

TO:

Washington State Alumni

and the

Parents of Our Students

The strike at Washington State University has ended. Spring-semester classes are over. Commencement exercises have been held. Most of the students have left. It now seems an appropriate time for us as members of the WSU faculty to pass on some thoughts about recent events on the campus to those who are particularly interested in both the present and the future of the university.

Many of you have undoubtedly been disturbed by what you have heard and read. It is difficult for someone off campus to realize what is happening at the university. Rumor, gossip, and even slander can add to the concern of those who have an affection for and an allegiance to the institution. There are many questions that you could ask. What was the strike about? What are these unfamiliar organizations—the Black Student Union, MECHA, the Three Forks Peace Coalition, the Third World group? Why did President Glenn Terrell even talk with those who presented him with demands? Were classes cancelled and why? Why weren't the "ringleaders" expelled? Were off-campus agitators involved? How extensive was vandalism on the campus? What is institutional racism? Has the university fallen into the hands of drug-using, bomb-setting, spoiled brats? Have the faculty and administration abdicated their responsibilities when threatened with violence? These are important questions, and we hope that we may provide at least partial answers.

Any understanding of recent events at WSU must be related to the tensions existing in American society as a whole. This statement has been made many times; but it is too often forgotten. All citizens are concerned about Vietnam, poverty, pollution, violence, and discord. Students are not indifferent to the problems of the off-campus world. Nor would we want them to be. Many students at Washington State are energetic, ambitious, young people, full of ideas and quick to condemn what they regard—rightly or wrongly—as failings on the part of their elders. Many of their cultural attitudes and their behavioral patterns are markedly different from those of thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago. They are inquisitive and interesting people. And they are definitely not children, to be ordered about or ignored or arbitrarily punished. Any parent who honestly looks at his relationship to his own children realizes that it takes a special effort to listen, to understand, and to persuade. And all these

difficulties are complicated at a university with over 13,000 bustling, argumentative, at times even cantankerous young people who are determined, in large part, to think their own thoughts and to make their own decisions.

THE SIT-IN

What could be called the spring troubles at WSU began in early May. There had been scattered events preceding that date. A demonstration against some Pullman merchants had resulted in vandalism. Arrests had been made, and cases growing out of the episode are now pending in court. On April 4, a fire—the result of arson—virtually destroyed the 10,000-seat south stands on Rogers Field. There had also been several peace demonstrations, an environmental teach-in, and other activities that indicated some unrest on campus.

On May 5, following the announcement by President Nixon that American troops were being sent into Cambodia and the deaths of four students at Kent State University in Ohio, approximately 700 people occupied the French Administration Building. There was no violence, but the demonstrators demanded that the university administration send a telegram to President Nixon urging immediate withdrawal of troops from Cambodia, censuring deaths on other university campuses, and issuing a statement demanding that national guardsmen be withdrawn from all universities in the country.

President Terrell was not on campus when the occupation of the building began. He returned later that day and entered into discussions with those making the demands. After consultation with students, faculty, and administrative advisers, he sent a telegram to President Nixon. The telegram read: "The recent events on the campus of Kent State University and the extension of the war in Cambodia have created outrage and dismay on the part of a substantial segment of the campus at Washington State University. You have observed similar reactions across the nation. Many on our campus deplore the decision to send troops into Cambodia and the tragic deaths Monday of the four students at Kent State." President Terrell also announced that on May 7 the university would hold a teach-in on Cambodia in place of the regular class schedule. After this announcement,

those occupying the building departed.

At this time, as later, there were complaints—both on and off campus—about President Terrell's actions. It is probably true that anything he would have done would have offended many people. One fact, however, must be accepted. Whatever anyone's personal opinion about the movement of troops into Cambodia and the events at Kent State, there is no question but that these occurrences sent a shock wave through American campuses. Student tempers were aroused, and feelings ran high.

President Terrell was aware of this situation and of the implications of his actions. When he sent the telegram, he stressed that "I cannot speak for the entire university." He emphasized that the telegram would indicate only that a sizable number of students at WSU deplored the move into Cambodia and the Kent State incident. "I reached these decisions believing unequivocally that they were wise decisions. I am not defensive about them nor do I make any apologies for either of them." Of the telegram to President Nixon, he said: "I did agree to write and did write to indicate that many on campus were angered over this decision. This is a statement of fact."

Concerning the decision to use a day for a teach-in on Cambodia, he stated: "I made this decision free of any threat of violence by the assembled students if this action were not taken. Rather, I made it because I was convinced as I talked with faculty, students, and administrative advisers that this would be a constructive way for the WSU community to exchange views about the pros and cons of the war and a far better way of letting off steam than through the destructive actions which have occurred on so many campuses. I have urged those organizing the teach-in to achieve a balance of those opposing and supporting the extension of the war in Cambodia."

And he also pointed out that he anticipated criticism. "Some will say if a university agrees to these demands it will be pressured to agree to others also. I do not subscribe to that position. In the past we have rejected requests that we regard to be not in the best interests of the university. We shall continue to do so."

THE STRIKE

Off-campus events—the killing of students at Jackson State and the deaths in Augusta, Georgia—were at least partially responsible for the campus crisis occurring in the middle of the month. On May 18, representatives of several student groups (the most prominent of which were the Black Student Union and MECHA—the Chicano students movement) addressed themselves to so-called Third World problems and presented eleven demands to President Terrell. Those announcing the demands stated that "the time has come to take meaningful and effective steps to eliminate racism from our institution." The demands were prompted by the belief of the Black and Chicano students (and, as it turned out, by large numbers of other students) that personal acts of racism and certain built-in institutional practices were intolerable and that the university should end such acts and such practices. Most of you are probably familiar with the eleven demands. Briefly, they were as follows, and demanded that the university:

1. Immediately disarm all campus police and the ROTC and disavow the use of violence (for instance, National Guard, Highway Patrol, etc.) on campus to disrupt demonstrations.

2. Eliminate all plainclothes and undercover agents (including FBI), cease the compilation of faculty and student dossiers for the purpose of political blackmail, and prohibit university personnel from engaging in undercover work or gathering evidence for punitive actions.

3. Establish a Review Board, consisting of Third World people, elected by campus Third World organizations, to investigate all law-enforcement actions involving Third World people and political cases both on and off campus.

4. Use its legal and financial resources as well as its influence to present a constitutional challenge before the courts to determine the right of Third World defendants to be tried in such a manner and in such a place as will ensure a fair trial and that they be tried and judged by their peers from the Third World.

5. Immediately abolish the university disciplinary board.

6. Establish a Third World board elected by campus Third World organizations with which the publications board will be required to work in fighting racism on campus.

7. Conduct a ten-day racism workshop which shall be mandatory for all faculty, staff, and administration members, to be given at the beginning of the fall semester, and conducted by faculty and students in programs in American minorities studies.

8. Immediately hire three Third World admissions officers whose sole responsibility will be to accelerate recruiting of Third World students.

9. Achieve a racial balance of Third World people proportional to their numbers in the U.S. population among undergraduate and graduate students, and on the faculty, staff, and administration and the Board of Regents, within three years.

10. Not allow any repetition of the loss of key faculty members which now threatens the viability of the Black Studies Program.

11. Immediately remove all non-union grapes from campus.

On May 22, by means of an open letter to members of the university community, President Terrell responded to the eleven demands. Although he rejected all eleven demands, he did so in a reasonable and objective manner which some may feel was too conciliatory. He pointed out that so long as the campus police functioned as part of campus security, it was foolish to disarm them and that ROTC rifles did not have any firing mechanisms. He stated his confidence that the campus could solve its problems without calling on outside law-enforcement agencies for help, and that he would rely upon such outside forces only if absolutely necessary. He pointed out that the university does not maintain dossiers on faculty and students for any political purpose, and that city and county police have the legal right to be on campus when engaged in legitimate law-enforcement activities. He refused to establish special tribunals for special groups of people and pointed out that the university has various mechanisms at hand for dealing with the problems of

minority students. He stated that the university does not have the authority to conduct litigation on behalf of individuals and that representation of individuals charged with offenses in courts is outside the scope of the university's mission of education and learning.

President Terrell said that abolition of the disciplinary board would mean that the university had no responsibility for the conduct of its students. "We are not disposed to take the position that the university should give up its responsibility to make independent judgments about the behavior of faculty, staff, and students." He stated that he was asking the Human Relations Committee to address itself to questions associated with equality of life for all minorities in all facets of university life, including student publications. He said that there are already in existence various workshops on racism on campus and that plans for additional similar activities are under way. But he pointed out that he could only urge, not force, faculty, students, and staff to attend. The university, he said, is engaged in special efforts to recruit minority students and will continue to do so, although there were various factors that made it impossible to assume that the university could achieve the balance demanded. He also explained the resignations of several faculty members involved in the Black Studies Program and stressed the university's commitment to the Program.

President Terrell closed his letter: "We must redouble our efforts to find solutions to problems of racial discrimination. We must use reason, dialogue, and appropriate action. Racial violence and racial inequities will not be solved by countering threats of violence. The university is not a place where solutions should be sought in an atmosphere of confrontation and threats. Our resources can be much better spent in seeking solutions through the application of intelligent search, dialogue, and peaceful action among members of a committed community."

On the evening of May 22, there was a rally of over 1,000 students. Here a vote was taken to strike the university until the Third World students were satisfied that their grievances had been redressed. The call for the strike said that this action "does not necessarily mean that all the demands would be met *in toto*; that is for the Third World groups to decide." In other words, the strike was in support of the Third World students, and the course the strike would take would be influenced by the success the university and the Third World students achieved in reconciling their differences.

Who were the strikers? As always, it is difficult to give exact descriptions of members of a group action or to state with certainty the motivations of everyone who took part. Some participating students (undoubtedly a small minority) were those prepared to take advantage of any opportunity to slam the "establishment." Some students took part just for the hell of it. But the great majority of the strikers were sincerely concerned about the issue of racism. The various strike meetings attracted up to 3,000 people (more than gather at the usual football rally), and almost everyone who had the opportunity to attend any of these gatherings was impressed by the seri-

ousness, the dedication, and the feelings of the assembled students.

Support for the strike was widespread. Students and faculty in departments such as plant pathology, psychology, economics, mathematics, chemistry, fine arts, and others went on record as supporting the general thrust of the strike. Many fraternities, sororities, and residence halls voted overwhelmingly to announce their opposition to racism. Even among many students who did not participate there was a great measure of sympathy for the announced aims of the strike action.

There was opposition to the strike. Some students were opposed to anything that might interfere with their classroom activities. On May 26 a group of students and faculty organized themselves as a University Committee for Rationality. This organization issued the following statement: "We strongly urge the university and individual members of the university community to work for the improvement of race relationships, but we disapprove of the strike as a method, and categorically oppose the participation of university employees in the strike." In addition, there were many off-campus people who indicated their belief that the strike should not be tolerated and that the university should act to end the strike.

The university administration adopted the policy of keeping the university open and of making itself available at all times for discussions. On May 25, the Vice President—Academic issued a statement to the faculty. "Classes will be held during the week of May 25-30 as scheduled. It is expected that all members of the faculty and all teaching assistants will discharge their instructional duties in accordance with their responsibilities to the university and to those students who wish to continue their studies without interruption. The university is firmly committed to increasing the strength and scope of its Minority Studies Program and to attacking racial discrimination in all its forms. A cessation of the instructional process cannot contribute to the attainment of these goals."

RESOLUTION OF THE STRIKE

On June 1, President Terrell announced that the university administration, the Black Student Union, MECHA, and the chairmen of the Faculty Executive and Educational Policies committees had arrived at an agreement, largely a restatement of what he had suggested the university was prepared to do. The following decisions had been accepted by all. A special assistant to the president for minority affairs would be appointed. The new assistant would be responsible for investigating instances of racial discrimination on campus and for making recommendations regarding steps to be taken to improve the total campus environment for minority group members.

Six students—two Blacks, two Chicanos, and two American Indians—will be appointed by the new special assistant following recommendation by the BSU, MECHA, and the American Indian Student Association. This council will work closely with the special assistant to the president and with various student, faculty, staff, and outside agencies.

A number of racism workshops and other programs have been planned for the campus this fall. The univer-

sity also pledged itself, so far as legally possible, to cooperate with the State Board Against Discrimination in its efforts to combat racial discrimination in all segments of society. Two Chicano students have been employed one-quarter time in the Admissions Office next year to assist in the recruiting of Chicano students. The Director of Admissions will employ two Black students and two American Indian students—also one-quarter time—to assist in recruiting students from these groups.

That evening the final strike rally was held. Representatives of the Black Student Union and MECHA announced that they had arrived at meaningful and satisfactory conclusions with the university and that, therefore, the reasons for the strike no longer existed. The strike was then declared at an end.

Comments on the Strike

It is difficult to make generalizations about any event, and interpretations will differ, depending upon the observer and his point of view. Perhaps the best approach would be to attempt some answers to questions that have been asked about recent occurrences at the university.

How much violence occurred?

There were some instances of violence during the strike. The windshield of a passing vehicle was shattered by a piece of wood thrown by a non-student. Legal action in this matter is now proceeding. There were several bomb scares, and one fire bomb was discovered. The Student Bookstore had three windows smashed, and an early-morning fire on May 29—unquestionably an arson attempt—damaged about forty seats on the north side of Rogers Field.

Yet one of the significant aspects of the strike was its consistent non-violent character. There were no dangerous confrontations with campus police (indeed, on one occasion the campus police chief was applauded when he addressed the strikers). There was no rock-throwing. There was no flag-burning. There was a noticeable absence of the empty-headed exhibitionism that has plagued so many campuses. In the face of persistent rumors (armed forces had set up camp outside Pullman, professional revolutionaries were being imported, bounties were being placed on the heads of those regarded as strike leaders, etc.), events never got out of control. At strike meetings, every suggestion that some act of violence be undertaken was immediately rejected. Although picket lines were thrown up around classroom buildings, force was not used to keep students from attending classes, and we found no evidence of physical assault on anyone during the strike.

On May 23, President Terrell and Pullman City Supervisor Larry Larse issued a statement. "Inflammatory rumors Thursday and Friday were rampant both in downtown Pullman and on the WSU campus. The students of WSU and the residents of the Pullman area have been remarkably calm in the face of these rumors, and for this they have our praise and respect." It might be worthwhile to quote from a letter to President Terrell written by a student on May 27. "All the students have demonstrated that they can voice their opinions in a sane fashion and without violence, destruction, or killing. We have

also demonstrated to the people of this community that we can, and will continue to, talk openly and freely—and we encourage them to do the same. We are proud to be able to say that our university has remained non-violent—and has kept its door open at a time when many others have been forced to close and send everyone home."

Was the strike over serious matters?

The strike was not a childish prank. It was a serious activity by students concerned with a serious problem. Put bluntly, it was an expression of student anxiety over the problem of individual and institutional racism. It is somewhat difficult for many older people to realize how concerned many students are about racial discrimination and about the subtle and not-so-subtle ways members of minority groups are continually reminded of what many of their fellow-citizens consciously or unconsciously think of them. We all know that Blacks, Mexican-Americans, and American Indians live in an environment consisting of the sly remark, the patronizing gesture, the only slightly disguised affront. In housing arrangements, in social activities, in their contacts with people, minority students are confronted with frustrating and insulting evidence of the disregard in which they are held.

The official position of Washington State University on the question of racism is strong and steady. In an open letter to students on May 27, President Terrell stated that he "opposes racism in any form" and that the WSU administration "is dedicated to the struggle to eliminate it." He said that his opposition to racism "is the social problem about which I have the strongest personal commitment."

Yet there is evidence that personal and institutional racism does exist at this university, as it does in most areas of our society. Minority students are regarded with hostility by some employees of the university, and certain established institutional patterns do discriminate against such students. Those striking—and large numbers of those who did not strike—were determined that WSU should do everything possible to eliminate any trace of racism on campus. One indication of student attitude here was the response to the possibility that Black students might withdraw from WSU. Many non-striking students were shocked and appalled at the idea of WSU becoming a lily-white institution. In the second half of the twentieth century such a university would be a monstrosity and would be so divorced from what is going on in American life as to violate all the principles to which WSU has pledged itself for eighty years.

Why was force not used to subdue those who were disrupting the routine of the campus?

Large numbers of people are angry about campus disorders and believe that the university should "crack down" on malcontents. We can understand this anger, and certainly a university should seek outside help if life or property is being threatened. But this was not the case at WSU. We feel that troops and police should be brought to the campus only when every other method of resolving the crisis has failed. It is easy to speak of calling in the troops. But the history of campus disorders indicates that the introduction of troops or police onto a

campus immediately leads to intensified conflict. In Ohio, California, Iowa, Wisconsin, Maryland, and other states off-campus police and military personnel have moved onto campuses. The results of such intervention have usually been disastrous to the educational programs of such universities, and this spring over 200 of them were in various states of closure. In most cases when outside force is used on campus, the chief victims have been students who were not originally involved in the disruption and who wished only to continue with their studies. The result of armed intervention is highly unpredictable, and we should remember that the great majority of those students killed this spring have been uncommitted bystanders.

WSU's principal responsibility is to provide educational opportunities for its students. It is not primarily a disciplinary organization, designed to expel students, to break strikes, or to use brutal force against any members of the university community. We think there are better ways to settle campus disputes, and the history of the recent strike indicates that WSU may be uniquely prepared to keep such disputes from tearing the school to pieces.

Can President Terrell handle the situation at WSU?

The attacks upon President Terrell have distressed us. Many of these adverse comments are based upon false information and misunderstanding. As we look back over the events of May, it is obvious that President Terrell did not lose control of the situation. He was dedicated to keeping the university open, to avoiding the use of force, and to carrying on discussions with striking students. He maintained his balance in spite of insults that came from some students and from many interested off-campus people. He did not allow himself to become provoked. He listened to students without being patronizing, and he seemed to be searching at all times for a solution that would be honest, fair, and practical. He was not "faked" into verbal explosions or into abandoning his belief that the university must solve its own difficulties.

President Terrell has been accused of failing to show "guts." This complaint is unfair and untrue. It is easy to bluster about and to threaten and to make statements designed for exciting newspaper reading. It is easy to pose as a military commander and to rush in with flailing arms and angry words. Patience in the midst of threatened

disorder is not weakness; rather, it is the undertaking of rash action that usually indicates that the situation is out of hand and that the man in charge doesn't know what he is doing.

One final fact should be mentioned. In its final meeting of the year the Resident Instructional Staff by a majority vote adopted special grading procedures *for this semester only*. These procedures recognized that the stress of the preceding two weeks might unjustly penalize our students.

Our Appeal

The loyalty of alumni to WSU is well known. The university needs the support of alumni and parents. We are asking you to maintain your interest in the institution. Of course, there are many things about WSU that may irritate you, and certainly we on campus make mistakes. But it is easy to support a university when the weather is fair and there are no problems. Support is more meaningful when we face difficulties. There is a traditional American phrase that sums up our situation: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That is really what we are asking. For support from tough people—tough-minded individuals who are not shaken by rumors or petty dissatisfactions. We are not asking for unexamined approval. What we need is steady, critical determination to stick with the university and with us through some troublesome times.

We have dedicated ourselves to Washington State University, and most of us intend to spend a significant part of our adult lives here. We are not giving up on the university. And why should we? WSU is not, as some have suggested, on the verge of disaster. Our undergraduate program next fall will be the most exciting and varied in the school's history. Our research efforts in many areas continue to contribute increasingly to the health and prosperity of the state. We are enrolling an ever-larger number of students from all parts of Washington who expect WSU to provide quality education and the opportunity to prepare themselves for satisfying professional careers.

This then is our case. We thank you for any consideration the matters we have discussed here may receive. We would be happy to receive your comments on these subjects, to have you visit the campus, or to send a representative of the faculty to meet with any small or large group desiring to speak further about our mutual concerns.

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