

Death Only Postpones Crisis at Swarthmore

By FRANCIS X. GEARY

Of The Bulletin Staff

Seven days of crisis on the quiet, Quaker campus of Swarthmore College ended tragically last Thursday when its 52-year-old president, Dr. Courtney Smith, fell dead in his office.

For a week, life at Swarthmore had been a continuous round of meetings and negotiations involving all of the faculty and most of the 1,024 students, 47 of whom are Negroes.

Problems Not Resolved

At issue were the "demands" of the Swarthmore Afro-American Students' Society (SASS), which had the approval, at least in principle, of a majority of white students.

The questions were not easy ones for an institution such as Swarthmore to resolve. They have not been resolved, and the agony may begin anew after a memorial service is held today for Dr. Smith.

For years, Swarthmore has scouted the nation for Negro students, whether they could afford the expensive education it offers or not. It sought those who could measure up to its rigorous academic standards.

Because of the social revolution of recent years, however, Swarthmore began to encounter competition from other colleges and universities looking for the same Negro scholars.

Black Enrollment Off

Thus, the number of black students at Swarthmore began to drop. For three years the administration has discussed this, trying to discover a remedy.

Last October, the militant members of SASS decided they could wait no longer. The year before the black students' organization had started making suggestions. This year they became demands.

'Whatever Is Necessary'

Just before the Christmas holidays, on Dec. 23, Dr. Smith received a four-page document from SASS. A covering letter said:

"Merry Christmas. Enclosed are the 'clarified' SASS demands you requested some

considered in depth by the Admissions Policy Committee, chaired by Fred A. Hargadon, who became the special target of SASS.

In its report of last Dec. 30, the committee recommended that the college accept five to ten students each year who fall below normal admissions standards but who have "other qualities" that might help them close the gap.

These students would be given special courses to "reduce past deficiencies." These are so-called "risk" students.

'Easier to Recommend'

The committee also recommended a search for qualified Negro faculty and administration members.

These and other programs to bring more Negroes into the school, the committee said, are "easier to recommend" than to determine how they would be financed. Hundreds of thousands of dollars would be needed, the committee said, considering its costs \$15,000 to put one student who has no financial resources through Swarthmore.

SASS rejected the report and complained that no Negroes had taken part in the discussions preceding it. Swarthmore, it charged, is an institution "primarily concerned with the preservation of its own excellence."

'Reject System Itself'

"Because we seek to redefine the underlying philosophy of education here, we must re-evaluate the standards which support it. The concept of a 'risk' student implies that there are those who cannot succeed in this academic system; but we reject this system itself," the black students said in a subsequent paper.

SASS demanded admission of ten to 20 'risk' students next fall; demanded that the college, at its own expense, send some of these to "quality private secondary schools" for a year prior to their entering Swarthmore and demanded that admission standards be revised.

It demanded that Swarthmore appoint a black assistant dean of admissions, subject to the approval of SASS, who would recruit and enroll black students. It also demanded a black counselor for confidential ad-

"Merry Christmas. Enclosed are the 'clarified' SASS demands you requested some time ago. If you fail to issue a clear, unequivocal public acceptance of these non-negotiable demands by noon, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 1969, the black students and SASS will be forced to do whatever is necessary to obtain acceptance of same."

The letter was signed by Clinton A. Etheridge, Jr., chairman of SASS, a resident of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Another of the SASS leaders is Don Mizell, of New York City.

On Dec. 26, Dr. Smith reached Etheridge by telephone in New York, and said he wanted to discuss the demands with him and any other SASS members on the 27th or 28th.

Sympathetic to Demands

Etheridge called Dr. Smith the next day and said SASS would not be available until after the holidays. He suggested a meeting the morning of Jan. 6—one day before the SASS deadline.

Dr. Smith told the faculty he was sympathetic to the demands of SASS and said he told Etheridge he needed more than one day, since he could not make decisions without approval of the faculty and board of managers.

So on Jan. 6, Dr. Smith was unable to meet the demands and on Jan. 9 Etheridge, Mizell and a dozen others occupied the Swarthmore admissions office, where they remained for almost eight days. The demonstration ended—at least temporarily—a few hours after Dr. Smith's death.

The problem of Negro enrollment at Swarthmore had been

recruit and enroll black students. It also demanded a black counselor for confidential advice and guidance.

Something Precious Lost

With respect to the money needed for such programs, SASS charged that Swarthmore "has a significant lack of innovation and effort in terms of tapping new sources of funds."

These were among the non-negotiable demands being debated and negotiated, and which may have been resolved by now except for Dr. Smith's sudden death.

In his last formal address to the faculty and student body last Monday, Dr. Smith expressed his disappointment with the entire affair. "We have lost something precious at Swarth-

more—the feeling that force and disruptiveness are just not our way."

And, he said, if anyone believes that direct action is the way, "I have to say that I seriously doubt their faith in education, and the educational process, and I would be saddened to see further acceptance of force as against those qualities of trust and tolerance and humility and antitotalitarianism and willingness to seek the good in others; those qualities that have made, and can make, Swarthmore especially 'fine' as an institution."