

Pittsburgh: The Rocky Road to Academic Excellence (I)

In 1955, before the "excellence" delirium spread through American higher education, the University of Pittsburgh committed itself to becoming an elite institution.

Though a long upward climb would be necessary for most parts of the 168-year-old commuter school, Pitt's officialdom confidently proclaimed the ultimate objective: "the trustees have set forth new goals," said Alan M. Scaife, chairman of the board, "which, when realized, will place the University of Pittsburgh among the leaders of the world's great universities." He added, "We are fully aware of all that this will require, and we intend to provide it."

If Scaife, who died a few years later, had been merely a trustee, his rhetoric might have passed without creating serious expectations. But Scaife was also the husband of Sarah Mellon Scaife, and the brother-in-law of Richard K. Mellon, the head of the vast Mellon industrial and banking fortune and, incidentally, also a university trustee. Board Chairman Scaife was now in his 50's, and, after trying his hand in various corporate enterprises, had fastened upon the university as an object of interest and personal concern. Under the leadership of the Mellons and their various financial and familial satellites, the grimy old city of Pittsburgh was undergoing a multi-billion-dollar renaissance that drew world attention and praise. Frank Lloyd Wright's prescription for the city of Pittsburgh was, "Abandon it." But the powers of Pittsburgh were rebuilding it, and if cities can be swiftly rebuilt, why not universities?

Ten years after Scaife's proclamation Pitt was far from crowding "the leaders of the world's great universities." But it had clearly become good in many departments and at least very good in others. It had elevated its admission standards, doubled the faculty, tripled the physical plant, established a flock of new graduate programs, all the

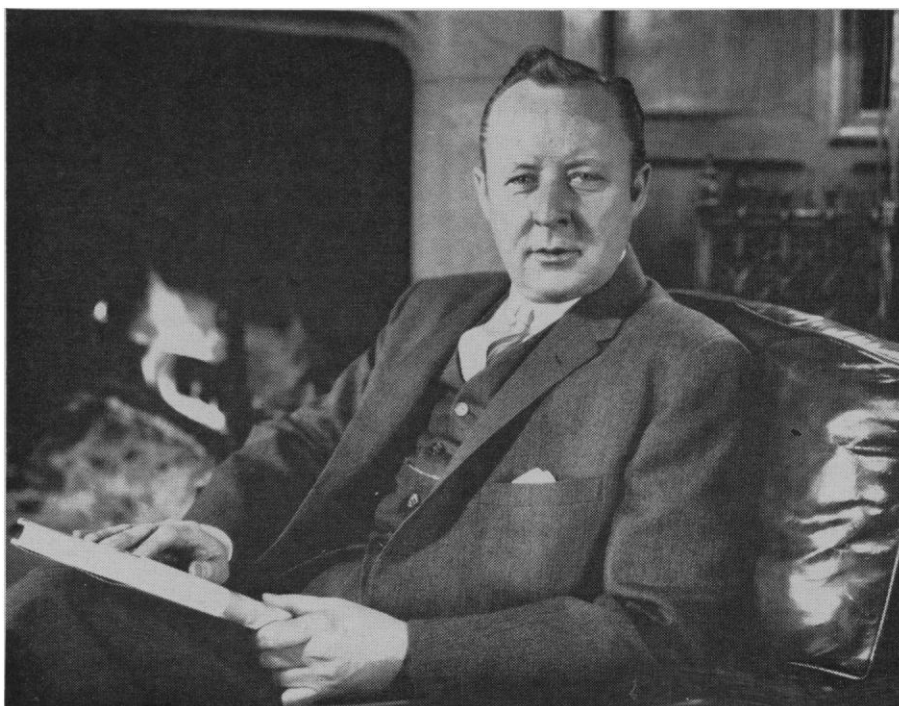
while holding to the 1955 enrollment of approximately 17,000. Graduate students with portable fellowships, a group inclined to be sensitive to the realities of academic quality, were drawn to Pitt in increasing numbers. And on prestigious campuses throughout the nation, department chairmen and deans came to regard Pitt as a raider worth minding, which is one reliable index of what's up in the university world.

Thus, last year, after a decade of striving, Pitt was pointed toward betterment and was moving rapidly. As it turned out, however, Pitt last year was also dead broke—with accumulated deficits of nearly \$20 million—and, at least temporarily, disowned by the power structure that had declared and endorsed the university's aspirations. Pitt, a private institution, had literally run out of money and credit—to the point where, amidst great humiliation and recrimination, it had to appeal to the state for a \$1.25-million emergency

grant to meet the June payroll. (Among other things, the request for state aid provided one legislator with the opportunity to lecture Pitt on its selective standards of admission: "It's the C plus and C minus students who are the backbone of this country," he declared.)

But the money was only a symptom. The ascent to excellence can be a savage and alienating process—and in the case of Pitt it was indeed savage and alienating. In the rich city of Pittsburgh, the university, with the leaders of some of the nation's wealthiest corporations and families sitting on its board, was forced to seek public help to meet its commitments. To protect the laboriously built academic program, some 200 janitorial and clerical workers were fired; and the administration instituted a drastic cost-cutting campaign which extinguished every other light bulb in the corridors and cut down on window washing and trash collection.

Chancellor Edward H. Litchfield, who had been hired at the very beginning to implement the board's designs, found his position untenable. Frank Denton, a Pitt board member who is vice chairman of the Mellon National Bank and, in effect, prime minister of the Richard K. Mellon empire, publicly stated that, when he learned of the university's plight, he advised Litchfield to get "some partners in crime"—meaning, Denton explained, some assistance



Edward H. Litchfield, chancellor during Pitt's decade of great growth.

in handling the university's financial affairs. (When Denton, a poor-boy college dropout who made good, is asked why the Mellons didn't quietly bail out the university to spare Pitt its trauma, he replies: "Don't ask me. I just make the money, I don't give it away.") By last spring, the atmosphere surrounding Litchfield had become highly acrimonious. Toward the end of May he suffered a mild heart attack, and thereafter was effectively out of university affairs.

Meanwhile, the bankers and industrialists of Pittsburgh quietly observed the agony of the university, and, as if to signal the feelings of the local sovereigns, Richard K. Mellon, who in the past had been an extremely generous supporter of Pitt, announced \$7 million in grants to two neighboring institutions, Carnegie Tech and Duquesne. Toward the end of July, Litchfield resigned. And just last month, a study financed by the Ford Foundation recommended that the University of Pittsburgh scale down its aspirations, seek greater state support, and recognize that "it takes time, judgment, dedication, money, and good luck to build a great university."

Walking on the Edge

In the relatively short period of 10 years, the University of Pittsburgh had traveled an impressive distance toward its ambitious goals. What had gone wrong to bring on crisis and a prescription for lesser goals? To say, as has been said, that the university was in trouble because its commitments exceeded its resources, is true but insufficient. (One of Pitt's officials explained: "Lots of universities walk on the edge. We happened to fall off.") Pitt was indeed in deep financial trouble, but in terms of the wealth commanded by those who had prescribed or at least acquiesced in the prescription for greatness, the amounts were trivial. And, without being cavalier about other people's money, it is obvious that, if a few people had been willing to write checks, the crisis could have been papered over and the university's quite messy financial affairs discreetly put in order.

Why, then, did Pitt become the Kitty Genovese case of higher education?

The answers are to be found in a number of places: to a minor extent, in the psychology of philanthropy and the precariousness and rigidities of university finance. When the crisis broke

out last spring, it had virtually no effect on the Medical School or the School of Public Health, two heavily endowed oases in Pitt's fiscal wasteland. Their favored status was referred to by Litchfield as early as 1961, when he pointed, in an address, to "private donors and public appropriating bodies which are so concerned with particular aspects of a university that they flood the parts they favor with all imaginable support, regardless of the impact on the rest of the institution."

"He Didn't Beg Humbly"

To a greater extent, the answers are to be found in the peculiarities of the city of Pittsburgh, the university, and the personalities involved. "This is a business town," said one dean, "and the people who count here send their kids to Yale, Harvard, and Princeton. They really weren't interested in Pitt." And another faculty member added, "Litchfield didn't conform to the style they expected of hired hands: he demanded arrogantly, he didn't beg humbly."

But perhaps, at a more fundamental level, the answers are to be sought in an examination of some of the realities of the academic excellence binge now wracking the nation. What is excellence? Can it be nurtured to swift fruition? And—possibly most important of all—do trustees, civic leaders, and university administrators fully realize what they are committing themselves to, emotionally, intellectually, and financially, when they prescribe "greatness" for that curious organism known as "the university"—especially a university whose trademark is a 40-story pseudo-gothic tower called "The Cathedral of Learning"?

The Pittsburgh inquest must inevitably start with the apotheosis of the New American executive, Edward H. Litchfield, institution builder, corporate strategist, managerial scientist, educational philosopher, equipped with portable dictating machine and private plane, who, at age 41, was summoned by the trustees to become 12th chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, assigned to do for the realm of intellect what the bulldozers, architects, and soot filters were doing for downtown Pittsburgh.

In microcosm, Litchfield had done for himself what the trustees now wanted done for their "trolley car" university. The only child of a Detroit postal employee, he worked his way

through the University of Michigan and overcame a speech defect to become a successful campus debater. After receiving his A.B. in 1936, he unsuccessfully tried for nomination for state elective office, then, in 1940, received his Ph.D. in political science. Two years later, after lecturing in political science at Brown University, he was serving as deputy director of the Michigan Civil Service Commission and teaching public administration at Ann Arbor.

At the end of World War II, a recommendation from a senior faculty member led Litchfield to a position with the State Department's mission to occupied Germany. There his skill in administrative matters and his lucidity in report writing caught the attention of General Lucius D. Clay, and in 1946, at age 32, Litchfield became deputy director and, later, director of civil administration in the Office of Military Government for Germany. The fast-rising young Litchfield also served with the U.S. delegations to the Moscow and London conferences of the Council of Foreign Ministers in 1947 and to the London Tri-partite conference the following year.

"Administrative Science"

In 1950, Litchfield left government service to become a visiting professor at Cornell University's School of Business and Public Administration. Three years later he was dean of the school and was attracting favorable notice as an articulate exponent of the theory that the "administrative process" is a distinguishable craft, or science, irrespective of what is being administered, and that its basic principles are equally applicable to a corporation, a university, a government, or any other organized human activity. To provide a scholarly forum for students of administration, Litchfield founded the *Administrative Science Quarterly*.

Meanwhile, Litchfield was manifesting a characteristic that later was to arouse a great deal of resentment at Pitt: a readiness to take on a multitude of demanding responsibilities. Simultaneously, or in close sequence, while swelling the endowment, faculty, and programs of the Cornell School of Business and Public Administration, Litchfield was executive director of the American Political Science Association, made a study of public administration in Indonesia, and was president of the Governmental Affairs Institute in Wash-

ington, a busy organization under contract to the State Department to administer the visits of hundreds of foreigners each year to the United States.

In addition, he was on the board of AVCO, a large, sprawling corporation, and on the executive committee of Studebaker. Later he became a member of the board—and, soon after, board chairman—of Smith-Corona, now Smith-Corona Marchant (SCM), and was intimately involved in lengthy battles for control and reorganization of that huge and profitable firm. (Litchfield still holds the chairmanship, and, according to SEC records, controls 40.912 shares, which have a current market value of approximately \$50 each. The records also list under his name 6000 shares of AVCO, value approximately \$25 each.) Flying in his private plane from Ithaca to SCM headquarters in Syracuse, to the Governmental Affairs Institute in Washington, and to Studebaker in South Bend, Litchfield was a one-man corporation, which in fact he later became, for he was not only Edward H. Litchfield but also Litchfield Associates, Inc., duly incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Was this the man wanted by the tycoons of Pittsburgh to implement their designs for the university? Indeed it was, and soon a series of coincidences swiftly helped determine their choice.

In 1955, with the incumbent chancellor about to retire, the trustees established a search committee, chaired by Leon Falk, Jr., vice chairman of the university board, real estate tycoon, heir to a steel fortune, a leader of Pittsburgh's Jewish community, and chairman of the Falk Foundation. (In 1965 the Foundation fulfilled its 35-year life charter after dispensing some \$34 million.) Falk occupied a circumscribed position in the Presbyterian-dominated summit of Pittsburgh (for example, he was not a member of the Duquesne Club, the ethnically sanitized social sanctum of the Pittsburgh Establishment). But on matters affecting the university, he and chairman Scaife, a fellow Yale alumnus, had a close alliance. And now, as head of the search committee, Falk was faced with a list of hundreds of possibilities.

Among the names was Litchfield, the bright young comer from Ithaca, and by coincidence, before any feeler was sent his way, Litchfield arrived at the Falk Foundation in quest of funds for



Pittsburgh's "Cathedral of Learning"

a voting analysis project. His lucid presentation, and especially a supporting memorandum, impressed J. Steele Gow, Falk's executive director. Said Gow in a recent interview: "It was a beautiful memo. Each succeeding paragraph answered whatever questions had been raised in your mind by the previous paragraph." Litchfield did not get the money, though later the Falk Foundation joined others in supporting the project, but, upon Gow's recommendation, the Cornell dean's name was moved to the top of the list of those being actively considered for the chancellorship.

"When we met him," recalled Falk, "we could see that he had everything we wanted: contact with business, experience in administration and government. Pittsburgh is an industrial city and the chancellor has to meet with the

leaders of business here. Litchfield fit any blueprint you could find. In fact," said Falk, "if the next guy looks like him, we'll take him."

Said Peter Gray, professor of biology, who was also on the search committee: "Litchfield arrived with a strong recommendation from Gow. We met him and we were enchanted. I did mention to him," Gray recalls, "that Pittsburgh was the most under-administered institution, and I remember that he said that it would be the most over-administered when he got through."

When the trustees offered Litchfield the chancellorship, the Cornell school he headed was rapidly growing in scope and reputation. He was reluctant to move to Pittsburgh, but the mandate for greatness and the professional opportunity were powerful attractions. On 18 July 1955 his appointment was an-

nounced, with the understanding that he would assume his duties the following year. The personal rewards of office were to be a residence, a chauffeured limousine, a generous and apparently open-ended expense account, and a salary of \$40,000 a year, which was \$10,000 more than his predecessor's and even well ahead of the presidential salaries in many of the elite institutions that the trustees sought to emulate.

Now, with high expectations, the University of Pittsburgh turned onto

the road to excellence. At a press conference in the Duquesne Club, Board Chairman Scaife introduced Litchfield and declared Pitt's aspirations to a place among the world's great universities. To the chairman's right stood the youthful, confident-looking chancellor-elect; to the left, Leon Falk, Jr., the discoverer of Litchfield and the board member who most closely shared Scaife's aspirations for Pitt. The surroundings of the press conference suggested that the proceedings were approved on high.

But no doubt was possible when Richard K. Mellon rose to give his benediction. Litchfield's election, he said, "underscores our belief that the University of Pittsburgh must undertake the role of building a great cultural and educational center for the region, a center without which no industrial city can become and remain great."

Thus began a decade of great change in the affairs of the once-placid University of Pittsburgh.—D. S. GREENBERG
(First of a series)

Education: Congress Is Faced with Some Trying Alternatives

When the federal budget is revealed to public view its general features are obvious, but details are not. At first, it is difficult to see the trees for the wood. Second thoughts often follow a second look.

As the President said in his budget message, "A budget is not simply a schedule of financial accounts.

"It is a program for action."

A budget is also a political document and can be compared, not unreasonably, to the opening bet in a hand of poker.

The budget for fiscal 1967 calls for record expenditures (\$112.8 billion) and forecasts what, under the circumstances, is a remarkably small deficit (\$1.8 billion). In order to finance the Vietnam war and a number of new programs without resorting to higher expenditures and a bigger deficit, a number of existing programs have been put to the budgetary knife (*Science*, 28 January).

The budget of the Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare offers an illustration of how this has been done. Total funds administered by the Office of Education would rise by some \$174 million to a total \$3.5 billion in the coming fiscal year. This \$174 million, however, is a net figure. Increases totaling \$561 million would be strongly offset by cuts amounting to \$387 million.

The most conspicuous cuts in education programs would be (i) \$191 million in assistance to school districts with sizable numbers of children of federal employees enrolled; (ii) \$12 million in "special appropriations for land grant institutions; and (iii) merger of the National Defense Education Act loan program for undergraduates and graduate students with the loan insurance program which was part of the Higher Education Act passed last year. A system of private loans to students would be substituted for the present program of federal loans to students made through colleges and universities. The result would be a cut of \$149 million in federal expenditures.

The administration argues that these cuts would be compensated for by funds available under new or expanded programs. But with enrollments and costs increasing in education, cuts, or changes that can be interpreted as cuts, are likely to be opposed. And in the case of the funds for federally "impacted" schools and for land-grant institutions, it is—to mix a metaphor—sacred oxen which would be gored.

Resistance is likely to rally most quickly against the proposed cut of \$11,950,000 out of a total \$14,500,000 in annual appropriations for "resident instruction" in land-grant institutions.

The federal government, under the proposal, would continue to pay the

\$2,550,000 in "permanent" appropriations which the land-grant colleges and universities have been receiving since the late 19th century. The cut would affect the so-called "special" appropriations which have been increased from time to time as enrollment and the cost of higher education has risen.

Administration spokesmen have observed that the funds for the land-grants are no longer needed because of the advent of other types of federal aid. The reply to this from land-grant partisans is that these federal appropriations are among the most useful funds these institutions receive, since they can be used where they are needed most, while other federal programs are "categorical" in the sense that funds are earmarked for specific uses. Most of the land-grant funds are used to pay faculty salaries and are regarded as replacing income from endowments, which most land-grant institutions have in comparatively meager amounts.

Each of the land-grant institutions would continue to receive a flat \$50,000 a year. But the reduction in appropriations for individual institutions would probably fall most heavily on institutions with predominantly Negro enrollments in Southern states. Many of these were originally "separate but equal" facilities which have been underfinanced and still depend on federal land-grant funds for very significant parts of their budgets. In bigger, richer institutions, losses would be proportionally smaller, but they would have considerable impact. Cornell University, for example, has been receiving nearly \$600,000 a year in land-grant funds, and if it lost all but \$50,000 a year, the equivalent endowment needed to replace these funds, at a return of 5 percent a year on investments, would be some \$11 million.

The land-grant colleges and universi-