

Protest:

Johnson Hall doomed to never-ending attacks

There was a protester on the steps of Johnson Hall.

I spotted him through sheer chance. Three months ago, when I first arrived at the University, it would have been impossible for me to miss him; I had been in the habit of checking the steps for signs of protest every day. Eventually, however I had come to the conclusion that my surveillance was a waste of time, since except for an occasional dusty administrator tramping down the stairs, the building's facade was as lifeless as the moon.

But that morning, as I shuffled east on 13th, the sun had chanced to poke through a gap in the ceiling of clouds, and as the glare stabbed my dime-sized pupils I involuntarily turned my head to the left and there he was.

He wasn't much, mind you: short, dark, with grizzled hair, a beard and an outfit somewhere between nondescript and army surplus, but no one could deny that he was a protester. He had a sign, first of all, emblazoned with an ingeniously multi-purpose "We protest," and he was shouting, though his voice was rather weak and tremulous, some specific suggestions to the occupants of the building concerning where they might go and what they might consider doing when they got there, along with some rather irreverent guesses as to their parentage. But even more than these obvious manifestations there was something about the way his eyes gleamed and his chest puffed out defiantly that said that here, indeed, was a rabble-rouser from the old school, thawed from seven years of suspended agitation by some unjust blast of bureaucratic hot air that had escaped the duller senses of the rest of the student body.

But we're going to sharpen those senses back up again, I resolved, bobbing and weaving across 13th through the current of whizzing Schwinn's and Peugeot's. I knew that Mt. Baker wasn't the only hot spot in the Northwest, and beneath the thin crust of apparent contentment, the simmering students were ready to erupt into a protest that would make Krakatoa look like a firecracker. It's going to be just like old times, I mused. Death to the fat cats! Power to the people!

"Hey, brother!" I shouted as I drew up next to the man. "We're

club us it's the fetal position with only the back exposed. And if they carry us out, the word is limp — nonviolent resistance, that's what it's all about."

The man still looked confused. "Hold it a minute," he said. "Are you saying you want to join me?" "Right on and solid!" I asserted. "But there's just one thing: what are we protesting about?"

The man sighed and sat down heavily on the steps. "That's what I was afraid of. You mean you can't guess?"

"Uh, well, I mean I'm not exactly..."

"Didn't you read about the administration's restructuring the minority student unions in such a way that they can only get incidental fee money if they agree to do light domestic work for the Daisy Ducks?"

"Uh, well, maybe I did see..."

"And haven't you heard about the plan to abolish the English department and divert the funds to paying 500 armed guards to protect the centennial banners?"

"Well, yes, I think I did hear..."

"And aren't you aware of the fact that tuition is going to be tripled next term so that a 1,000-man team can be hired to comb the hills until they find a Sasquatch who can play tight end?"

I was embarrassed. "You know, it's a funny thing," I said. "I did know all of that stuff, but somehow until you pointed it out to me it didn't seem to matter. Now that I think about it, there have been a lot of injustices lately. It's odd that I didn't get upset about them before — somehow it almost seems like there's an atmosphere of anti-indignation around here."

"You're telling me," the man said dejectedly. "Watch this." He strolled across the courtyard, grabbed a passing student, and dragged his captive back to the steps.

"Hey, what's the big idea?" complained the student. He had unkempt medium length hair, glasses like coke-bottle bottoms, a five o'clock shadow, a dingy white shirt, a skinny brown belt cutting into a bulging waistline, a briefcase, double knit slacks and desert boots. "I've gotta go, I've gotta study for my midterms!" He strained against the protester's grasp toward the library like an infant reaching for his mother's breast, but the grip was firm.



Graphic by Steve Sandstrom

"No, don't say that!" the student cried. "It's a jinx! Just say that, uh, that I am considering a number of options at the moment, including some which are related to the general field of health science." Suddenly he sank to his knees, sobbing.

Surprisingly, the reaction was almost immediate. Just a few seconds after our united shouts began ringing through the stately pillars, the huge glass doors swung open and a dignified figure strode out, his head ringed with Grecian curls and his black satin robe rippling gently in the breeze. He smiled, cleared his throat, and drew himself up to his full height.

"We must be tolerant," he said, "because the University is an open society, and as an open society it is vulnerable to protests such as these. Take 'em away, boys."

With that a dozen uniformed policemen leaped from the bushes and surrounded us, arms linked. The black-robed figure gripped the sides of a podium that had materialized in front of him as if by magic.

"I have a dream!" he cried. "As I look out across this great campus I see vast potential. I see freshmen that need initiating, I see phone booths that cry for stuffing, I see panties that beg to be raided. And I see — yes, yes, it's getting clearer now — I see the students rising up

to fulfill that potential. I see all-nighters during dead week, I see the canoe fete, I see thousands of bright, eager faces turned skyward in a communal prayer to the basketball scoreboard. We are still infected with the scourge of protesting, and there are still those who stubbornly insist on pointing out injustice. But the ripples of unconcern and non-involvement are swelling, swelling into a towering tidal wave of apathy that will crush these malcontents and leave a glorious, stagnant ocean of insensibility in its wake. And in the end — We shall overcome!"

"He may be right," sighed the protester as we were hustled into the squad car. "I'm really getting tired of all this one-man protesting business. I'm about ready to give..."

"Hey, wait a minute," I cried as the door slammed shut. I pointed through the wire-mesh window and the protester and I broke into beaming smiles.

There was another protester on the steps of Johnson Hall.

"... but there's just one thing: what are we protesting about...?"

behind you all the way! The revolution is on! We're not gonna be establishment groupies any more!"

"Huh?" he said, looking bewildered.

"We're on your side, man," I cheered, pounding him on the back. "What's the plan? Fifty through the front door and a hundred through the rear? I think I know where I can get some masks — if the pigs try pepper gas we've got to be ready. And we've got to make sure that everybody knows about self-protection — if they try to

"When are your midterms?" asked the protester.

"At the end of next month," conceded the student. "But competition is fierce! And I was only able to study for 21 hours yesterday because I spent three hours spitting into everyone else's culture plates in the bio lab. But if I can just keep from wasting any time by eating or sleeping I should be able to catch up."

"Pre-med," the protester told me, jerking a thumb at the student.

"Oh God, I'm not going to get in, I just know it!"

"Easy, pal," said the protester. He looked up at me and spread his hands. "See what I mean! How are we supposed to fight that?"

"We aren't," I said defiantly. "We don't have to. We'll take on the administration ourselves, just the two of us! Come on!" We turned away from the blubbery figure and swaggered to the top step of the stairway, shaking our fists and shouting at the unseen enemy within.