

*The University's seventy-eighth Commencement Exercises were held in Lawrence Frost Amphitheater June 15, 1969. W. Willard Wirtz was the principal speaker and traditional Greetings to the Class were delivered by President Pitzer.*

## ADDRESS BY W. WILLARD WIRTZ

WOODROW WILSON remarked once that a short speech, out of doors, permits only the compound fracture of any worthwhile idea. Yet Commencement speakers go on. This year, their rusty cliches and bromides shot down by events, they circle helplessly over temporarily demobilized zones like helicopters—badly exposed, totally defenseless, making more noise than progress—hoping the Baccalaureate cease-fire will hold, and mortally afraid of firing the first shot, just by accident.

Today's categorical imperative, though, is to be relevant—to now. It would be as wrong to be silent at Stanford about today's crisis on the campuses as to seek sanctuary at some little South Dakota college to inveigh against what was called there last week an "insurrection" by those "intoxicated with the romance of violent revolution."

So I have done what distance and the press permit to learn the facts of local circumstance, including a whole new set of initials (SRI and AEL, ASSU, SDS and SES, YAF, A3M) and such a complex of fertilized councils and boards as might confound a Congressional committee if it were to manifest a dubious interest at the wrong time.

But this a dangerous kind of partial acquaintance. Cervantes' Man From La Mancha, dreaming his not so impossible dream, laments that "facts are the enemy of truth"—which they are when you know only part of them. To try to learn, as I have, what April really meant at Stanford is to wonder anew how much this year's events have been exacerbated by the newspapers' myopic obsession with whatsoever is bad and by the public's addiction to the hallucinogens NBC,

CBS, and ABC. You wonder how big a factor it is that the most outrageous conduct assures national notoriety, while earnest, quiet, constructive efforts go totally unnoticed, and by what license the media give such unequal time to reason and anti-reason.

Yet there can be no responsible diminishing of the facts, for they are that the very meaning of a free society and of a university are challenged today—by a claim that obstruction and destruction, disdain for law, and brutish contempt for disagreement, are valid forms of protest and dissent.

They are not. They violate reason itself.

To the extent that such claims create immediate crises, they require action which a stranger to the campus, an invited guest, could comment on only at peril to the situation and with no conceivable possibility of helping out.

The roots of these disruptions clearly reach, however, far beyond the campuses, into the whole national community and around the world. These remarks proceed from the sense that behind the tormenting *facts* of an apparent claim of validity for disorder, a much larger issue of *truth*—or *untruth*—is being raised. *This issue is whether an almost absolutist idealism—that totally rejects the procrastinating counsel of experience—can be an effective force in the pursuit of human purpose.*

I have no way of knowing how much this dignifying issue is in the thinking of those in the forefront of this year's activities. I expect this varies. But it is clear that this question of whether idealism *can* be effective—with or without disorder—looms very large in the minds of a great many young Americans today—and a great many older ones; and that grave doubt about the answer is a critical element in the current unrest. It seems reasonable to believe that if youth could be given confidence that what it believes in has even a fair chance of working—even just that part of it we have told them we believe in—disruptions would still flare up on the campus, but they would go out like paper matches.

In the belief, then, that youth does not demand that we accept its answers but only that we ask its questions, I take a few minutes to face the one that seems to me most fundamental—and most difficult. Is there basis in hard reason and honest hope

to believe that idealism that insists on working *now* has any better chance today than it has had in the past?

My answer is yes—on one critical condition.

This condition is that youth make now on the community of the country and the world the same kind of demands that it has made on the colleges and universities—with the same degree of persistence.

This is a Spartan condition.

The targets for this year were close at hand, in easy range: research laboratories conducting CBW (chemical-biological warfare) experiments a few blocks from the dormitories; worn out university procedures that people on the other side of a single desk could change. And protagonists and antagonists alike shared the basic commonality of a belief in reason.

Tomorrow's objectives have to be the malignant anachronisms of a government that seems to be out of range and held by those with intransigent interests in the status quo. How much will youth's spirit wane when the targets have to be getting rid of the rule that permits filibusters in the U.S. Senate; breaking the bondage of the seniority system and the Rules Committee in the House of Representatives; applying conflict of interest rules to legislators as well as judges; mending corrupt practice acts that are today only chicken fences built by foxes?

Will youth fight as hard for "maximum feasible participation" by the poor in the poverty program as it has for a black studies curriculum?

I mean no discouragement. I hope and believe—for the first time—that *this* idealism has muscle.

But are those muscles strong enough to press on beyond little victories and drive through to the fundamentals?

SRI is one thing. ABM is another. Just being "against the military-industrial complex" is only a catharsis unless a clear set of affirmative priorities is finally established. Stopping war is at the head of youth's list. It has to be. But peace will be a half-victory until its dividends are plowed back into humanity's common enterprise.

There is another fundamental. We call ours, properly, "the civilization of the dialogue." Yet this dialogue has become too much a politics of

poisoned catch-phrases marshalled by ghost-writers and read then by statesmen from hidden teleprompters; too much a religion of rituals that obstruct the larger faith that reason offers; too much the jargon of calculated deceit in which we hawk the products of our commerce; too much the commercialized dominion television seizes over the minds of a people's children. Idealism will work only if the trash is cleared out of democracy's dialogue, so the truth can get through.

One other thing about putting idealism on an effective working basis: idealism rejects by its very nature the concepts of compromise and consensus. This means that the advocates of change are inevitably weakened by internal dissension, for they want different things, or the same things in different forms. The custodians of inertia face no such problem. They unite "only from nervousness, not from goodwill" around the centering idea of things as they are. So, today, those who believe in human equality are split into those who say "separate is not equal" and those who demand separatism as the measure of equality—to the infinite advantage of those who oppose equality in any form.

Idealism will work only if idealists—youth—will make these compromises—not with tradition or the Establishment, but among themselves—which the advocates of change have to make to counteract the monolithic inertial force of the status quo.

Is this too large an order? I don't know. I don't believe so. I hope not. For I think the future hinges, and the case for idealism depends, on youth's staying power.

It is left to say what reason there is to believe that this case is any better than before—even if the condition is met.

This depends, for me, on a reading of these totally incomparable times, with full realization that there has been such a reading, especially at Commencement, time after time after time before. But I find, even in the fact of your outbursts, the reflection of this same view.

It can't be your thought that it just happened that you, among all the college generations you join, decided suddenly to assert what has always been called "youth's unconquerable spirit."

It didn't just happen at all.

What happened is that you came along at the time of an almost fantastic change in the balance of power between man and nature—at the end of an incomparable decade of scientific and economic and social achievement—very possibly at that remarkable second in infinite time when Man suddenly discovered that the force that controls Man is Man, and then immediately got in trouble with his new boss. Walt Kelly put it best, in the mouth of Pogo: "We have met the enemy, and it is us."

We had talked for a long time as though we were in charge. "The difficult," we liked to say, "we will do immediately; the impossible will take a little longer." But we didn't believe ourselves. We put up indefinitely with intolerable circumstances: war, pestilence, hunger, pollution of our whole environment, a choking increase of population. Our excuse was that we couldn't help it; that outside forces—higher, lower, natural, supernatural—were in control. That was our religion, our science, our economics, our politics, our morality.

When idealists and visionaries asserted a greater human ability that would overcome these conditions, they were told in the colloquialism of the times to "go jump over the moon."

They did. Most of science fiction has become fact in the past 10 years.

Then we asserted our dominion over economic laws that had previously been assumed to operate inexorably on a roller coaster of prosperity and depression—and are now in the ninth year of evidence that the economy is servant, not master.

In the areas of social concern, greater advances were made in the first two-thirds of this decade against the forces of apocalypse—ignorance, disease, poverty; all of them except war—than in most of the previous centuries.

Yet the rest of it is that while we stand now at the very portal of the realization that the human capacity includes the competence to greatly perfect the human condition, we hesitate. We know, as individuals that we can do just about whatever we set out to do. But the newly realized human capacity is in people collectively, acting through institutions—and institutions are congenitally arthritic. Even as individuals, we are also taxpayers

—and don't want to pick up the check for our affluence.

I find myself thinking sometimes of what promise there might be in a political coalition of those under 25 and those over 55, on the theory that it isn't really age that matters but rather that the middle years are afflicted by debilitating ambitions and obligations. And very soon now the young and the old will outnumber their common enemy.

This seems to me, in any event, the time youth has waited for—a time when the shackles of the old superstition of determinism have been thrown off, when the excuse of “outside forces” has been reduced to an empty alibi—when the society is in a state of suspended expectation—and youth's idealism is the obvious catalyst.

That's all.

And if it should seem that there has been nothing here at all about disorder and lawlessness and contempt for disagreement, I can only say that I find answers to them in whatever reason there is to believe, as I do, that a tougher-minded idealism will work—better.

I have tried to say “stay with it.” Mr. Justice Holmes put the reasons for it better. “A man,” he said, “should share the action and passions of his time—at the peril of being judged not to have lived.” He won't mind adding “so should a woman.”

Goodbye, and good luck.

## GREETINGS TO THE CLASS BY PRESIDENT PITZER

**Y**OU ARE NOW ALUMNI of Stanford University, and I congratulate you. (As such, you are the first alumni group I have met this year that does not require an explanation of what has been happening on the campus.)

Surely this is one of the most distinctive classes in the history of the University. It is unusually rich in traditional training and social perspective.

You came to Stanford the year the war in Vietnam was escalated, and you have studied in the shadow of that war. You have seen American ghettos in flames. You have watched anxiously the rapid growth of world population. You have seen three of your countrymen circle the moon, and thousands of them marching in the streets. You have taken part in a thorough review of Stanford education, and you have witnessed demonstrations that threatened to halt the work of the institution. You have been productive, and you have been perceptive.

What does Stanford expect of such a class? What do you expect of Stanford? We expect much of you, and I trust that you expect the same of us.

I imagine that you would like Stanford to continue its traditional work, for the problems that dismay us all will yield only to perceptive attack by enlightened men.

I imagine, too, that you want your University to be sensitive to new values and receptive to new ideas. You expect us to be willing to change, for stubborn inflexibility is an illness of our time.

And I hope that you expect—and will support—our efforts to keep the University a neutral forum for the expression of all points of view. The world has desperate need for such places, and they must remain politically unbiased if they are effectively to remind society of the gaps between its ideals and its deeds.

We shall try to do all those things.

For our part, we expect you to contribute conscientiously to the advancement of mankind. A nation is awakening to the depth and breadth of its problems, and to its tardiness in dealing with