1929-1945: Depression, Another War Hit Tech

Members of the academic world were feeling the bite of the depression much more strongly than workers in private industry, but there was great concern among faculty and students about long and short term effects of the "crash," Col. Frank L. Locke, Personnel Director of the Division of Industrial Cooperation, in an interview with The Tech, said that, "While the depression will affect men finishing this year to some extent, there is no great cause for feeling discouraged about the near future." While future economic events were to prove Col. Locke’s short range prediction incorrect, his faith in the continued demand for more and more top qualified engineers was to be shown valid from a long range point of view.

The full term took on a tragic note as the Institute learned the news of Dr. Stratton’s fatal heart attack in his home. President Compton stated at this time that "Dr. Stratton’s death is a terrible shock not only to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but also to that group of governmental, scientific and industrial agencies which he has served so long and so effectively."

Enrollment Falls

In spite of the depression, by the time the class of 1933 graduated in June, the Department of Personnel was able to report placement of about 20 per cent of the class. The depression did affect enrollments for the coming year, however; the undergraduate body had fallen by 311 compared to the previous year. For the second consecutive year the Institute offered free courses for engineers and architects out of employment. The students and faculty began to feel the pinch of a credit shortage when newly elected President Roosevelt declared the national bank holiday. Walker note tickets were made available to all those students who found themselves temporarily financially embarrassed by their inability to cash checks or draw from savings. The Tech announced that it would accept meal tickets in lieu of cash. Tech Show accepted bank and student account checks in payment for tickets to their production, and the Glee Club and Dormitory Committee took IOU’s. Enrollment for the next academic year dwindled again, falling by 224 to a low of 2,560.

Sigma Xi Established

It was also in the month of April that the Tech chapter of Sigma Xi, the national honorary scientific fraternity, was established. Included in the first initiation of 41 members were President Compton and Dean Bush.

Enrollment Increases

As the class of 35 graduated there were indications of an upward trend in job prospects and the registration of more than 600 freshmen as indicative of improved economic conditions.

Once again The Tech conducted a poll of student opinion. This time the results showed that the student body in general was not in favor of the New Deal, despite the fact that the great majority condemned the Teacher’s Own Bill of Massachusetts.

Prerequisites Offered

It was in the spring of 1936 that construction was started on a sailing pavilion opposite Walker Memorial. With a change in admissions directors from James L. Trayn, who was retiring, to Professor B. Alden coxswain, there was a stronger emphasis on training in Mathematics, English and Physics as the only prerequisites for admission.

In April the first all-Technology peace conference was held. Pacifists, defenseists, scientists, militarists and satirists all had their say in the largest peace meeting in the history of the school.

The year of 1936 ended with a hooted controversy over such hazing practices as kidnapping and head-shaving. The Institute Committee voted official condemnation of kidnapping and recommended Faculty discipline for offenders.

Tuition Raised!

Because the financial situation of the country made future aid and endowments uncertain, President Compton announced a raise in tuition to $600, a hundred dollar increase over the past academic year.

In November the Riverbank Hotel was purchased by the Corporation to provide much needed Institute living quarters for graduate students. The hotel was renamed Graduate House.

Water Fight

The Tech reported a "friendly" water fight between the student and some sophomore and freshmen classes. Then in May, Harvard students attempted a "blitz-krieg" on the MIT student body. They met with an unexpected guerrilla defense by the engineers and were forced to retire leaving diverse pairs of pants and parts of pants at the Technology’s main line of defense.

War Again

On Dec. 7, 1941 the United States declared war on Japan for her attack on Pearl Harbor. Within the next few days the U.S. found itself in a state of war with Germany and Italy, Japan’s allies in the Axis con-federation. At this time President Compton made the statement that the "best work Tech can do in the present situation is to continue along the course it has been following in the last year.

Crash Program

By Dec. 17, 1941 the administration announced its Senior crash program for graduation by April 2. Summer classes were planned to shorten the undergraduate program so as to supply the country with the technicians and engineers needed to achieve victory in a modern global conflict. By 1943 the curriculum was completely altered, graduating a class every three years instead of four.

Army Moves In

It was also in 1943 that the campus was evacuated and eventually all the dorms were taken to house students of the Army Specialists Training Program. By June, 1943 all students not already in the Army programs faced induction in the Army and active duty regardless of status.

All this time the research department had been expanding, reorganizing, reorganizing and developing more and more crash programs to meet the needs of national defense. Throughout the war MIT remained the leader in the development of new weapons of defense and attack. It was with a grateful sigh that the campus escaped for its first free breath on VE Day, May 11, 1945.