

Interview with Provost Saltman

September 17, 1969

(The following is the text of remarks by Dr. Paul D. Saltman, Provost of Revelle College of the University of California at San Diego, in an appearance as guest of Aline Saarinen on the "Today" show originating on NBC in New York on August 25, 1969)

SAARINEN: Summer is on the wane, of course, and students will all be going back to colleges and universities, and everyone wonders whether the causes of the protests have been removed, whether, if there still is protest, it will take the form of a reasoned protest or whether violence will erupt again. My guest this morning is a man who has seen and will be involved in whatever happens on the campuses. He is Dr. Saltman; he is the Provost, which is the Executive Officer of the University of California in San Diego. And as he said, under the sweatshirt marked "Provost" he wears another sweatshirt marked "Biochemist." Welcome to "Today," Dr. Saltman.

SALTMAN: It is indeed a pleasure.

SAARINEN: I suppose the first question is: Can you summarize what you think the causes of student unrest are, and then, whether you think these have been ameliorated enough so that we can look forward to a different kind of season?.

SALTMAN: I think that there are several fundamental reasons for student unrest on campuses at this particular period of time let's say, from 1960 onward. These are internal and external problems. I'll try to deal with them both and see how they fit in with where we're going in the year ahead.

The external problems are quite clear. We have a war in Vietnam which is very, very distressing to most students on the campus, most faculty, and, I think, to most of the people of the United States today. That war continues. We have circumstances outside the university which include the problem of the use of the resources of the United States, the so-called military-industrial complex situation, which hasn't changed fundamentally in the last ten years. We have circumstances that disturb students and faculty and the people of the United States in terms of the relationship of minority people and poverty in the United States. Those circumstances have not changed fundamentally in the past ten years. These are the major external causes I see. Now, all those relate in kind to what takes place inside a campus. Let's see about that.

You bring a group of men onto a campus, age 18 to 24 or so. And you say to them, "You are on this campus. Why?" Well most of them will say, "I don't know really why I'm here, but I don't want to be in the draft: This beats the jungle." So essentially they have come to you in refuge from the draft, which is intolerable to them. Their motivations and concerns for being in a university as a learning experience are sometimes quite minimal, relative to these other concerns. We have a situation where, if we are talking about the use of the economic resources of the country, where it's more difficult than ever to obtain federal or state funding to support universities, to give scholarships to students, particularly minority students. We are in a circumstance where the student in America today, far more bright than I was when I was a student, far more knowledgeable from the standpoint of the total amount of goodies that are crammed into his head, is in a position in which he or she feels totally impotent to interact with the society and bring about changes. And now you put all this together in a university campus, where little has been done to bring the student into the mode of governance of the university; where very little has changed in a curriculum; where faculty and administrators have grown up in the '40's and '50's when, here was to

publish 20 papers a year and have a hundred K in grants that were--You know, I am a biochemist and I used to have a \$6,000.00 rat bill when I was doing biochemistry in the good old days. That was a mark of success.

SAARINEN: You explained which the external causes of the student protest were and the internal ones. Now, we can all see the external causes, the war, etc., still go on. Has there been a really strategic change within the administrations which will change students' attitudes?

SALTMAN: I think there has been a fundamental change in the attitude of faculty and administrators with respect to bringing about the evolutionary change within the campus in terms of how students can and should participate in the real governance of the universities and colleges, and I think this is very healthy. We work very actively to do that on our college campus. I think there has been a major change in curriculum, and this is important.

SAARINEN: Then you think that the protests this year will be, if there are, they will be about the state of the world but not against the college, so they will be less violent?

SALTMAN: I don't know. I think that one of the problems that the student is beginning to realize, very sensitively, is the fact that by defecating on a quad or a plaza that a revolution is not made. And to the contrary, that the society becomes so antagonistic to this sort of behavior pattern that they withdraw funds, that they essentially are anti-university, anti-intellectual, and thus that very source of learning, that very source of change, of bringing the mind to some sort of ability to operate in a society is shut down. I think that students recognizing this are trying to turn their efforts to the outside. Instead of messing on their quad, they try to get out in the community and somehow try to participate. But the community, the nation, the state, the county, the city in which they live, find themselves very reluctant to accept students as part of the power structure of these external communities, and I think this is very, very bad. I think that in this new curriculum that we are trying to develop at the University of California at San Diego, we are trying to take the laboratory of the city, and no longer just the laboratory in the classroom on the campus, and say, "Are you interested in society? Put your money where your mouth is. Get out in the society and make these changes."

SAARINEN: But you said to me when we were chatting before, that for this generation of students, history begins in 1965. isn't there getting perhaps to be too much emphasis on the immediate, the present, the now, and not enough on historical perspective, not enough on the excitement of learning?

SALTMAN: I agree with you very much on that, Aline, and that's why think that the correlations of the student now, and the student now in context of his past, and the student in the projections and extrapolations of his future--that is part of the interaction of the city and the university. This is what we have to do to change. Don't forget, we still live and operate in a university structure in America that's fundamentally predicated on the Morrill Act* of 100 years ago, which was directed to an agricultural economy. We are now living in an urban society. What are we doing about this urban society in which we live? You can no longer retreat, essentially, to the mountain top.

SAARINEN: All right, that brings up this other point: There was kind of a dichotomy on the campus where the black students, who were protesting for their rights and their separate studies and so on, and then you had white students on another level. Have these come together, or is there still a very separatist kind of thing? Are the rebels together? There is very little time, so--

SALTMAN: Answer yes or no? I think there is an evolution in the thinking of black students on the campus--that the immediate cry for black studies is now being changed to, "How can we, as black students, essentially operate in our special fashions and needs to become more a-part of this urban society?. Black studies, qua black studies are not enough, but what can we do for all minority peoples, for all poverty peoples, to make the city, to make the country, a better place in which to live?" Our campus has been very fortunate in having a group of Chicano or brown students, a Mexican-American group and blacks working gather with faculty and other students to bring about the development of a college on our campus, which I think will just do that.

SAARINEN: Thank you. In other words, you are giving us a more hopeful picture for this coming season on the campuses. Thank you, Dr. Saltman.

(End of interview)

*(act named after Senator Justin Morrill in which state colleges and universities were conceived to train and assist in the development of individuals to serve an agricultural economy)