28 March 1969, Volume 163, Number 3874

SCIENCE

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE: 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: 202-387-7171. Cable: Advancesci, Washington. Copies of "Instructions for Contributors" can be obtained from the editorial office. See also page 1709. *Science*, 29 December 1967. ADVERTISING CORRESPONDENCE: Rm. 1740, 11 W. 42 St., New York, N.Y. 10036. Phone: 212-PE-6-1858.

Difficult Times in Higher Education

The academic year 1967–68 will surely prove to have been one of the most difficult in the history of higher education. Unpleasant, demanding, and accusatory attitudes were in evidence on many campuses. The sobriety of the scholar and the would-be scholar, celebrated in all previous ages, seemed simply to vanish. In some places the spirit of reasonableness, and the desire to achieve understanding with common courtesy, were actually sneered at and contemned.

It is not easy to see why these lamentable lapses occurred, and continue to occur, on college campuses. Some say it is because the present generation of young people, raised aloft on an unprecedented wave of idealism, understandably react negatively when frustrated in their desire to achieve instant reform. But this cannot be an acceptable or sufficiently mature stance in men and women of college age. Nor do the young alone have reason to feel put upon. It takes no youthful perception to see that there is much in this period about which to be both worried and discontented, even angered. All of us are tormented by the war in Viet Nam and its recalcitrant opposition to repeated efforts at solution. None of us is unaware of, or unmoved by, the manifold troubles which confront us at home and the apparent inability of established institutions to make adequate quick response. There can be no question here of a generation gap.

But the majority—happily—do not consider that such perplexities warrant departure from good sense coupled with civility, or condone insistence on having one's own way regardless of others' rights and feelings. Most of us agree deeply with the view expressed by Professor Archibald Cox, in his committee's report on last year's troubles at Columbia, that "a university is essentially a free community of scholars dedicated to the pursuit of truth and knowledge solely through reason and civility." The great majority of us also accept a second of Professor Cox's principles—that "resort to violence or physical harassment or obstruction is never an acceptable tactic for influencing decisions in a university." We go further and recognize that, though opinions will and should differ among us, we can hold different opinions without descending to personal quarrelsomeness and abuse, or without trying to insist, childlike, that only our views shall be heard. We also agree with Professor Cox when he says that a scholarly community, to remain viable, must be organized in such a way as both to produce loyalty and to make possible the redress of grievances.

Perhaps, as some commentators suggest, we are moving through a turning point in history in which old ways of doing things are breaking up. Perhaps we are experiencing shattering fundamental changes the significance of which cannot yet be even dimly discerned. Such explanations seem to me overdramatic. Nevertheless, I must at least concede the possibility that our colleges and universities are only among the first of institutions to be shaken by an all-encompassing sea change now occurring around the world. Though I hope not.

Whatever the portent, things were different in the academic world last year—different and difficult—and they continue so this year. The ivory tower has become a laughably grotesque symbol of the contemporary institution of higher learning. What do we do in such troubled circumstance as we are now experiencing? I suspect the path of prudence for those of us in positions of responsibility for academic institutions is simply to stay alert, to keep mindful of our distant goals, and in a tumultuous sea, to navigate as best we can.—NATHAN M. PUSEY*

*This editorial is adapted from "Harvard University: The President's Report, 1967–68."