

Pittsburgh: The Rocky Road to Academic Excellence (II)

In 1955, when the University of Pittsburgh sought a new chancellor, meritorious candidates did not stream across the Alleghenies in quest of the job. Whatever its aspirations, the university was an academic backwater, and Pittsburgh was still a dingy industrial city. After one candidate rejected a firm offer, the search committee discovered and proceeded to woo Edward H. Litchfield, the rapidly rising dean of Cornell's School of Business and Public Administration. But Litchfield was in a position to be selective and deliberate about his professional choices. His reputation had spread throughout the informal network linking education, government, industry, and the philanthropic foundations. It could be reasonably assumed that he was destined for a summons to some major position, and now that he was at mid-career it was prudent to be cautious about his choices.

When the trustees approached him, Litchfield's response was to attempt to define their aspirations for the university and determine the resources they were willing to expend to attain those aspirations. Over the course of several months in the spring of 1955, he held exploratory conversations with Board chairman Alan M. Scaife and Scaife's close collaborator in the affairs of the university, Leon Falk, Jr., chairman of the search committee. In the socially compartmentalized city, Scaife, of the Presbyterian Mellons, and Falk, a leader of the Jewish community, had found a meeting ground in using their family fortunes to support the university's medical programs. "Socially, Alan Scaife had his friends and I had mine," Falk said in a recent interview, "but on civic matters, it was a close relationship." Three years after Litchfield's appointment, Scaife was dead of a heart attack.

But in 1955 the Scaife-Falk alliance was the principal fount of aspiration for the university. On 1 June, following many conversations with Scaife and Falk, Litchfield wrote to Scaife, "I

thought it would be helpful if I were to set forth my understanding of our discussions." There followed a letter of some 1500 words, which stated, "If I interpreted our conversations correctly, you hope to make the University of Pittsburgh one of the nation's outstanding universities." It was his understanding, Litchfield continued, that the improvement program was to encompass all the disciplines, at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Then he went on to observe:

A program of this magnitude has major financial implications. Preliminary appraisal would indicate the need for additional endowment of from ninety to one-hundred million dollars in the period just ahead. It also indicates a substantial tuition increase once the program has been improved sufficiently to make that increase acceptable to the people whom the University serves. . . .

This is a very far reaching proposal. Indeed, I would suspect that it has not been paralleled in this country, or perhaps in the world, since the great period of development at the University of Chicago.

With remarkable prescience, Litchfield added that, during the period of change,

. . . emphasis must be placed upon the creative and developmental aspects of the move, rather than upon its negative and often frightening "reorganization" aspects. The loss of little "empires" of personal prestige and position must be overshadowed by the dynamic movement forward. I know this is a very general idea, but I think it represents a psychological guide which is often the difference between leading an organization forward and tearing it apart by reorganization.

Litchfield concluded with a caution:

I believe it is of transcendent importance to say that this is obviously a program which will require many years to bring about. To attempt all of this in a brief time would almost certainly jeopardize the whole undertaking.

Two days later, Scaife wrote to Litchfield that his reaction to the letter was "exceedingly favorable," and that he would "confer with Mr. Falk in an

effort to determine the best way in which such a comprehensive program might be 'sold' to the Trustees."

On 17 June, 3 days after the trustees' regular spring meeting, Scaife, borrowing heavily from Litchfield's lengthy letter, publicly announced plans "to make Pitt one of the world's foremost universities." The trustees, he said, had agreed upon a 10-year goal; to reach it, millions of dollars would be sought from industry, foundations, and private philanthropy. No specific sums were mentioned by Scaife, but he read a statement of the trustees that referred to "creation of large and unearmarked endowments." Scaife observed that, in the past decade, Pitt's endowment had grown from \$3 million to nearly \$30 million, and that \$20 million had been added in new buildings, mainly in the health fields. "Comparable and even greater amounts will be necessary in other fields to round out our plans for the university," he said. In mid-July, Litchfield's appointment was announced.

Two months later he spoke at the annual dinner of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. In attendance were some 400 civic leaders and industrialists, the people most directly involved in the renaissance of the city of Pittsburgh. Litchfield made reference to a \$125-million program for the university, and there was stunned silence. Where the figure came from is not clear. Scaife and Falk had obviously "sold" something to the trustees, who included many of the leaders of Pittsburgh. But whether they had mentioned a price tag for the Litchfield program was eventually to become a critical question.

Said Falk last month: "Our understanding with Litchfield was that we wanted to go up and use the Ivy League as a measuring stick. We wanted to get as much excellence as we could across the board. Litchfield said it would cost \$100 million. But there was never any understanding about the total sum." In 1962, in a speech reviewing the years that had passed since the trustees' "historic decision," Litchfield said he had been asked, "Did the trustees know what they were doing?" My answer to that," he said, "is that most of them did and the others soon found out." Last spring, 3 weeks before he was hospitalized with a heart attack, and at a time when the affairs of the university were critical, Litchfield said in a speech: "It is true that when the new administration

came in 10 years ago, it was contemplated that there would be \$125 million in new endowment, in non-medical areas. It was not promised, it was just contemplated. It was not forthcoming."

Soon after Litchfield was formally inaugurated, in the spring of 1957, his administration was in a sense like an army moving swiftly through unfriendly territory: the gains were spectacular and brought a great deal of favorable notice. (*Fortune* was to laud him the next year in a lengthy article titled "The All-Purpose Executive.") But each move forward stretched the lines of goodwill in some segment of the campus or the surrounding community and left behind pockets of hostility.

Inheriting a faculty of 725 members, of whom less than half had Ph.D's, the new administration instituted a process of evaluation—conducted by the faculty itself and several outside groups—that came to be known as "separating the sheep from the goats." Some 250 faculty members soon understood that their continued presence was not encouraged, and, within a few years, 208 had departed. Admin-

istrative posts often went to outsiders. "When he brought in 'names' from big universities, it was easy to take," said one faculty member, "but in many cases, it seemed to me and my friends that the replacements weren't worth all the pain and turmoil that we had to go through."

When Litchfield arrived, Pitt had residential facilities for only about 160 students, some of whom were housed off campus behind the black-painted show windows of former stores. Almost immediately the owner of several apartment-hotel buildings adjacent to the campus offered to sell at a favorable price. Litchfield accepted, and the owners dispatched eviction notices—during the Christmas season. The buildings were among Pittsburgh's most luxurious, and the recipients of the notices included many widows and retired people well-connected with Pittsburgh's influential families. The Litchfield administration had not sent out the notices; the sellers had. But the ambitious young chancellor found himself damned for inhumanity to the genteel aged.

Meanwhile, tuition regularly rose,

from \$546 a year when Litchfield arrived to \$1400 when he departed; admission standards were raised, and emphasis was placed on broader geographical representation in the student body. (Only 5 percent of the undergraduates were from outside Pennsylvania in 1955; last year, the figure was 32 percent.) This pattern was being repeated across the country, but in Pittsburgh, as elsewhere, those who had to pay, and those whose children were rejected by what they considered to be their university, often reacted angrily. Wrote a Pitt alumna to the *Post-Gazette*: "I have seen its tuition increased, and its standards raised in order to make Pitt a 'second Harvard.' Meanwhile, the sons and daughters of steelworkers and coal miners were forced to seek community college legislation. . . . Pitt can't have it both ways. If it wants to be a private Harvard, let it find the money from private sources."

But whatever may have been Litchfield's understanding with the private sources, the amounts specified at the outset were not forthcoming, and most of what did come was not in the



Chancellor Litchfield (center) on the grounds of the controversial Heinz Mansion.

form of the "unearmarked endowments" cited in the trustees' 10-year plan.

When Litchfield arrived, the University's annual budget was \$11.3 million, and the endowment had a book value of \$24.6 million, which probably provided income of approximately \$1 million a year. Ten years later, the annual budget was \$46.3 million, and the book value of the endowment was \$61.5, which probably generated an annual income of \$2.5 or \$3 million.

"The Most Distinguished Professorships"

Litchfield's most ambitious designs were in the long-neglected non-health areas, but the gifts from the wealth of Pittsburgh—with one major exception—continued to flow into the health fields. In late 1958, a few months after Scaife died, Litchfield announced that the A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust was providing \$12.5 million in endowment for 16 distinguished chairs, with salaries of \$25,000 each, as well as 50 predoctoral fellowships and six to nine postdoctoral fellowships. "By reason of salary," Litchfield told a university convocation, ". . . these will be the most distinguished professorships in the disciplines in the United States today."

But the underlying reality was that the University of Pittsburgh was entering a period in which the flow of money was not to keep up with the designs of its ambitious chancellor. The \$12.5 million was about all he was to get in unrestricted endowment; most of the rest, in great chunks, was to be designated for the health professions. Money for construction was forthcoming from private and state sources, but when the construction was completed, where were the funds to be had for using the new buildings? The Pitt post-mortem financed by the Ford Foundation concluded that the university's cost per student rose from \$1028 to \$2021 between 1957 and 1962. During the same period, the average per student expenditure at private universities in the North Atlantic states went from \$1294 to \$1766. By 1964, Pitt's cost per student had risen still further, to \$2310, but tuition was only \$1400, and the usual means of filling the gap—income from endowment, gifts, and alumni support—were insufficient.

Meanwhile, additional strains were being introduced into the finances of the fast-growing university. It was a mark of quality, the univer-

sity asserted (a characteristic of the academic *nouveau riche* is incessant public stocktaking), that Pitt was the recipient of an ever-increasing volume of federal research funds. In 1965, the annual budget of \$46.3 million included some \$20 million in federal grants and contracts—an impressive growth from the \$2.4 million of a decade ago. But federal grants are deliberately designed to require some financial participation by the university, and they were costing Pitt more than they brought in. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which by statute provides annual funds for its private universities, was not disposed to underwrite the university's ambitions. In 1958 the state was providing Pitt with some \$4.5 million a year, a sum that amounted to about 27 percent of the university budget. By 1965 the annual state contribution had risen to \$6.9 million, but this amount was considerably less than 10 percent of the annual budget. As the university's financial situation became more critical, relief was sought by raising the tuition. But Pitt was pricing itself out of the local market, and, after one increase, enrollments actually declined. Meanwhile, appeals to the alumni were ineffective. The new administration had in effect been telling them that the place of their education was defective. At the height of the financial crisis last year, with 64,000 living alumni, Pitt was able to raise only slightly over half a million dollars.

The Role of Good Luck

The Ford study cited the importance of "good luck," among other things, as a necessary ingredient for building "a great university." When Scaife died in 1958, Litchfield lost his main entrée to the powers of Pittsburgh. Scaife's ally in university affairs, Falk, was vice chairman of the Board, but did not succeed him. ("Falk didn't want it and besides, it wouldn't have been appropriate for him to be chairman," says someone who was close to both men.) Scaife's successor was Gwilym A. Price, a Pitt law alumnus who had risen through Pittsburgh banking and eventually gone on to become head of the Westinghouse Electric Corporation. Price, it is said in Pittsburgh, is not a Mellon man, and was not disposed to go to the "39th floor," the locale of the Richard K. Mellon interests in the U.S. Steel building, to plead for funds for the university. Furthermore, his chairman-

ship partially coincided with a particularly turbulent period in the affairs of Westinghouse, and the university apparently did not rank high for attention. (Since the financial crisis, Price, now retired from Westinghouse, has been devoting his full time to Pitt and was praised by the Ford study for his efforts.)

Meanwhile, Litchfield found himself drawn into a series of often-irrelevant but bruising rows, and it became clear that to preside over the affairs of an institution is one thing, to control them is another.

When he announced plans for expanding the campus and creating a great industrial park, local residents reacted angrily. The intention to acquire nearby real estate stirred a local disk jockey to a spoof, in which he declared he had no territorial ambitions beyond a nearby piece of land—to a background chorus of Heil! Sieg Heil!

The Mansion Controversy

In 1961 the university, with the aid of an anonymous special gift from the labyrinths of Pittsburgh riches, purchased, for \$150,000, a 36-room mansion owned by a member of the Heinz food family. The intention was to use the building for a conference center. Zoning regulations forbid this, and the house stood empty for 2 years, arousing the ire of neighbors, who said it was drawing vandals to the area. Finally, the trustees directed that the house should become the chancellor's residence. The initiative was not Litchfield's, but apparently he was not disinclined to be housed in such seeming splendor. Soon, however, the "Litchfield house" was the center of a raucous, highly publicized fight over what percentage of the building was devoted to educational purposes and therefore exempt from local taxation. Whether Litchfield enjoyed generous entertaining, or felt it was part of his duties, or both, the fact is that the stately halls of the Heinz mansion became the center of a conspicuous social whirl. Prospective faculty recruits were given what was referred to as "the treatment," leading some of them to conclude that Pitt must indeed be an affluent institution. The chancellor also saw value in ceremony and, with newly designed academic robes, was given to holding university-wide convocations. It was readily agreed that Litchfield was performing academic wonders for Pitt. But some called him "King Edward," and

fixed their attention on nonacademic matters.

Throughout his chancellorship, those so disposed could find ample data to arrange in a hostile pattern. If the university had financial problems, why did Litchfield live in the Heinz Mansion? Litchfield had a chauffeured Cadillac; the president of nearby Carnegie Tech got along with a chauffeured Oldsmobile. Litchfield, still holding on to his corporate interests, regularly was flown about the country in his own plane, charging the costs to the university when on university business. At least a dozen university presidents in this country are provided with planes from the university budget, but those who wished to look askance could find grounds for doing so.

In 1961 Litchfield reacted with speed and shrewdness to protect a member of the history faculty whose loyalty was questioned under the state's subversion laws. He appointed a distinguished fact-finding committee, staffed it with members of a respected local law firm, and then issued a report which might well be regarded as a minor classic of academic freedom. "I would respectfully suggest that those who publicly try by innuendo and condemn by inference," Litchfield wrote, "are not different from those who purge without a hearing; that intemperance and absolutism are equally dangerous whether they arise from within or without; that vigilance, like Janus, must look in both directions." The faculty was pleased, but in conservative Pittsburgh the chancellor didn't win many credits.

In April 1963 Pitt awarded an honorary degree to Edward Teller. Ten members of the physics faculty wrote a letter of protest to a local newspaper. Their department had not been consulted, they said, and furthermore, they did not like Teller's views on disarmament. Ideological amends were achieved 3 months later in the award of an honorary degree to Harold Urey, but grievances can long survive in the academic atmosphere, and some faculty members were muttering for a long time about the Teller award.

In March of last year Litchfield assisted some students who wished to participate in civil rights demonstrations in Alabama. He soon found it necessary to issue a public defense of his act. "This university," he said, "takes for granted the right of every student to speak of what is on his mind and encourages him to do what



Pitt trustees seeking state aid at legislative hearing. (Left to right) Former governor of Pennsylvania David L. Lawrence, Board chairman Gwilym A. Price, and Board member Frank Denton.

he considers appropriate to pursue his convictions. . . . We insist only that he speak and act with regard to the law of the land, the regulations of the university, and the rights of his fellowmen." But in Pittsburgh, some savage realities underlie the patina of civility. Not long before, a Negro civic leader, waiting for a luncheon appointment in the lobby of a private club near the university, was asked to leave. Litchfield's embrace of civil rights did not win him friends in those parts of the community whose support he desperately needed. In one way or another, all these incidents—the loyalty affair, the honorary degree, the Alabama episode—have been repeated on campuses throughout the country without seriously harmful effects. But the university was now like a wounded creature, and in no condition to increase its burdens.

It was against this background that the Litchfield administration gradually began to feel the effects of financial malnutrition. The 1958–59 academic year ended with an annual deficit of \$159,473 but an accumulated surplus of \$952,575. In other words, Pitt spent more than it took in during that year, but, from a variety of sources, it had a financial cushion which far exceeded the year's deficit. The next year, however, the annual deficit totaled nearly \$2 million, and the cushion was gone, replaced by an accumulated deficit of \$956,747. The following year, the short-term financial prospects again looked bleak, and, according to a budgetary apologia issued by the trustees following Litch-

field's resignation, Pitt made "a fundamental fiscal decision." The administration predicted that the university, with its quality now fast on the way up, would be operating in the black in 2 years. The Board therefore agreed to obtain a \$10-million loan "to finance a 'great leap forward' educationally and to carry the institution through its period of deficit." Pitt borrowed \$10 million from the Equitable Life Assurance Society of America, at interest of 5¾ percent per annum, repayable in quarterly installments, starting in fiscal 1963–64, when a surplus was predicted. In the year of the borrowing, the deficit was projected at \$2.1 million; it turned out to be just a bit short of \$3 million. In 1961–62, the deficit was expected to be \$1.9 million; it turned out to be nearly \$2.9 million. For 1962–63, the deficit was predicted to be \$2.4 million; it turned out to be almost a million dollars higher. Behind the façade of affluence, there was taking place a desperate juggling act. Current expenses were met by dipping into unearmarked money that had been assigned to endowment. Federal research funds not immediately required by grantees were stuffed into the dikes. (The research agencies, however, appear satisfied that all funds were available when needed by their grantees, and that all their payments to Pitt are fully and properly accounted for.) This shifting of money from one account to another, known as borrowing from special funds, is a commonly accepted practice for meeting short-term cash needs in most businesses, including universities. But at Pitt

the internal shifting of money took on the aura of a handful of defenders racing around inside a great perimeter to give the outside world an impression of strength. In 1955, the borrowings from special funds totaled \$1.1 million. By 1962, it was over \$10 million.

The Pitt administration had planned to raise the tuition from \$28 to \$36 a credit hour in 1963; but western Pennsylvania was economically depressed, and it dared go no higher than \$33 per credit hour. At the end of the year the Equitable loan was exhausted, and Pitt borrowed another \$5 million.

By now the accumulated deficits totaled \$10.2 million. The academic year of 1963-64 ended with a \$4.5-million deficit. By mid-1965 Pitt was a fiscal shambles, appealing to the state to bail it out. Will you close down if you don't get the money? inquired one state legislator. "Just give me one alternative," replied Frank Denton, the Mellon National Bank vice chairman who came on the board after Scaife's death. Litchfield's budget forecasts were "pipe dreams," they were "worthless and misleading," Denton declared. "I don't understand why we [the trustees] are being blamed for speaking up now," he said; "If we were wrong at all it was in not finding fault earlier." Board chairman Price took a different tack. "Litchfield," he said, "has done more for Pitt in one decade than another more conservative man could have done in five decades." Pitt, Price concluded, had simply tried to improve itself too quickly.

In close relation are the questions, What did Litchfield actually do for the quality of Pitt? and Why didn't he simply get out when it became apparent that adequate support was not being provided? The answer to the first is that Litchfield put Pitt on the academic map; that when he arrived, from the deanship of a school of business and public administration, and with a background in corporate affairs, the faculty feared that a bookkeeper was taking over. Throughout his tenure, however, it was apparent that, while bookkeeping was not his forte, he had a sound instinct for academic quality, and a passion to build it at Pitt. When a department chairman wanted to hire a man, apparently Litchfield's last thought concerned where the money would come from. Against a good deal of indifference and opposition, he was constantly trying to create what he called the "organic institution"—breaking down disciplinary barriers, estab-

lishing ties between the university, the community, and industry. In administrative matters he was a widely copied experimenter. Perhaps his best-known innovation was the trimester plan of three 15-week terms, which, he believed, would not only speed the educational process but would also produce a good deal more education from the same financial overhead. In 1960 Litchfield claimed that, in the previous year, the third term trimester had "produced \$400,000 in excess of our expenditures for instruction." But the third trimester, though staffed for a large student load, never filled up, and, ironically, the Ford study concludes that the trimester plan is responsible for "a major share" of the cost increases that overwhelmed the university.

When things started to sour, why didn't Litchfield abandon Pitt, or decelerate its growth? Along the way, some business friends advised him to shut down parts of the university

if more money were not provided. But a tenured faculty cannot be shut down. He tried to save \$50,000 a year by closing the Allegheny Observatory, in the belief that it was no longer scientifically productive and was playing only a minor educational role. But friends of the observatory appealed to astronomers elsewhere, who appealed to their chancellors and presidents. Litchfield was soon receiving embarrassing inquiries, and he dropped the plan. By the early 1960's, when the financial cracks were first appearing, he was close to having doubled the faculty. These were his people who were coming to Pitt, filled with promises from the ever-optimistic chancellor. He couldn't leave, and he couldn't stop the growth.

There is no question, however, that Pitt made incredible progress in Litchfield's decade. Did it grow more as a weed or an oak? Maybe some of each, but in any case, the test is that Pitt now counts as a significant academic center and in 1955 it did not. Under Litchfield, it simply became better and bigger in many important respects. It acquired departments of anthropology and general linguistics; the department of geology was expanded into a department of earth and planetary sciences; the business school became exclusively a graduate division; new graduate schools were established in Public and International Affairs and Library and Information Services; interdisciplinary centers were set up in nine separate fields, including philosophy of science, space research, computing, Latin-American studies, regional economic studies, and learning research. The university also established three regional undergraduate campuses to serve rural parts of the state; it even sent faculty members to assist with the development of universities in Nigeria and Ecuador. Too much, too fast? Hindsight suggests yes. But it is also worth considering that much of the Pitt experience is not unique. It was the first institution to make the break for instant excellence, and it was the first to stumble. But many others can be seen laboring along the same path. They don't necessarily have direct equivalents of the Litchfield-Scaife-Mellon-Pittsburgh complex, but they have an assortment of related problems, and the identical problem of forcing rapid growth and quality in something as ornery and as little understood as that organism which is known as the university.—D. S. GREENBERG

(*Second of a series*)

AEC Panel Named

An advisory panel on **accelerator radiation safety** has been created by the Atomic Energy Commission. The members will act as consultants to AEC field office managers. Requests for the panel's services should be made in writing to the Commission's Division of Occupational Safety, Washington. Special attention will be given to proposed accelerators having energies and intensities in excess of those of existing machines. Existing accelerators operating at energies above 20 Mev will also receive attention. The panel includes:

Miguel Awschalom, Princeton.

Frederick P. Cowan, Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Keran O'Brien, AEC Health and Safety Laboratory, New York.

Roger Wallace, University of California.

Robert V. Wheeler, Argonne National Laboratory.

Edward J. Vallario, of the Division of Operational Safety, AEC, will act as liaison between the Commission and the advisory panel.