

THE BEAVER

Some Notes on Student Life

THE CHARACTERISTICS of the undergraduate today are not as easy to describe as they would have been a year or more ago. This does not mean that he is in any major way a different person, but only that the world in which he lives is radically changed from the world of the student of the past.

Every student, as every other person, is concerned with his personal fate. The ways of the world do not ordinarily obsess him, the machinations of the government do not usually involve him, and even his own family's life seems more remote when he enters upon his studies at Caltech.

Today a sense of futility and insecurity controls the student at Tech, as it surely does at other schools. The events of the world over which he has had no control in the past have so involved him that they can no longer be ignored. Indeed, they occupy a good deal of his thoughts in his waking hours and have become the major topic of his bull sessions.

The Carefree Days Gone By

Whoever would today set pen to paper and write about the carefree and happy-go-lucky life of the student must be demented. The men in the undergraduate school have come here to learn. They realize that theirs is a rare gift which is needed by the high form of civilization in which we live, and that this gift can be utilized to help themselves as well as others. These men have come with a desire to better their position in society; they also know full well that, in the future, they *will* better that society. They are confused, befuddled and sometimes even amused when they view the laws, which have been created to control their future lives. Few people have any control over their lives today, but the Tech man does not even have the fortune of a random fate. The result has been to give the student an unequaled sense of futility—which can be observed by anyone on the campus today.

Students and The Draft

Draft laws have been set up. It was thought that good students should be exempt, as their value in other fields would be far greater than their value in the active service. As the law now stands, those in the upper half of the class will be given a 2-A classification, which will allow them to continue their studies.

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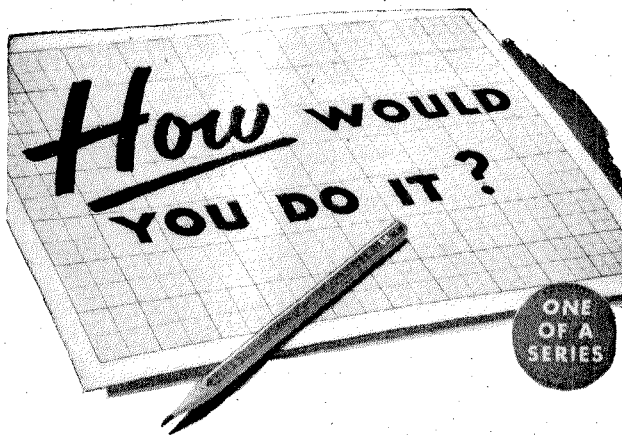
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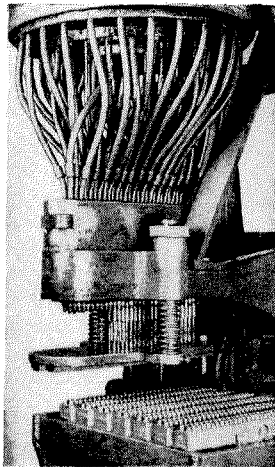
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THE BEAVER . . . CONTINUED

This system has not worked well. Some students have left for easier schools, where they are confident they can attain the upper half. But even those in the upper half here find dealing with the draft boards a very difficult matter. There is no steadfast rule which insists that those in the top half must be deferred. Furthermore, is the population of the school going to be reduced to 1/2 every year? Indeed, many draft boards flatly refuse to entertain what they term "inequality."

Seniors in a Quandry

The seniors are in a complete quandry. It is difficult for an average Caltech student to be accepted at a graduate school; now it appears that it will be doubly difficult unless he is a veteran—and there are few veterans in the undergraduate body now.

Employment, too, is the concern of all those who are leaving Tech this June. Several companies have stated that the draft status of a student is a matter of indifference to them. Although this is certainly a magnanimous view the seniors view it with considerable doubt, for they know that no company will undergo the expense of training a student only to lose him when his deferment expires. The war industries might get such men deferred longer, but the great majority of industry is still devoted to peacetime production. The companies themselves must be in something of a dilemma over the lamentable state of affairs.

No Incentive

The draft laws have had other unforeseeable difficulties. It was first thought that they would serve as an incentive to those students in the lower half of the class—but things haven't worked out that way. Such a student is infused with a sense of futility and desires to quit it all, throw his ambitions to the wind, and join the service for the lack of responsibility he can find along with the good pay and fast life. Already some good men have left the campus, some men who would have done much better in other fields.

Still Good for a Laugh

These matters have reached a place of major importance on the campus. Still, the students managed to find much humor in the situation and the slightest allusion to draft status brings volleys of jokes. They realize, of course, that what must be done must be done, even though they could wish for a more intelligent manipulation of their lives. There is a rather important place in society after all; it would seem regrettable to leave it unfilled.

—Bob Madden '51