

A Letter From
Hector Prud'homme

Revolution of the Wheel

This may be the final 1969-70 issue of the UH Liberated Press. The French say, "Partir, c'est un peu mourir," which is applicable whether you are parting from a person, a place, or an endeavor. In life you come to understand that you are all the time giving something of yourself to people, and taking something from them, unconsciously. The more you give the more you get, and somehow the more giving and taking there is, the richer you all are in the end. I feel this way about a lot of things this past year. So, to graduating (?) students with whom I have worked, and on this occasion of course to those on the Liberated Press, I recognize a debt, and say "Farewell."

Now to what is yet to be done and how to do it. There is an enormous amount to do, but I will not discuss the issues themselves — there isn't space. I would like, however, to talk about organization and method — that is, the "how to" of anything that needs to be done.

First, a word about "the revolution." There are various grades of them — from the convulsion that was the French Revolution to the quiet turning of a wheel. A wheel turning once makes one revolution. I say it is a good revolution, without creating havoc or shedding blood, when the wheel moves to a new and better place. The wheel is our lives, and the new place is where we are going. I am for the Revolution of the Wheel.

The enormous amount remaining to be done has got to be done through the political process. It is somehow part of the fiber of Americans, whether they came to this country early or late and whether they suffered or prospered, that political change is tied to the Constitution and absolutely not to the coup d'etat and armed force syndrome. I think the current movements (Strike, etc.) are converging towards the political process, notwithstanding what Jerry Rubin says, and notwithstanding that ten days ago we heard the voice of the working man saying "There are millions of people like me. We're fed up with your movement. You're forcing us into it. We'll have to kill you. All I can see is a lot of kids blowing a chance I never had." Though Rubin might like to set things up so they would happen his way, and although the working man is making fighting noises (and it's a real threat) at anyone trying to smash the democratic system, there is a clear difference. Get out the vote! I think history will record that the current outpouring of spirit in action not only shows democracy is alive but that this spirit is revivifying the democracy. In short, there is, it seems to me, a convergence of action through the political process, which the system is designed for — freedom of speech, the press, peacefully to assemble and to petition, the right to vote and elect or replace representatives.

Something that has bothered me about the action of "the young" is the confusion and fear needlessly caused. Take the University. Hartford people and parents are confusedly asking, or jumping to conclusions, about who is taking what position on what, who is in authority, how much agreement there is, how the University can be open and on strike at the same time, whether students are being intimidated, etc. It looks to them a little like the French Revolution. There is something in this, if only that there was confusion in both. But the matter goes beyond that, as it often does in a confused situation. There is fear of divisiveness in the University, of radicalism, of the administration sacrificing principle to expediency, and of disorder and reaction setting in.

The French Revolution started with ideals. The partisans issued documents listing propositions on almost all the subjects they could think of that had political or social relevance. Early assemblies and committees passed resolution after resolution with wild enthusiasm. Disorganization set in, led to confusion and finally to absolute chaos. Dissent was one of the first casualties, as history records is the fate of freedom in all movements based on violence. It lasted for years. Finally, France closed the revolution when, at all costs, men sought a way to be governed firmly. Came the man on horseback — Bonaparte. There had been no dearth of ideals. What was missing was experience and political wisdom. Few realized how limited is the usefulness of general propositions in practical life, nor did they know how long it would take for new ideas to become part of the fabric of a complex society. Are we going to have such a revolution — no. Will the war come to an end soon — yes. Will the country return to its accustomed ways — no. Can the



universities make a contribution — yes. Will the University of Hartford contribute — it depends.

I imagine that ten years from now, long after our war in Southeast Asia is over, a number of private colleges and universities in the nation will have gone under, either because of lack of imagination, inaction, or just plain lack of the will to live. We have a lot to do at this university to be what we can be in ten more years. I needn't tell you there are lacks now, and there are plenty of great things we could be doing additionally if we had Aladdin's lamp: And yet, when I saw the campus in 1959 it was all open meadow except for North House. We had no magic wand but the change has been astonishing, in program, faculty, students, and facilities. The Board of Regents, to give it its due, has been a great force. It says something about Regents as people and something about Greater Hartford as a community, that this Board, including some of the highest managerial talent in the country, has given so much time and thought, unremunerated, to the University. I have felt since the beginning that there was practically no aim the University couldn't achieve if its faculty and our supporters in our area set their minds to it. And now, in the past five years, the students have been moving up into place on the planning side. The way we use these human resources will determine both whether we are emerging with distinction (as I think we are) from the present stirring national difficulty, and whether the University will be a bright light ten years hence.

The University's role is a special one in the face of change. It is, or should be, a bastion of academic freedom, especially during an emotion-charged period like the present. It has to be a free place for everyone to think his or her thoughts, to agree or dissent, to express himself or herself, independently and not under aggressive group pressure. In other words, our goal is to keep channels of thought and statement flowing full and free, whatever the issue under discussion and whatever position, in his or her conscience, any individual decides to take. This doesn't satisfy people who want the institution to take a political position and to throw its institutional weight on one side or the other. Nevertheless, this is what academe is all about, it is the special role of teachers and scholars, it is the finest thing that a university can be, it is also a very fragile thing. In defense of this we are bound to take our stand.

How then do we defend it? Here I address myself especially to student organization. I feel in the wind now, for next year, an increasing degree of teamwork between Regents, administration, faculty, and students, including a student organization that is representative and well organized. The University is going to need all the talent and teamwork it can muster. While the war issue is in the forefront, other factors are also at play ranging all the way from the life-style of the American people to ways of teaching and learning in the universities. My hunch is that the stock market is telling us, among other things, about future change in the multiplication rate of our consumption of the world's resources. And I think that at least some students are telling us — apart from the war issue — about their problem of how to deal with the fabulously increasing amount of knowledge they will have to master, i.e., to be masters of, as they move into positions of responsibility for their world ten years and twenty years from now. Academic freedom is the University of Hartford as it is.

Assuming therefore that I am not going to be cast in the role of Marie Antoinette, that Robespierre is still in the wings and probably will not be called on stage at all, and that Napoleon is just the name of a brandy, I hope to be here next year to see something exciting and fruitful. The key to that fruitfulness will be orderly and organized collaboration in the University on the question of the University of the future. The excitement comes free.

Hector Prud'homme
Ex-Acting Anything