

Gullen Quits

Cushman New WSU President

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President George Gullen took a late-night meeting of the WSU Board of Governors by surprise Tuesday with the announcement of his resignation from the University's highest post effective immediately.

Citing what he called the "massive dehumanization" which distinguishes "this and every other university," the 57-year-old administrator said he could no longer justify "a single day more" at the helm of the State's third largest university.

Gullen's contract with the university is due to expire in April and there had been speculation that he might quit at that time rather than continue in the post he has held since 1971. Gullen, then vice-president, had temporarily assumed the mantle of president on the resignation of William R. Keast that year, but was later named to the position permanently after a nation-wide search had failed to uncover any other suitable candidates.

Rumors of his dissatisfaction with the presidency have surfaced often in the last few months, but most observers have taken them to be largely the result of temporary pressures growing out of the university's current economic squeeze.

In a lengthy statement to the *South End* shortly after the meeting, however, Gullen revealed that his reasons for quitting run much deeper than simple job dissatisfaction. Referring once again to the "dehumanization" he had emphasized earlier in his brief resignation speech, the former president went on to outline his criticisms of "a complete social system which subverts every human impulse into relations of domination and manipulation, which progressively destroys every vestige of human community and substitutes for it the wholly false community of the market."

Coming from a self-confessed "lifelong believer" in the American system of free-enterprise capitalism, Gullen's remarks appear to signify a remarkable conversion, one all the more remarkable for the obvious conviction with which he seems to have arrived at it.

Gullen is, by his own admission, "one of the few" who have made it to the top and successfully reaped the benefits that accrue to making it. After serving several years as vice-president in charge of Labor Relations at American Motors, Gullen relinquished his career in industry for a position in the administration at WSU under Keast. He rapidly developed a reputation for sympathy toward the Detroit business community and was often criticized for his lack of academic credentials and sometimes overweening eagerness to please the big corporations.

But Gullen sees no contradictions in his activities at the time, given what he calls his "then very fragmented" perspective; he in fact criticizes his "muddleheaded liberal critics, who are ever-more incapable of perceiving anything so subtle as my real function as chief salesman for this factory for the reproduction of human capital."

"What was really happening at the beginning," said Gullen, "was not that I was 'expanding' the interdependence of the university and the business community by encouraging the encroachment of corporate interests on the 'neutral ground' of the university. For anybody who is willing to look beyond the prevailing myths surrounding the social function of our system of mass education, it will be apparent that such a system grew not out of the

intentions of liberal humanist educators, but directly out of the need generated by the Industrial Revolution for a properly socialized and stratified labor force. 'Higher education' has always served the ends of business, but what we have really been witnessing over the last half-century or so has been a process of emergence in which the real function of the university, of all mass education, has come out from behind the smokescreen of these myths and shown itself for what it really is."

The appearance of more and more corporate managers like myself in positions of power within the university, and the progressive elimination of 'academic' programs like Monteith simply culminate a process which has been going on more or less covertly since 'mass education's' inception.

Karl Marx realized this indirectly over a hundred years ago when he observed that an individual's labor power under capitalism is a commodity like any other and is subject to the laws of the market just like any other. From there it is not difficult to see that the university is literally a factory to whose production processes the student submits himself in order to enhance his value as a commodity on the labor market when it comes time for him to sell himself.

But of course, at the same time these underlying relations are emerging, the veils of mystification which have surrounded them for so long remain at work— they are still not totally transparent.

The gray-suited ex-administrator halted for a moment and toyed nervously with a paper-clip, apparently searching for the right way to express his contention.

"You see," he continued, "I've come to view capitalism as a social process which goes on right in front of our noses, but always behind our backs. In other words, it's a set of social relations that presents a wholly innocuous set of appearances—like the apparently 'innocent' and 'mutually beneficial' exchange of labor for wages—behind which lurks an insidious reality which is the real determinant of our lives and over which we have no control—like the fact that the wage-labor relation is based upon the hidden extraction by the employer of hours of unpaid labor from the employee. This extraction is kept secret from the worker, who is told that he is getting 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work,' but at the same time this is going on behind his back, right in front of his nose all his stolen labor is being accumulated in the form of somebody else's capital!"

In the same manner, this university operates as an apparently neutral training ground with no other goal than the gathering and transmission of knowledge. But beneath this seemingly innocuous exchange in the 'marketplace of ideas' a whole set of mysterious things is going on. It turns out, in fact, that the university's most important function lies not in its content but in its form; it turns out that its most important product is social passivity.

Nothing could be more appropriate, I think, than the characterization of the university as the marketplace of ideas, and those people in the academic world who identify it as such have very often not even an inkling of how revealing the description is. The university buys and sells knowledge, students, instructors, everything; the exchange relation underlies its every activity. The university, with its corporatized, hierarchical structure, with its immense bureaucracy, its emphasis on scheduling and quantifying, its authoritarian teacher/ student relationships—the separation into leaders and led—its separation between learning and doing—in fact, its mere existence as a category of activity wholly separate—just like work—from life, is the perfect ideological training ground for the 'production,' literally, of a workforce amply adjusted to the 'realities' of work, of 'deferred gratification', of 'sold' time, of obedience to authority.

Regardless of what skills or knowledge it may incidentally impart the university's real function is the socialization of individuals into unquestioning acceptance of the status quo, of the natural, inevitable and unchangeable nature of the society in which they live. Never for a moment must they even begin to suspect that human social organization has ever operated on anything but a basis of competitiveness, distrust and individual acquisitiveness.

One of the most important ways I've detected through which the university achieves its goal of socialization is via the fragmentation of knowledge and experience. Because of the ever-increasing necessity for specialization under advanced capitalism, it becomes impossible for capital to make use of the complete human being, it must instead select his or her most usable—how do they say it in those television ads, most marketable—skill and develop that skill exclusively, to the complete detriment of all the myriad thoughts and activities which make a living human being who is capable of acting on the world.

At the same time, the continued narrowing of activity effectively prevents students from ever coming to any real grasp of their social situation. As if it weren't enough that they must specialize in one activity, the sea of detail which confronts them in the learning of that specialty assures that the time spent contemplating endless rows of trees will make forever unattainable anything even approaching a complete view of the forest.

Finally, the separation and compartmentalization cap off a process which has been at work on them from the moment they stepped forth into the world of self-consciousness: they learn definitely that, confronted with the enormous complexity of modern civilization, it is impossible for them to exercise control over any but the most trivial events in their lives. Real action to transform their lives and their world can only fall within the realm of the specialists in action: the leaders, the celebrities, the pop stars, the 'movers and shakers' of history: the authorities.

It takes little imagination to see the social results of this huge capitulation to impotence: if individuals feel powerless in their social situation, if it is 'abundantly clear' to them that they can in no real way affect any of the things the system does around them—even though it does them in their name—then how can they feel any responsibility for them?

Hand in hand with this nihilistic resignation goes what I consider the great trick of all bourgeois science and education: the artful guise of apparent objectivity. Once approached as a separate and objectively neutral category of human inquiry, 'science' no longer needs to require of the 'scientist' that he bother himself with the political or moral implications of his activity; those are things which fall outside the range of his responsibility, things to be decided by the specialists in politics and morals. Therefore scientists in the university can go ahead and develop behaviour modification and drug therapy techniques as knowledge for knowledge's sake, and politicians and policymakers will make the decision whether to use them to give retarded children productive lives or to turn dissenters, criminals, 'hyperactive' schoolchildren and others insufficiently 'adjusted' to this society into affectless zombies. It seems not to occur to most of them that perhaps the obstinate refusal to 'adjust' to society's 'norms' might imply not a deficiency in the individual but in those very 'norms' by which they seek to define for others what is 'healthy' and what is not 'healthy' behaviour. They can't see the forest for the trees; for them, a specifically social response to a specific social situation becomes 'human nature.'

Ultimately their inability to analyze critically the ideology of 'science' itself and their willingness to trust in the good intentions of the 'authorities' have given us everything from food which is not food to a technological capacity for global repression and destruction unprecedented in human history. It has made possible the carving up of the world into markets via what had previously been little more than an interesting but technologically unfeasible speculation: World War.

Again Gullen halted, seemingly surprised by his own impassioned denunciation of a set of values which had until recently guided his whole life.

I'm sure you can well imagine that these have not been easy conclusions for me to come to. I have spent the overwhelming majority of my adult life pursuing what I took to be the best goals of a rational and humane system which had room in it for the realization of every individual's potential. It's not easy for me to say I was mistaken, but given the enormity of the mistake I feel this is the only way I can even begin to regain the humanity that was very nearly lost to me forever.

In the last analysis, it was the dehumanization occurring in my life that caused me to question the most basic assumptions of my daily activities. It's not entirely clear to me how or when it occurred, but at some point it began to dawn on me that every single relationship in my life was based on a transaction, every single person I encountered was viewed solely from the perspective of how he or she could be used to further the interests of the university. And just as department heads and 'lesser' faculty members were forced to literally grovel before me for the money which alone makes all things possible in the capitalist university, so was I, in turn, forced to grovel before legislators and 'corporate entities' for the money which alone gave me that power.

Very slowly it became clear to me that my life was simply an unending series of pseudo-relationships in which, depending on our relative positions in the social hierarchy, I was either dominating others or being dominated by them, manipulating others or being manipulated by them.

And I don't wish to live like that any longer. I have had enough of singing the empty praises of leaders of every stripe at Builders of Detroit dinners when I know full well that the millions of working people in this country and the world are the only real builders of anything. I have had enough of 'commanding' an institution which, in one of my more ingenuous moments, I quite openly referred to as being 'truly in the people business.' Only a society like ours could turn the experience of living and growing as a human being into 'the people business.'

It's no longer even a question of whether or not a better society is attainable: either it will come about or life will not be worth living. But it won't come about until we have all overcome all the separations which keep us passive spectators of our own lives, until we all become the conscious determiners of our destinies.

Of course it's patently ludicrous to think that my, or any individual's, single act of resistance is going to bring about the overthrow of capital, because it's only by resisting together that we can end its domination in our lives. This necessarily implies cutting through all the banalization and trivialization of our everyday experience, all the televised, newsprinted and billboarded garbage, all the pseudo-objective educational drivel that keeps us from seeing the world and our own activities in it for what they really are.

It's apparent to me at this point that, to paraphrase a familiar anarchist slogan, students will never be truly free until the last administrator is hanged from the guts of the last professor. This may sound a little extreme, but I think it makes perfectly clear that there is no longer any room for equivocation: anybody who thinks that their vested interest in the perpetuation of this institution outweighs the interests of all of us who are determined to bring an end to every form of hierarchy and domination has nothing coming to him but a very rude awakening.

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