them with local colleges and the neighbouring Polytechnic. At intervals in the past Manchester students had fallen out with the NUS on the grounds that the benefits of membership did not justify the subscription; that the NUS was a tedious talking shop controlled by the London colleges; and that affiliated unions had to waste time and money on sending delegates to attend its chaotic conferences and transact other business. Many students disliked the politics of the NUS Executive, which seemed too moderate in the mid-1960s and both extreme and self-paralysing ten years later. The Men's Union had withdrawn from NUS in 1954 while the Women's Union retained their membership, but in 1959 a General Meeting had voted in favour of returning all components of the federal Union to the NUS. It was, however, tempting to economise amid the stringency of the mid-1970s by cancelling the Union's block subscription to the national organisation.

Proposals to follow the example of Aston University Birmingham, secede from the NUS, and try to go it alone, aroused wider interest among Manchester students than did any other issue of the 1970s. For all its flaws the NUS was the students' national campaigning body, concerned with grants, social security benefits, and resistance to education cuts. Membership offered a number of advantages, especially cheap travel and commercial discounts. But the organisation had failed to maintain the real value of the student maintenance grant; the NUS was hamstrung by a deadlock between three rival political groups, any two of which would combine to defeat proposals made by the third; and it was addicted to discussing international issues, about which it could only gesticulate. Should not students be allowed to join the NUS at their own discretion, rather than be delivered to it en masse by their university union? Defenders of the NUS argued that to undermine it was to weaken still further the position of students in the face of the Government. In any case the University allowed for the block subscription in the capitation fee, and should that subscription be cancelled there was no guarantee that the University would pay an equivalent amount to support services provided by the Union itself. In the view of David Aaronovitch, who was later to become President of NUS, disaffiliation would be 'economic suicide'.

Suicidally or not, early in 1976 a large General Meeting voted by a majority of one (547 votes to 546) to withdraw from the NUS. But the matter was wisely submitted to a referendum, in which 1,694 students voted for disaffiliation and 2,128 against the move, while another 40 abstained. Discuss services and amenities rather than ideologies, said some commentators, impressed by the size of the poll, and student apathy would disappear. Hence the Manchester Union remained with the NUS, though the issue was sometimes reopened at times when other Unions chose to pull out, and Conservatives were to return to the matter at intervals during the 1980s.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the University, like most others in the country, had arranged for student participation in many of the bodies concerned with academic affairs and domestic management. These ranged from departmental and faculty boards (which generally made the decisions most affecting student courses) to Senate and Council. A few student representatives attended the University Council by invitation only, but the University was more generous with formal membership of Senate. In 1976–77 it obtained from the Privy Council an amendment to its statutes allowing eighteen representatives of the studentry to become full members of Senate. Twelve students were elected by the faculties, three by Owens Union, and two by UMIST Union. One was to be nominated by the Committee of the Postgraduate Society. The University's departmental structure had the effect of fragmenting the student body, and the constitution ensured that the Union did not provide the only way into the Senate.

Senate and Council membership was for moderates and reformists. Radical students would not have considered sitting even on a departmental board; to do so would have been to capitulate to the establishment, to be deceived by token concessions. James Richardson had already boycotted his school council and declared in favour of a pupils' union which excluded teachers; he was disinclined to change his tactics at the University, believing as he did that governing bodies ought to be overthrown rather than joined or even infiltrated.

While seeking to co-ordinate the efforts of scattered departmental representatives, the Union relied heavily on the power of publicity to improve the lot of students. On occasion it set out to embarrass certain parts of the University, particularly departments said to be teaching badly or making unreasonable demands. At its disposal were its own journal, *Mancunion*, and a new device, the Alternative Prospectus.

Two mainstream student newspapers existed in 1973: *Manchester Independent* and *Mancunion*. The first had grown out of a crisis in

1960 which had led to the establishment of a student paper managed independently of the Union, but under some supervision from senior members of the University. In the 1960s the *Independent* had become a successful journal and won national awards for excellence. By 1974, however, the paper was sinking into debt. It lacked an efficient system of distribution, published irregularly, and complained of hostility on the part of the Union officer concerned with academic affairs. Though still publishing some articles of high quality, *Independent* failed to recover and eventually abandoned the field to *Mancunion*, once only a free news-sheet through which Union officers tried to explain their actions to their constituents. Now, under more enterprising management, it began to acquire many of the better characteristics of *Independent* and by the 1980s both the paper itself and some individual journalists were beginning to win prizes in the annual *Guardian-NUS* competitions for student newspapers.

In 1974 Anne Bourner, a geology student, became editor of *Mancunion* and expanded it into a magazine of up to sixteen pages, including features, reviews and sports reports. She bore with good humour letters addressed to 'Dear Sir', replying 'The Editor is a woman and proud of it', and thereby provoking other correspondence directed to 'Dear Woman'. Sadly, the claims of her degree forced her to resign prematurely, after which a General Meeting in January 1975 voted that *Mancunion's* editor should become a sabbatical officer, who would look after all the Union's publications. For a time this officer was really a manager, the editorship passing to a collective which accepted or rejected contributions by majority vote, but by the 1980s the paper had an individual editor once more. At first each issue was pasted together and produced on a photocopying machine, incurring the charge that it resembled 'a borrowed set of sociology notes', but from later in the year 1975 *Mancunion* was professionally printed as a tabloid newspaper. By 1978–79 five or six thousand free copies were being distributed by the simple method of leaving piles at prominent points in the Union building. They were paid for partly by an allowance from the Union's budget and partly by advertising revenue. Despite its intermittent fondness for scurrilous gossip columns, the paper escaped the threats of libel actions that had beleaguered *Manchester Independent* in the touchier atmosphere of the late 1960s. Both sides showed restraint, offended senior members of the University preferring to ignore or remonstrate with the paper rather than resort to writs. Charges of sensationalism, inaccuracy and political bias were more likely to come from disapproving students than from academic staff.

At intervals *Mancunion* started debates on the shortcomings of departments, in a measured manner which would have been almost inconceivable in earlier decades. Even in the deferential 1950s attacks had not been unknown, but the rejoinders of the academic staff had been much haughtier. It now seemed, for instance, that the tense personal relationships among academics in Philosophy, a Department said to exist in 'a state of apparent dishonest inefficiency', were communicating themselves to students. Much to its credit, however, the Department found numerous student defenders, who called the paper's account tendentious and objected to its attempts at the public laundering of dirty linen. In November 1977 thirty students signed a letter in which they declared that 'The majority of the business, both academic and social, of the Philosophy Department continues to the satisfaction of all concerned.' Not all departments would have secured so favourable a testimonial. However, a mature student uttered the sinister prophecy that *Mancunion's* article would stir up trouble rather than promote reform – that it would provoke 'an entrenched reaction detrimental both to harmony and democracy'.

Criticisms of the Department of Town and Country Planning, voiced in *Mancunion* in the autumn of 1976, seemed to echo widespread disillusionment with the schemes of urban planners. A gang of four, who claimed to express views shared by 'most students in our department', complained particularly of the status of so-called 'practical work', because it was not genuinely practical and encouraged fantasies, both architectural and geographical – 'e.g. designing a New Town in four days'. Projects were subject to unexplained academic assessments (as graded course work they formed part of an examination, and the academic judgement of examiners was not open to student challenge). Course reforms, in the view of the plaintiffs, resulted only in a 30 per cent increase in the burden of work, which was neatly complemented by a 30 per cent drop-out rate: most members of the staff insisted that their own courses remain compulsory, and therefore it was always possible to add to the curriculum but never to delete anything by way of compensation. One lecturer, E.J. Reade, was bold enough to back the criticisms, seeking to dispel the illusion that the planner could become a quasi-deity with synoptic vision acting on behalf of society as a whole and rising above the 'sectional interests' of the specialists involved in the enterprise. 'I feel that the University authorities should be profoundly concerned when what is taught in one of its departments is so inhibiting to free intellectual enquiry.' Another lecturer, Chris Wood, adopted a moderate and soothing

tone, promising reform and defending the Department against what he saw as a brilliant and unfair piece of journalism.

High failure and drop-out rates in certain quarters attracted *Manchester Union's* attention. Hence the Physics Department, whose methods had seemed especially enlightened in the late 1950s and 1960s, came under fire in 1978 in the wake of numerous failures, followed by re-examinations and some exclusions, of students taking first-year courses in Physics, and in Physics and Electronics. There was a suspicion that the Department had been trying to 'hook' students in order to keep up its quota despite their poor A-level results (there was no surer way of incurring the displeasure of the University authorities than failing to recruit an adequate number of students, at a time when the University's income increasingly depended on student fees). Having secured students' custom the Department had, allegedly, failed to teach them efficiently. Poor lecturing in a fundamental first-year course, 'Vibrations and Waves', attracted much blame. An admissions tutor praised the Department for taking chances on promising students who did not have the best formal qualifications, and pointed out that good textbooks, including some which had been prepared in the Department in Professor Flowers's day, were available to students who disliked the lectures provided. Whatever the rights and wrongs of this particular dispute, it could be said that British universities had always prided themselves on their low casualty rate and invoked it to justify public expenditure upon them. Any departure from this cardinal principle, even in the name of widening access to the University, was cause for concern. Remedial teaching might be needed in universities if schools failed to prepare students for courses that made severe demands upon their mathematical or other skills.

The Alternative Prospectus, addressed to applicants, made more systematic attempts to improve conditions across the University. It sought to offer a candid account of Manchester from the point of view of the 'consumers of education' and to provide a foil to the University's own propaganda, which had become so mendacious, or so philistine, as to enthuse even about the featureless architecture of modern student flats. Potentially, the Prospectus was an effective weapon, since a hostile report could well discourage custom and force a department, fearful of declining numbers, to change its ways. Introducing the work in 1973, the President of the Students' Union, Ngaio Crequer, envisaged that staff-student consultative committees would make or at least approve the entries, and that the Prospectus would tell unvarnished truths about matters of interest to students – including

the balance between lectures, seminars and tutorials; the number of contact hours; the standard of lecturing; the adequacy of laboratories; and the effectiveness of consultation. Later the Prospectus claimed to bring student life 'into its environmental context . . . The content of the Physics course at Manchester might be the same as that at Lancaster, East Anglia or Durham, but being a Physics student at Manchester is going to be a hell of a lot different.' Over 4,000 copies were printed and bound and posted to all schools and colleges in the country which taught subjects at Advanced Level.

A problem with the Alternative Prospectus was that, although it was said in 1975 to represent a thousand students' views, it was impossible for outsiders to know how large a sample of opinion in each department it was reporting and how fairly. Exasperated by the questions put to him by newspapers, Professor Dodwell complained of inaccuracies in the Prospectus and asserted that the offending article about the History of Art Department, which no-one would admit to having written, had never been shown to the local consultative committee. By the late 1970s, however, the Alternative Prospectus had mellowed. As John Fryett, then Education Officer of the Union, conceded, it was no longer considered heretical or sycophantic to praise the University or its departments. Dissatisfaction did not have to be total and the redeeming features of departments did not have to be ignored.

Early in 1978 a centre-spread in *Mancunion*, written by Neil Botfish, presented a balanced and reasonably optimistic picture of education in the University: 'most would agree that student life in Manchester is a very good one. The vast majority of staff are friendly and eminently capable in their fields. There is some choice in what we do, especially in the third year, and our views are generally listened to . . .'. He argued, however, that there were 'pockets of discontent all over the University', and that student campaigns would naturally concentrate on eliminating them. The most widespread complaints were of uninspiring lectures, which sometimes became exercises in dictation or efforts to cover blackboards in formulae for students to copy, and of the failure of the University to insist that its teachers be properly trained in their tasks (admittedly it provided courses for newcomers, but attendance at these was not compulsory). John Fryett blamed professors who, themselves unschooled in educational techniques, failed to insist that their staff be better prepared, for fear of exposing their own ineptitude in the classroom. Allegedly, they took refuge in the cosy belief that 'academics should be natural teachers', and entertained the delusion that 'university students are crying out to learn, that their

motivation is naturally high, and therefore the university teacher has to do nothing to stimulate interest – pure facts presented traditionally are all that is needed.’

Most students were content if their lectures were lucid and not too long, if their opinions were heard and their questions answered, if their reading lists were not interminable, if their assessment did not depend wholly on conventional three-hour examinations. Most tutors, however, dreaded the occasional group of students, ranging from sullen youths in bother boots to self-conscious, tongue-tied young women, who reacted neither to each other nor to their teacher, sitting in stony silence and avoiding the tutor’s eye no matter what pearls were cast before them. Looking upon their unresponsive faces, unable to fathom the thoughts behind them or overcome the instinctual ‘when in doubt, say nowt’, many were tempted into nervous gabbling and the delivery of impromptu lectures which then precluded any possibility of interventions from the floor. Some students, by nature absorbent, sponges rather than fountains, felt no love of discussion and were exasperated by colleagues who did. A woman appealed to David Aaronovitch, who was responding eagerly to Ian Kershaw’s seminars on Nazi Germany, ‘Will you stop talking in the seminar? Having discussions! I don’t come here to listen to you. I can’t take notes when you’re there. I’ve got a degree to get.’

Little, perhaps, could be done for those students who had become more deeply alienated, convinced (at least intermittently) of the dryness of their discipline and the sterility of academic exchange. A literature student wrote:

‘Endless corridors I walk down –
 Like some nightmarish dream –
 A prisoner in your graveyard –
 Alice searching for the queen.

 ‘I see never-ending textbooks,
 Re-occurring black and white,
 Eternal lists – type-written
 (Christ, can’t you even write?)
 Yes, you speak of “man’s experience”,
 My friend, you speak in vain,
 Your listeners are ignorant
 Of hunger, fatigue, pain,
 Your words may be impressive,
 Your arguments profuse,
 A literary critic – you can only reproduce.’

Many students were anxious not to become introverted and self-absorbed, obsessed with their own personal problems or even with those peculiar to student life; they wanted to care for others. The Union ran its own welfare services, supplementing and perhaps surpassing the pastoral care provided by University departments. 'Contact Nightline', available from 8 pm to 8 am, was presented for a time as the Union's equivalent to 'The Samaritans', providing sympathetic listeners to lonely, depressed and worried students; an advertisement exhorted 'Don't Bottle It Up!' Later, in the 1980s, it preferred to call itself a friendly service which could be consulted, even at ungodly hours, on any subject, however mundane. The Legal Advice Centre considered about three hundred cases a year, particularly those involving landlord and tenant relations, consumer complaints, and road traffic offences and accidents. Most of the help was given by Law students, with an academic on hand to deal with the more complex questions. One University and Academic Affairs Officer, Dave Carter, was particularly anxious to provide advice for students seeking to change courses, who often encountered hostility in the departments they were trying to leave. Lisa French, Warden of Ashburne Hall from 1976 to 1989, was impressed by the Union's ability to nag dilatory Local Education Authorities into releasing grant cheques and saving impecunious students from having to live on air until they arrived. The task of welcoming overseas students and helping them to get their bearings was taken seriously; Ashburne Hall supplemented the Union's efforts by presenting an introductory course teaching new arrivals how to flag down buses and how to take their turn in food shop queues. The Union's Welfare Officer was supported by a phalanx of auxiliaries – a full-time Administrative Assistant, and student Secretaries for Accommodation, Grants, Overseas Students, the Nursery, and Health Centre Provision.

Flanking the Union were two semi-autonomous organisations, Rag and Community Action, which turned outwards towards the city and strongly influenced public impressions of students. They represented two different approaches to charity and welfare. Rag, more traditional and more closely connected with halls of residence, involved students, not only from Owens and UMIST, but also from Salford University, from local colleges, and sometimes from the Polytechnic. It was often described as the MASS Rag, referring to Manchester and Salford Students, and was given to stunts, capers and frivolities legitimised by the high-minded purpose of raising money for some sixty local charities. Rated in order of worthiness, these received different proportions

of the net takings. Heading the list in 1975 were the Booth Hall Hospital, the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital and the Ancoats Settlement, which each received 6 per cent, and were followed immediately by the Little Sisters of the Poor, entitled to 5 per cent. Rag at its worst conjured up depressing visions of rowdiness, slapstick, minor public school humour, beeriness, brown sauce, and even blatant sexism. Part of its stock-in-trade were attempts to drink pubs dry (sponsored by Watney's, the brewers) and three-legged pub crawls, together with annual entertainments such as the Pyjama Dance (it required nerve or insensitivity or both these qualities to board a bus in a dressing gown and brave the stares of fellow passengers). No Rag procession could be considered complete without a few arrests, charges of public order offences, brief court appearances, and fines. Community Action, by way of contrast, involved its supporters directly in practical welfare work, rather than fundraising, and accused the Raggars on at least one occasion of playing Lady Bountiful and patronising the people who benefited indirectly from their antics.

Emblems of Rag in the 1970s were two whimsical figures, Fred Bogle (who was more leprechaun than evil spirit, and manifested himself to the organisers every year), and Miss Charity Hog, who was a hedgehog and no sow. It was the Bogle Stroll, said to be the largest sponsored charity walk in England, which saved Rag from degenerating into a worn-out festival barely tolerated by the people of Manchester. Started in 1962, the Stroll consisted of an overnight walk, first of forty-seven miles from Blackpool, and then of sixty-four miles from Lancaster, to Manchester. In 1974–75 the route was changed, both to increase the safety of the walkers and to eliminate the rising cost of transporting them in buses to the starting point. Walkers now pounded a triangular course which began and ended at UMIST, and took them – if they had the stamina – to Salford, Worsley, Atherton, Wigan, Chorley, Blackrod, Westhoughton, Walkden, Swinton, and back again to their base. Four formidable hills made the journey more taxing than ever. But in 1975 2,800 walkers and a dog began the walk, and 427 humans finished it; in 1976 2,600 started and 385 completed the course. Most walkers got as far as Wigan. Strolling was not a universal practice, for runners of fierce competitive instincts covered the ground as individuals or as teams, and proved that the fastest could make it home in about seven-and-a-half hours.

Whatever the motives of the participants – and sometimes these had little to do with charity – the Bogle Stroll commonly accounted for almost half Rag's income, while the proceeds of the sale of Rag

magazine added another 30 per cent of the whole. Income from the Stroll suffered from difficulties in persuading walkers to exact the promised sums from their sponsors; in 1979, success did not crown the organisers' attempts to programme a computer to send out the necessary reminder letters. A perpetual problem with Rag magazine lay in its penchant for offensive jokes, now deemed to be both sexist and racist, and its stubborn indifference to the dawn of political correctness. Between 1973 and 1975 reports in *Communication* estimated Rag's annual earnings as approximately £30,000. But the takings then began to fall steeply, and the organisation raised no more than £12,000 in 1977 and £16,000 in 1978. In the second of those years it proved necessary to cancel the Rag procession, for the citizens of Manchester were weary of student ritual, and the organisers could not meet the conditions imposed by the police. However, the shock of this break with tradition seemed to concentrate the mind, and Rag showed signs of reviving: the procession took place once more, there was talk of a target of £40,000, and new, public-spirited activities such as organised blood donations began to figure in the programme.

Community Action stood for direct contact between student volunteers and those they were supporting – homeless, elderly, mentally ill, and disadvantaged people in general. Members of the organisation gave advice, encouragement and practical help rather than money. Under its umbrella students undertook many imaginative projects and it set out to support other enterprises which were 'self-help, community-based, run and organised by the local people'. Community Action received an annual allowance from the Union and employed two full-time and one part-time organiser. One of the most enduring activities was the Soup Run, which began when the pubs closed; volunteers asked no questions and exacted no conversation, but handed out bread and soup to anyone who wanted them, providing many clients with their only hot food of the day. Students on the Veg Run begged fruit and vegetables from stallholders in Springfield Market and distributed them to old people, to single-parent families, and to a number of institutions, such as the Ladybarn Community Centre, the Night Shelter for homeless people in Ardwick, and the Battered Wives' shelter in Chorlton.

Early in 1979 Community Action was running about twenty activities, which included clubs and camps for children and young people; schemes for decorating houses; a project for teaching English to Asians; and a Road Show which laid on performances for old people's parties, hospitals, and children's homes. Like Rag, it had ups-and-

downs and suffered from organisational weaknesses; like the Union, it frequently failed to attract enough members to the general meetings which were supposed to lay down policy. Determined to impose tighter controls in the hope of keeping the Union financially buoyant and within the law, the mainly Conservative Executives of the later 1970s irritated Community Action by suggesting that it keep its paperwork in better order. One General Secretary, it was said, failed to realise 'that you can't ask someone who is prepared to stand in the street for three hours giving soup to homeless people to fill in forms in triplicate of how much soup they gave out and who to'. Idealism and accountancy did not mix. But Community Action held together somehow throughout the decade.

Preoccupied with the cost of living, oppressed by deficits in personal budgets, lamenting the inadequacy of grants, quailing before bank managers, constrained to earn money rather than pursue academic knowledge throughout vacations, too proud, sensitive or resigned to beg extra subsidies of parents, many students identified themselves with the poor and homeless. Many chose to live in the poorer quarters of the city rather than hold themselves apart in the self-contained world of the halls of residence and the University flats. Between the 1950s and the late 1970s the popularity of various kinds of accommodation altered in that many fewer students lived in board lodgings; the 'traditional halls' maintained a steady state but took a smaller share of the expanding market; University self-catering flats began to attract many tenants; and, towards the end of the 1970s, students began to apply for and occupy Council flats rather than rely on private landlords. Statistics on student residence published by *Mancunion* in February 1980 disclosed the following choices and preferences:

Private accommodation	36.5%
University self-catering	20.5%
University catered halls	19.0%
At home	12.0%
Council property	4.5%
Boarding	3.0%
Direct leasing	2.5%
Hostels	1.0%
No fixed abode	<u>1.0%</u>
	<u>100.0%</u>

The direct leasing scheme was launched experimentally in 1976, the principle being that the University itself should rent accommodation

from private landlords and itself let the premises to students. By so doing the University could ensure that properties were not damp, dilapidated or dangerous, and protect students from exploitation by unscrupulous operators. For their part, the landlords, often sorely tried by the provisions of the Rent Act, could be certain of receiving their rent cheques promptly. University student flats could not be shared by men and women, but mixed groups were allowed to rent houses within the direct leasing scheme. *Mancunion's* figures suggested that in 1980 93 properties, occupied by a total of 347 students, were included in the enterprise. In 1982 the University Council gave authority to expand the scheme to enable 1,000 students to benefit from it in October 1983.

Traditional halls set out to promote community life, local patriotism and a competitive spirit. They provided some pastoral care and strove to counter the impersonality of a large and potentially bleak University. Their critics, as they had always done, associated them with hearty misbehaviour rather than aesthetic sensibility, and with protracted adolescence, pseudo-gentility and petty regulations. Since they were rival claimants on students' loyalty and provided alternative centres of entertainment, some bad blood existed between them and the Students' Union. When the Union officers issued exhortations to hall members and urged them, for example, to vote on rent strikes, certain hall officers took umbrage. Liaison officers were sometimes appointed in the hope of improving relations between the Union and the halls. One thousand-strong, the Owens Park Student Association (OPSA) resembled a parallel Students' Union based in Fallowfield, and was for a time headed by its own sabbatical President.

For some years the high cost of running traditional halls had made it unlikely that new halls would be established. One, however, was reconstructed in the late 1970s, when Ellis Llwyd Jones, a women's hall whose members were known as Elysians, migrated from its original site in Old Trafford and arrived in Victoria Park as a neighbour of Dalton Hall. Intended to provide places for trainee teachers of deaf people, the old premises were sold to Greater Manchester Council when the special schools for deaf children moved out of Old Trafford and the proceeds were used to rebuild the hall. For the time being Ellis and Dalton merely coexisted, but in 1987 they were to come together under the same head of residence and the same committee. From 1990 they would be officially described as a single item, Dalton Ellis Hall.

The status of some residences changed. Since the late nineteenth century, many had been owned by religious denominations and had at some point been licensed by the University to receive some of its

students. However, in the 1970s two Catholic-owned halls, St Gabriel's, for women (run by the Sisters of the Cross and Passion), and Allen, for men (built by the diocese of Salford), officially became University halls. The University took leases on both at a nominal rent of £1 per annum plus a sum which would cover the insurance of the buildings. It also undertook to maintain the grounds and gardens and (at St Gabriel's) to pay rates and contribute to security costs. Other religious bodies, in the 1970s and 1980s, began to relinquish their licences and sometimes to dispose of their buildings to purchasers who withdrew them from University use. For these reasons, the Methodist college, Hartley Victoria, was lost to the University in 1974. Summerville, the Unitarian College in Victoria Park which had been accustomed since 1905 to receive some University students, gave up its licence in 1985. In the same year the Northern College (formerly, in successive incarnations, the Congregational College, the Northern Congregational College and the Lancashire Independent College) sold its imposing premises in Whalley Range for use as a training centre by the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union, ordinands giving way to officials as secularisation advanced.

Unfriendly commentators on halls of residence veered between predictions that halls would price themselves out of the market by overcharging, and complaints that such was the shortage of accommodation that the wardens could impose whatever absurd rules they liked on students who desperately needed places. Some, it was said, would perform almost any chores at the warden's behest in the hope of a guaranteed place the following year. For a time the Warden of Needham Hall in Didsbury provoked genteel protests against a genteel regime, in which students, greatly daring, contemplated terminating the 'gentleman's agreement' to wear formal dress at Sunday lunch, walking out of dinner before the Warden rang his bell, and perhaps even depriving him of waiters. These mild threats were not, it seems, carried out. Residents of the Moberly Tower, senior students and postgraduates whose average age was twenty-five, complained of regulations more restrictive than any imposed at Owens Park, where 55 per cent of residents were first-year students and the average age was nineteen. Their Warden retorted with complaints of childish misconduct and objections to the vandalising of lifts. Since many of the graffiti which disfigured them referred to the Warden it was hard for the accused to maintain that the crime was an outside job.

In 1975 the Warden of Hulme Hall praised Manchester's halls of residence for their individuality, and rejoiced in their autonomy, the

variety of their architecture, and their escape from the dull uniformity and central control which plagued halls in other universities, old and new. A Hulme student murmured, however, that masculine halls did not cater for a variety of types and rested on 'the assumption that every resident is a beer-drinking, rugby-playing heterosexual'. Laddishness, and to some extent lassishness, were perhaps inevitable consequences of segregation, but this ensured (as the separate Women's Union had once done) that women should have the chance to run their own affairs. Dr French of Ashburne was a firm defender of traditional women's halls, which gave female students 'a chance of being properly in parallel and not sat on by a majority of hefty rigger players'.

One hall seemed bent on self-parody to the point of self-destruction. A close neighbour of the Athletic Ground, Woolton was famous for its sporting prowess. Since its foundation in 1959, it had rapidly invented a range of traditions reminiscent of early Betjeman verses on 'The 'Varsity Students' Rag'. Perhaps the proximity of Owens Park and later of Oak House, the immediate targets of many japes and ritual obscenities, spurred Woolton into cultivating an exaggeratedly distinctive identity based on its own version of machismo. In the winter of 1975–76 there was an unpleasant exchange on the premises between the student President of Woolton and a young man wearing the badge of the Gay Society. The Society were accused of exploiting a personal quarrel to draw attention to their cause, but it was certain that a letter, crude in its sentiments if not in its prose and purporting to come from 'Woolton Hall' (though surely not from the whole Junior Common Room), was sent to and published by *Mancunian*. 'I would like to bring to the notice of your readers an alternative society; namely, "Heterosoc," which holds its meetings at present in Woolton Hall. We believe we uphold the morals of the majority, the laws of nature, and the laws of the land, by denying "Gay" people any rights whatsoever.' Copious correspondence followed, on this and other occasions, in which to their credit some Wooltonians wrote anonymously as individuals to express their own regret at the behaviour of dominant members of the hall. The Warden tried to improve the hall's image by drawing attention to its good academic as well as its excellent sporting record, and to his own policy of promoting an atmosphere 'tolerant of individual views and attitudes'. Wooltonians became indignant at their own notoriety, especially when they found that guards accompanied by Alsatian dogs had been deployed at Owens Park on the night of the Seventeenth Annual Woolton Commemoration Dinner, to discourage roisterers from running amok.

Although, at the end of the 1970s, about 40 per cent of the student population were living in residences provided by the University and many wished to spend the maximum permitted time in them (generally two of their three undergraduate years), a large number had neither the desire nor the means to hold themselves apart from the people of Manchester. Cheapness and accessibility made the notorious Hulme estate, which lay to the west of the University, increasingly attractive to students. Conceived by Wilson and Womersley, who were also the University's own planners, and built between 1968 and 1971, Hulme had provided over three thousand deck-access homes and fifteen tower blocks. But it had rapidly decayed into an ultra-modern slum, described by *The Architects' Journal* as 'Europe's worst housing stock', and destined to survive for only twenty years. A survey conducted in 1975 showed that almost all Corporation tenants wanted to leave the huge, crescent-shaped blocks of flats, a quarter of a mile in length and six storeys high, which had been grandiosely named after the Georgian architects of London and Bath. Student comment alternated between condemnation of Hulme's disastrous structures and a desire to defend its inhabitants against sensational charges that the neighbourhood was rife with crime.

By the mid-1970s the University itself was leasing flats containing two or three bedrooms in Bentley House, Hulme, and subletting this Corporation property to students, providing them with 'basic minimum durables'. By 1978 students themselves had begun to apply through the Town Hall to rent flats directly from the Corporation through a scheme for 'Joint Lettings for Single Persons'. Estimates that there were soon as many as a thousand Owens and UMIST students living in Hulme were probably exaggerated, but the figure given in 1980 does suggest a student population of about 700. More resilient, agile, and unencumbered by pushchairs, students were happy to occupy the upper levels of the crescents when families were moved out and rehoused on ground floors, and the flats had the great merit of cheapness: rents were very low, and allowed the students far more disposable income than did the halls. The *THES* reported, on the authority of the Director of Estates and Services, that students had a good effect on the area, and that neighbours had begun to welcome their presence.

Attempts at characterising students have usually depended on dubious stereotypes, on images formed around the most vocal, vehement, idealistic, eccentric, and badly behaved. In the 1970s, however, the press, as

though balked of its prey and frustrated at the dearth of good copy, tended to concentrate on the unspectacular qualities of students and their lack of originality. It was probably true that the ultra-left and the devotees of direct action had become more distant from the ordinary student population and that their methods, if not their ideals, were regarded by the majority with greater impatience and distaste. Rises in the cost of living and the failure of student grants to keep up with them induced a hard-headed concern with the practical-material. Few students were utopian. They were not averse to protesting, but protests usually had specific and limited aims, such as preventing the demolition of a still-useful building or adding a few pounds to the Union capitation fee. Once challenged, authority often made conciliatory moves. As witness the Alternative Prospectus and the attention paid by *Man-cunion* to certain academic departments, would-be reformers often resorted to adverse publicity rather than disruptive tactics. The welfare services of the Union and co-operative ventures such as the essay bank encouraged students to help each other and the experience of living and surviving in Manchester could provide an education in itself. As James Richardson remembers, 'I learnt how to live on my own. Learnt about renting flats, learnt about landlords, learnt about money, learnt how to spend it, how to be in debt!' Some hall residents and some Raggers maintained the tradition of indulging in licensed student rowdiness rather than gaining worldly wisdom. Others preferred to merge with the city, even to live in its most run-down places, as if, like medieval Franciscans, they were identifying with the most deprived people in society and were distinguished from them not by their worldly goods but by their hope of a better future, their powers of self-expression and their developing skills.