Administraison Quails Before Student Rebels

By ROY LOWEY-BALL

Students rushed through a morning air that was charged with excitement and anticipation. They hurried into the physics  amphitheater long before the program was slated to begin and took their seats before the podium.

The guests were late and as they entered they felt the atmosphere of tension. They seated themselves before the eager crowd and awaited the onslaught. The time was 10:30 a.m. It was Monday, January 28, 1918, a date that marks the greatest student upheaval in the history of Rice.

Like this week’s Forum discussion on the “Rice Myth,” the occasion was student discontent over University policies. Captain James Baker and other Trustees met with an angry student body to discuss—not academic policies, but military regulations.

EVENTS THAT forced this meeting between the students and trustees of the university has exploded in the preceding week. On January 19, each student found a document entitled "TAPE" written in flaming red, attached to his door and at various other junctures on campus. The broadside bitterly lampooned the administration and appeal ed to the students with a fervent stirring "UNITED WE STAND" emblazoned on the front page. "TAPE" unified campus animosity towards the military establishment into a result of World War I. It derided the wasteful guard duty, severe room restrictions, irritating taps, grotesque uniforms, unfair "tours," and total failure of the "war courses." "TAPE" aroused new pressure for the outlawed Student Association and food reform.

There was general unrest on campus due to a hastily written letter sent by the administration to the students’ parents denying charges levied in the broadside.

Demonstrations in the dormitories followed and on January 22, a near riot erupted. There was a "great deal of noise making" as the Houston Post reported. Several windows were shattered and Firearms were harmlessly discharged. Some rooms were flooded and finally the dormitories were plunged into total darkness. Someone had blown the fuses.

...THE STUDENTS insisted they would submit to no regulations until their demands were met," The Post continued. The following day the two students responsible for the firearms were arrested and "each student underwent a grueling cross-examination."

Friday of the same week witnessed the notification of the trustees about the campus calumny and on Saturday the student cadets presented the men’s case before the trustees. It was decided that a mass meeting should be held the Monday of the following week, January 28. Young Alston Duggan was the first to speak on that day. He faced the audience, hushed into silence, and at the same time addressed the trustees: "We are not insurrectionists," he said. "We are students working for the bettering of Rice Institute and for the perpetuation of an institution which has...almost phenomenal success."

He was followed by Jay Alexander, his eloquent colleague. "The cause of this controversy," he stated, "lies further back than September. It lies further back than last year. It lies as far back as the very beginning of the institute in 1912, when a spirit that has had a student of that has persisted to this day, and that is the cause of all the minor clashes..."

"THIS SPIRIT IS the final of fear for the administration, and a belief that nothing is to be gained by an attempt to confer with the authorities concerning student’s lies, real or fanciful."

Alexander cited several instances, especially in the matter of food. Other grievances of major importance had been met with "delay and equivocation." President Lovett refused to allow the use of any campus building for the organization of a Student Association. He seemed to stand in perfect terror of any such organization, Alexander continued.

THE THRESHER published some of the students' complaints which the student organ was threatened with suspension. They were told that "if any more articles of such a nature appeared, that the paper would be summarily suspended.

But the main issue was put forth in "TAPE." It decreed the futile attempt of the administration to transform Rice into a military camp in a few months. Study time had been severely disrupted, the women were made to wear outlandish and ridiculous uniforms, and the whole program was ineptly conducted.

Alexander concluded his speech with the prophetic statement: "The present disturbance is not the first, nor will it by any means be the last, if conditions remain the same as they have in the past years...Regardless of how the present controversy turns out, sooner or later there will be another eruption."

...THE REASON IS deeply rooted and it will take something drastic to get rid of it, but it must be uprooted if Rice Institute is to continue and to grow as an institution of the highest rank..."

As a result of the frenzied speech-making and other energetic activities, the students petitioned the administration on matters collared in "TAPE." The establishment acquiesced to nearly all of the students' demands, doing away with taps, roll call, girls' uniforms, ad infinitum. The Student Association was approved, the Thresher allowed to live, and the military atmosphere eradicated.

Expressing his joy, one student bubbled, "something which stirs everyone, which cannot be expressed, fills our hearts."