

Do not bend or mutilate

The university is a place of learning and light . . . and people say "Oh yeah!"

The president is busy.

He does not look up when you enter his office. An impressive stack of letters have just disappeared under his signature, Walter H. Johns, written with an 'a' almost as large as the 'W' and a 'J' with a monstrous stomach.

If he ignores you for the moment, there is already a hospitable cup of coffee by your chair. Funny, you didn't notice it and sat in the wrong chair. However, you might glance about and see that it is really a very nice office, the one they reserve for the president, but then, it's all part of the insulation, part of the attempt to shelter, protect the administration from . . . "First of all, before we do anything else," (Oh, oh, he wants to run this show) "can you come to supper tonight?"

Huh?

"My wife will have some left-

overs from a luncheon and if you don't mind leftovers . . ."

There is a private phone in the president's office which he must keep tabs on in addition to calls routed through his secretary. As his constant companion, it frequently makes its presence known, say, every few minutes: "Yup, yup, yup, yes. Well why don't I just send it to you? I haven't time."

That stack of official looking letters? He is organizing a club of former university presidents, *Lucem Revidemus* (We See the Light Again) is his proposed title. And there is a personal invitation for tea in Victoria which he must refuse because of a speaking engagement in Vancouver, "No time." His secretary pleads that he sign "one little short letter, I think that's the last one."

Getting around the president's phone is like feeding your girl-

friend's little brother quarters: neither stay away for very long. "It's not a year of loafing" he tells it, "it's a year of work, what the young people say today is doing my thing."

That year starts next August when he leaves the post he has held for ten years to return to his overstuffed bookcase and its many unread volumes. After that you will probably find him in a Classics classroom teaching again.

But today he is an administrator and as such turns an indignant eye towards a CBC television program, *Man At The Centre*, broadcast the night before as an in-depth study of Canadian universities. One has the distinct feeling that the president of the CBC, George Davidson, a long-time friend, will soon hear the president's complaints.

"It was supposed to be a picture of Canadian universities and it MAY have been at most, part of

Berkeley and Columbia. This student who said the university was run by two men, the president and the provost, or our academic vice-president here, and implied that the Board of Governors, none of them being educators, set the courses—this is sheer bloody nonsense and you know it is. The administration does nothing of the kind, it's the responsibility of the instructor. It is the responsibility of the instructor to see that what he has to teach is . . . and I can't think of a better word to describe it, I think it is le mot juste . . . relevant.

NO FACTORY

"I won't accept it, I will deny that it is a factory. The simple fact that you use technical devices does not negate the existence of a community of scholars. I believe the university is a community of scholars. I believe both the instructors and the students are learning, of course it's at different levels. But there is a dialogue and there will be much more when I go back to the classroom than when I left because students speak up today."

His secretary speaks up from the doorway. There is still another letter. "Can you just sign this?"

"THAT," the president asks, "is the last one—isn't it? If I can leave at noon I can get back from Ottawa in time for the dinner." The secretary evaporates.

"If a student who needed to see me, didn't, I went to see them. I collared them and said: 'Look, you're in trouble, what are we going to do about it.' This is one reason I think tests are so important (not necessarily exams under pressure), otherwise how are you going to find out if the student is learning anything? You have got to find out at first hand what the student is doing."

"I never suffered from enormous classes, never had to organize great throngs. But if you must have one or two hundred students in a class your markers must be competent." Possibly, he says, the answer is in the tutorial system, at least outside the sciences. "If there were a 15-minute oral quiz, I could sure find out if he (the student) learned anything."

But there can never be enough time. "The tragedy is that the time in university for learning is so short." To encapsulate his point, the president pulls from an extensive repertoire the Roman proverb: *Vita Brevis, Ars Longa*—life is short, the art is long.

SO MUCH TO DO

For himself, it is a philosophy closer to that of Cecil Rhodes: "So much to do, so little done; he said that on his deathbed you know. I'm 60 now and that is the feeling you get. In the past years I have been learning the art of administration. I've worked hard at it. I have only touched the surface. When you expect a student to prepare himself for a place in society in three or four years, it is a lot to ask. The most you can hope is to instill a hunger for knowledge that will last the rest of his life."

As the end of his long tenure draws close ("Well, there are quite a few (presidents) who've been around quite a long time, I'll admit there aren't very many who have lasted as long, in fact there are very few"), a note of regret, of powerlessness against the times

creeps into his voice. The man at the top of a careening computerized university structure ("It has a life of its own") cannot help but remember the 23-year old Cornell Classics and ancient history doctoral candidate who spent Christmas 1932 in an Ithaca New York rooming house for a sumptuous Christmas dinner of vegetable beef soup and bread. He didn't have the \$15 for a train ticket home to Exeter Ontario.

If it was a lonely Christmas, his memories of it are still indicative of the mood of those now incomprehensible times. "Half of the students didn't have enough to eat. I don't think anyone felt put upon. It was a fact."

"The big challenge then was to mold the economic life of the country so we could get work for people again. There was a desperate effort by people to recover their dignity by earning their own living, to stand on their own feet. The students were very close to that, my goodness, yes."

But now: "There are so many people here that seem almost frantically unhappy and that is most unfortunate. They seem to be hungrily seeking a life to enjoy and they can't find it. They can't enjoy life as it is. They seem to be concentrating on the evils of life and complaining all the time. Of course the ills are there and we should be trying to find out about them. Instead of complaining so frantically about those ills, maybe we should get down and try to cure them."

**Feature by
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DR. WALTER H. JOHNS

. . . lives in a big house on the corner of the campus

"I don't think in their efforts to reform society they have to be so terribly unhappy. I don't think we're any happier today than when we had nothing, when my wife and I had to borrow chairs from the undertaker to entertain."

"Some students bring a closed mind to university. They KNOW society is rotten and there is no good in it. I think we were more open than that. They should be permitted to put their view forward but not permitted to ram it down everyone else's throat—I'm right even if everyone disagrees with me."

If the president ever belonged to a realm of radical student organizations, he's not admitting it. There is one, however; that he remembers with a whimsical smile focused on the days of the idealistic student: "Veterans of Future Wars" was formed in the 1920's and dedicated to the belief that war was a silly way to settle arguments on an international scale. He still believes it but has long since discovered that "those who refuse to study history are doomed to repeat its errors."

But no one was listening when the young professor from Waterloo University presented his comparison of Hitler and Phillip of