

Perceptions of the
College of Agriculture
at Cornell University

An Interview of
W. Donald Cooke

by Gould Colman
on 5 January 1984

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As a contribution to an oral history of the College of Agriculture at Cornell University, W. Donald Cooke, a prominent university administrator at Cornell, was interviewed by the University Archivist, Gould Colman on January 5, 1984.

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PREFACE

This manuscript numbering 28 pages is a transcript of one or more tape recorded interviews with me.

Any reader of the transcript should bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of my spoken rather than my written word.

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(signed) [W D Cooke]

(date) [2/15/84]

Understood and agreed to

[Gould Colman] (interviewer) (date) [17 Feb 84]

The following is an interview with W. Donald Cooke, taking place in his office in Baker Laboratory on January 5, 1984. The interviewer is Gould P. Colman.

Cooke's positions at Cornell

Colman: As he has known for something like a year now, we've been going to get together on this occasion and talk about his perceptions of the College of Agriculture as he has seen it from Day Hall or elsewhere, with the idea that anyone who is doing a history of the College of Agriculture might well benefit from his observation of events.

Now, the first thing, Don, is to get down what your perspective has been. Where have you been during all of these years to look at things?

Cooke: Well, I started out as a Professor of Chemistry in 1961 and in 1963 I became the Associate Dean of the Arts College, in 1965 Dean of the Graduate School, in which, of course, I had substantial interaction with the College of Agriculture, as well as all other Colleges on the campus. After that I became Vice President for Research in 1969 and held the Deanship of the Graduate School and the Vice Presidency concurrently. In '74 I became Acting Provost for a year. After that service I remained as Vice President for Research but absorbed the duties of policies on academic appointments. I was even Acting Affirmative Action Officer for a while. A bit unusual for a Vice President for Research.

I left the post of Vice President in '83 and currently am a Professor of Chemistry and have charge of occupational health and safety programs on campus. So I have had a lot of interaction across campus. I've seen a lot of the College of Agriculture.

Colman: So what's different about the College of Agriculture besides where it's located and where the standpipes go and so forth?

Cooke: Well, of course, it's statutory to begin with and has a mission that it owes the State. That does make it different to begin with.

Colman: Now, it's not automatically clear to me why it does, because doesn't Cornell University talk about its land grant mission as though we were all involved?

Cooke: It is true that the land grant institution is Cornell University as a whole. There's no question about that. On the other hand, I think it's also fair to say that most of the interaction with the State and the citizens of the State does come from the statutory colleges. I would say that the College of Arts and Sciences has very little interaction with the citizens of the State as contrasted to the citizens of the United States, because there's no State focus in the Endowed Units as there is in the statutory. The College of Agriculture, in particular, has a responsibility to the farmers of the State. They do get out and help the farmers when the farmers need help. When they have some problems on Long Island, we get a group down there. Human Ecology functions in the same way. ILR [Industrial and Labor Relations], in fact has an accepted duty to the state... So even though we are, as a whole, the land grant institution, I think the focus is primarily in the statutory units.

How college differs from other Cornell colleges

So that's one difference. Of course, the statutory units, particularly the Agriculture College, have what you might call a more applied mission. It's very hard to separate the basic research and applied research; and there's a large gray area – in fact, the gray area is probably larger than all the rest of the areas – but nonetheless, they do tend to look at problems that are closer to solutions rather than long-range problems. But that doesn't, of course, include all components. Obviously the researchers in the Departments of College undertake very long research programs; but there is more of a bias towards shorter range problems than in the endowed research units.

I remember when I first came to Cornell in '51 that the researchers in the College of Agriculture were kind of looked down upon by their more purists in, say, the College of Arts and Science Physics and Chemistry and whatnot. I think over the years, though, that's gradually changed. More respect has developed for the research programs than had been back in those days. They probably also became more interested in longer range research problems. So I think over the years the respect in the rest of the Institution toward the College of Agriculture research has improved.

What other ways are they different? Well, one thing is they expect – the faculty seems to expect stronger leadership from the academic officers. There's a gradation in the University where deans have power of action versus those that have restricted roles. The deans of the College of Agriculture have always been fairly stronger individuals than in the other colleges. I think that's becoming less so. I think the Agriculture faculty is coming more toward a more democratic approach, but I think it still persists that the faculty do expect strong deans and accept strong deans.

In the Arts College, which I think is the other extreme, the whole College functions more in the mode of a committee than it does a leadership role on the part of the dean. So there are those differences across campus.

The same thing is true at the department level. Department heads, as they used to be called in the College of Agriculture, had much more power of action than heads of departments in other areas. They served for indefinite terms and generally quite long terms. It took a lot of unilateral action that would never have been tolerated in other parts of the campus; and so I think that's another difference.

Colman: Let me ask how you felt about that. Was that a good thing?

Cooke: It has its pluses and minuses. As long as you have very good department heads, the system functions well. On the other hand, you don't always have good heads. Statistically you're liable to get someone who's not very good and such a situation can do damage to a department. So the more democratic approach does protect you from that kind of damage. On the other hand, the freedom of action does get restricted by the more democratic approach. You can't take the kind of actions at times that might be best to take. So there's kind of a tradeoff of pluses and minuses to both systems, as I see it.

What other differences there are? Well, I don't know if it's pertinent, but I think the Administration backup in the College of Agriculture has always been more adequate than it has been elsewhere on campus – the relative number of

employees, secretaries, and whatnot has been always significantly higher than the rest of the University. I think the rest of the University is low on services and so it's not that the Agriculture College is extravagant, but that it's about where it ought to be. The other areas of campus are not where they ought to be... This kind of backup services probably results from the adequacy of State funding over many, many years.

Of course, another point is that the College does have research funds from the State which are not available to other portions of the University. That's a difference. The faculty in the Endowed Units have to raise their own research money. There are funds available in the College of Agriculture on a relatively routine basis. This is a difference. I'm not sure it's all to the best, though. The faculty that were continuously supported year after year don't have that lean and hungry look that other faculty have who have to raise their money each year. So one can become complacent if you know the money's coming in each year.

Colman: I would think there would be another side to that matter, too as the lean and hungry stands, which would move research in the direction of where the money was, which is not necessarily the same as the interests ...

Cooke: I don't see that as a particular problem. It does occur sometimes, but almost all people have access to money to do what they want to do. There's some faculty who fall between the cracks as far as programs go and have to struggle more to get money because it doesn't fit this or that particular granting agency. And I think you know there is money available – in sciences, anyway – for almost whatever one would want to do. That is, of course, not true in the social sciences where there's very little money available to begin with – at least from the federal funding agencies. And in humanities there's only trivial amounts available. But I think in the sciences almost every interest is represented somewhere. I don't see that as a problem.

Is Cornell one university?

Colman: Let's go back to the point you were making about this matter of credibility, of respect. You're suggesting that we're more a one University today than we have been. One doesn't cross some kind of a boundary in moving between the campuses anymore.

Cooke: Or less ...

Colman: Or less. I occasionally overhear students' conversations as I'm walking along which suggest some awareness of a passage there. I know that in Day Hall, at least among some of the Trustees, there has been some discussion of whether we're one University or more than one University. And Mort Adams, for example ...

Cooke: Sure...

Colman: ...got a committee – I think he was instrumental in getting a committee appointed on land grant affairs that ultimately led to the appointment of the Vice President.

Cooke: Yes.

Colman: I wonder if you have any observations on this matter of one university, or two, the extent to which Central Administration took an interest and a concern about the College of Agriculture. I guess another way of saying

it is was Mort Adams right?

Cooke: Well, I think the business of setting up a Vice President for Land Grant Affairs was not the question of whether we're one or two universities. I think it was to interact with the State in a more efficient manner than we had been doing previously. In a sense, it wasn't a new post. Arthur Peterson served that role for many, many years. It was more a reassignment to a different person rather than – more than anything else.

Colman: But I thought Art was there at the same time that Connie...

Cooke: Art was there at the same time, yes. But there was a reassignment. Art used to do it. And perhaps an expansion of the role was also called for. But I think the Administration paid as much attention to the statutory units as they do to other units. Let's see, the last two provosts were from the statutory colleges. Keith [W. Keith Kennedy] and ...

Colman: That's right.

Cooke: Yeh. The last two. That's certainly an indication. There have always been people from the statutory college in the Executive Staff. Still are. Jim [James] Spencer is another one. I just don't think that they looked at the colleges any differently except when it comes to the budget. Of course, the fact that the funds for the statutory colleges come from the State and we have little control over them, other than trying to influence them, when we're dealing with budgetary matters they certainly are two different units. The flow of money comes from different directions. But I don't see any indication that the statutory colleges were handled any differently outside the budget-making process.

And don't forget, if you look at any university, take medical schools in universities, you'll find the medical school operates in a very different mode than the rest of the university and the barriers between the medical school and the rest of the university are usually substantial. So I just don't think that's the way it has been. Not my experience, anyway.

Colman: Let me approach it from the direction of the College of Agriculture and how much interest they wanted on the part of the Central Administration.

Cooke: That's a little harder to know. It probably varies with each Dean and I'm sure some of them would rather have their own independence of action and at times got restricted by the university policies. For example, academic policies apply across the whole university. That may have been a problem at times with some deans, I presume, who would rather do things their own way, rather than be restricted by university policy.

Colman: But that would be true of any dean – like Dean [Simon C.] Hollister, for example, in the Engineering ...

Cooke: Yes, I don't think the deans of the statutory colleges were any different than other deans. They would rather have all power unto themselves, insofar as their faculties would let them.

Colman: But in Agriculture there was a tradition of independence that, say, Dean [William I.] Myers inherited.

Cooke: Yes.

Colman: And so he could – it would be difficult for a Dean – let's say, President [Deane W.] Malott – to expect to have the same authority over the College of Agriculture when Dean Myers was there that he might expect to have in other colleges.

Cooke: Probably so. For one thing, the funding comes from the State in which the Dean of the College of Agriculture has a good deal of influence. And you go back to Liberty Hyde Bailey, I guess the situation was even more critical and Bailey seemed to run the College of Agriculture as he saw fit. Obviously, I wasn't here; but that's how I understand it. And he was not concerned much with what the University had to say about the College of Agriculture. That has certainly changed.

Colman: I think in Bailey's case it went beyond that because he knew what was good for the entire University.

Cooke: Perhaps [laughs]. I think you might be right, Gould, yes.

Colman: Well, now, a time came when – the Division of Biological Sciences...

Cooke: Yes ...

Colman: ... was created ...

Cooke: Yes ...

Colman: ... and that impinged mightily upon the Dean's prerogatives in Agriculture.

Cooke: Very much so, yes. Because you have then a mixture of Endowed and State funding in the sections, as they're called, and so the deans did lose some of their power and influence over some of their faculty who were in the sections. I think in retrospect that move to separating out the Biological Sciences Division was a good move. I must admit that in the beginning I was worried about it, that it would separate the faculty in the applied areas and they would thus lose the contact with the more fundamental sciences. I don't think that's happened now. And I think it turned out better than I expected. So I think it was a good thing that it happened. But it does erode the power of the deans, no question about it, has less control over those section faculties because he doesn't pay a fair percentage of them.

Colman: How do you think that was handled?

Cooke: Oh, I think it was done well under leadership particularly of Bob [Robert S] Morison. It was a traumatic issue at the time, of course. Break up some of those departments and we moved some people from the department and it took a lot of courage to go ahead and do it. Who was dean?

Colman: Charlie [Charles E.] Palm.

Cooke: ... Charlie Palm at the time?

Colman: Yeh.

Cooke: I never knew whether he was supportive or not and I suppose it's in the record and other people do know, but I just don't ...

Colman: That's fascinating. That's fascinating to me, that ... So you were,

Division of Biological Sci- ences

at that point, Dean of the Graduate School?

Cooke: I was Dean of the Graduate School. Yes.

Colman: I would suggest he didn't go very much public with his feelings ...

Cooke: No. I don't think he did. How he privately thought, I don't know, but he didn't fight it publicly, certainly. There were a lot of faculty, though, who were strongly opposed to this, plus a good group that was strongly supportive. I think Dale [R.] Corson was the person who really played a very important role in the formation of the Division. He was Provost at that time. But, all in all, I think it was a good thing.

Colman: You didn't feel that that established two classes of people – first-class faculty and second-class – put the label on ...

Cooke: It might be easier to say that that happened, but I don't think it did. I think it sort of separated out two different kinds of research in general. I don't think that two classes of faculty emerged from that. I don't see any evidence that that's so. Some people may feel so, I don't, though. I think there's a lot of respect across the boundaries for different research programs. Along more fundamental ... I suppose, if you're looking for, say, a neurobiologist, it's easier to recruit them into a section called Neurobiology and Behavior than it might be into the Department of Agronomy. But that doesn't indicate two different classes of citizens. I just think they do different things. And, here again, there's a lot of gray area overlapping in research, in the two sections versus the department.

Colman: That was certainly a big concern at the time, wasn't it, of recruiting people and what sort of structure would be the most effective.

Cooke: Right. And I think that had a good deal of substance to it. Of course, you must remember back in those days also there was a real shortage of faculty. It was very difficult to recruit faculty. It may be hard to believe in today's marketplace, but we had faculty lines that went unfilled for years just because we couldn't find anybody to take them! That was a period when there was a real shortage of Ph.D.'s and all universities across the country were expanding and many new openings and... Just a different situation than there is today.

Colman: Do you have any thoughts about academic freedom and how that was affected, if at all, by the stronger administer structure in the College of Agriculture?

Cooke: Well, academic freedom's a word people define for their own purpose. I think that the general idea of academic freedom is that people have the right to say what they wish to say and publish what they wish without retaliation. But it's been broadened out by many individuals to suit their own purposes to define their own jobs as to whether they want to teach or not and what kind of research they want to do. It becomes a hobby horse for a lot of people. But I don't think that was the basic concept of academic freedom when it first surfaced. As to whether a strong dean makes a difference in the fundamental academic freedom – speech and publishing – it might have. If faculty members said something that the dean didn't like that impinged at the State level, a stronger dean could perhaps retaliate, yes.

*Academic
Freedom and
Recommended
Practices*

Colman: Let me take a – let me take a for instance ... Here the College of Agriculture works through an Extension Service and it's confusing to the clientele if you come up with two professors who come to different conclusions and so how would one reconcile that kind of situation?

Cooke: Well, I think two different voices putting it truthfully, Gould. You know, I think it would be untruthful to say this is the way it is, even though a lot of people disagree with it. Tell the farmer to do this and some other professor thinks he shouldn't. It's hard for the farmer obviously to weigh those things; but to come out with one line and say this is truth when you're not at all sure that it is would be worrisome to me.

Colman: Well, of course, it's not called the truth, it's practices – recommended practices.

Cooke: Yes, yes, that's fair enough. A good point. I don't know how to answer the question, but ...

Colman: Well, now, a number of years ago I did a book on the sugar beet industry in New York State and it became College policy to support that industry. And one of the faculty members up there was very – was convinced this was going to be a fiasco. It turned out he was right. And ultimately he was told to keep quiet.

Cooke: Now, that's impinging on academic freedom. No question in my mind.

Colman: Okay.

Cooke: Did he? Keep quiet?

Colman: He did! And resented it, bitterly.

Cooke: Yeh, that's an erosion of academic freedom, no question in my mind.

Colman: And yet if the College has a – you wouldn't argue with the College taking a position on the matter ...

Cooke: No. I think what I would argue with is that he does not say I agree with the College position. I think he should be allowed to say that he disagrees. He should be allowed to say it publicly. And the College just has to recognize that there are people who disagree and yet the – if the professor is right, he's right; and they should feel strongly enough or be convinced enough that they can withstand that sort of criticism.

Colman: Well, now, let's add another dimension to it. Here was a highly politicized matter with millions and millions of dollars involved and jobs and the publication of this professor was a reference point for the opposition. And it became very important to withdraw or revive that ...

Cooke: I guess I just don't see it that way, Gould. If the idea is good and can prevail it ought to be able to withstand criticism – even internally. I just don't think a university can be in a situation and say this is our line and no one can disagree.

Colman: Well, am I to think that you know of very few cases similar to the one I have cited.

Setting Priorities

Cooke: I know of very few cases, yes. There have been some. I don't know of many cases. Do you know of many?

Colman: No.

Cooke: No.

Colman: I don't.

Cooke: I think they're unusual.

Colman: I'm interested in the relationship between cash flow and research priorities. When Charlie Palm finished his long tenure up there, the Advisory Committee for the College of Agriculture asked him on the last meeting of his Deanship to sort of summarize what he thought he had accomplished during that thirteen years. And, as I recall it, it's a four or five-page paper. But what it adds up to me is I took care of my people. I worked very hard to take care of my people and it looks to me like he did a good job of doing so. When you start taking care of your people I suggest that you go where the money is and encourage those activities which keep a good cash flow situation

Cooke: Yes, I would agree, yes. You do need money to run operations. You do need money to do research and the more likely projects are to be supported. That's where you ought to build, because that's where the money usually goes – to the frontiers of science and so the two are not incompatible. So, I don't object to that sort of thing happening.

Colman: Um-hmm. So you're not – you're not any way an alarmist, now, about the investment of – heavy capitalization of research in genetic engineering.

Cooke: No. No. I think that's in the frontiers of science and an exciting aspect of the scientific world. I'm not an alarmist at all about it. I don't know – the point of your question as to whether you think there are moral issues involved?

Colman: No, I'm not – I'm not implying – I'm not implying that. All I'm implying is, I guess, is that there are many concerns in society that don't get attached to the flow of money. And the University, presumably, has the broader – has the universe as its concern.

Cooke: But I think the universities take longer range views, too. You know, genetic engineering, for example, could have an enormous positive impact on this world. Food, and food production could be radically changed through genetic engineering. I don't think the University should try to solve all problems of society; it's just not within our capability. So I think – I see no problem at all in concentrating on genetic engineering versus other particular fields of study. There will always be faculty who worry about wars and international policy. We have them and that's good. But, on the other hand, it's probably not the things we do best. We do genetic engineering sorts of things best. So I don't see any problems. More broadly in the bio technology. I think it's an exciting business; I think it will have major impact on the future, hopefully positive. So I have little concern.

1969 Crisis

Colman: Now, you've been pretty optimistic in your view of whether – not necessarily, was it rose-colored glasses ... But all during these events where a lot of folks were pushing the panic button in 1969 and so forth, you sort of took

a long view and didn't get all that excited.

Cooke: That's true, I didn't. Of course, I had one particular piece of my background that was psychologically buttressing, Gould. I've been in Eisenhower's War Room during the War, so ... [Laughs]. I've seen what some of these things really were! So I never got as excited about it as other people did, perhaps because of that background. But I think I did take the long view and felt at that time, "This, too, will pass", as it did. For one thing, I had read a lot about students' revolts – they're not at all uncommon, internationally and in this country. We've had eras of student revolt and the one prior to '69 was in 1933 where there were student uprisings at Columbia, City University and not unlike the ones in '69. And violence in one of them ... So I thought that this would be a phase we'd go through and survive. I think we survived for reasons I don't understand, much better than any other country.

Colman: There are those who attribute some of this happy outcome to the College of Agriculture and the sanity that prevailed there. Do you buy that?

Cooke: No. I think you might talk about Colleges of Agriculture in general or midwest universities were much more conservative so that it was primarily on the east and west coast that the universities were in turmoil. Nothing much happened in the University of Missouri or the University of Texas or – that really changed things very much. I think that's a regional political thing more than specifically colleges of agriculture.

Colman: That's right. I didn't make myself clear. That the reason that the students – whatever we want to call it – challenged the government here in '69 didn't take more radical dimensions than it did due to the stabilizing effect on this campus of the College of Agriculture.

Cooke: Well, perhaps there may have been more students at the barricades – or a higher percentage – without the College of Agriculture. I think that's probably true. And I think less so now than it used to be, the faculty of the College of Agriculture and the students of the College of Agriculture tended to be more conservative. I know if you went to a faculty cocktail party some years back you could immediately tell what College you were in. The people in the College of Agriculture, they always introduced me as Vice President Cooke or Dean Cooke, always more formal. They were well dressed and they just looked at things differently compared to the same kind of affairs in other colleges, where no one would think of introducing me by the title. It was a certain formality that existed, probably less so now. I think that was the case. They probably are more stable, at least used to be.

Colman: More traditional.

Cooke: More traditional ... I suppose that's the word, yeh. Probably had a stabilizing influence, I suppose. But I'm not so sure it was a major factor. It may have been a factor. I'm not sure why other countries came out so much worse than the students wound up with a much greater influence in the operation of the universities. Students in this country have very little influence on how a university operates. They're just not allowed to. It just never happened. That was the thrust of '69. It failed.

Colman: Because the students never formed an effective national organization here.

Cooke: They didn't even form an effective local organization.

Colman: That's right.

Cooke: I think, for one thing, they were all amateurs. In other countries some of the students are not amateurs. Political people dominated by politics, pro or con the government. But we never developed that kind of political cadres in this country where other countries did. Perhaps the reason being is the students in other countries generally can go to school indefinitely. And here you have to get a degree or leave.

Colman: [Laughs]. Yes!

Cooke: Of course, though, there were changes that came about because of that. If you take the Kahn-Bowers Report which was written about 1967 or '68, making a lot of recommendations and you read over those recommendations, you see that many of them actually came about. They were – the general thrust was to make the University a more humane place. And I think it has become more humane. I think we do listen to students more than we used to. They don't have any more power, but at least they get listened to more. So I think positive aspects did come out, even though the times were bitter and difficult.

Colman: Another way of saying that is we know how to handle students better.

Cooke: I don't think that – you know, there's no code to say how you handle students. It's just the innate reaction of people that worked, I think, more than any formal way of handling students. Yeh, I'm optimistic. I think universities will survive pretty much as they have in the past. There may be fewer students. They keep saying that year after year. So far, it hasn't happened, but I guess it's bound to happen eventually – the enrollments will decline. So I'm generally optimistic about the state of the University. We've always had money problems and almost every year that I've been here, even in the best of years in the sixties when the money was flowing, and we always had budget problems. If you have a good faculty, you think that they ought to be able to spend as much money as you can find for them and ask for more. That's not unnatural. I don't see any deep dark clouds on the horizon. I think the higher education establishment in the country has some very strong support. I mean, in positions of influence and power -- just look at industry themselves. They give billions each year to universities. Of course, they need the product of the universities – the trained personnel. You look at our federal loan program. I think the indications are positive. I don't see any trend toward downgrading universities or colleges.

Colman: Now, what about this land grant mission that I keep reading about – that the University has a strong commitment to public interests.

Cooke: I think they do. I think, though, it's concentrated in the statutory colleges. And – for example, take the College of Engineering. I think they see a role for themselves in industry. And they might give some bias toward New York State industry, but if it's an industry in California that they interact with, I think beyond a slight bias they look at industry on a national scale, rather

Leadership Styles

than a state scale.

I think as far as the College of Arts and Sciences goes there's little feeling of the state mission. So I think it is the statutory colleges that carry the burden of our land grant status. Just the facts of life, Gould, that's all. They're used to it. It's been their tradition. And I think the Agricultural college takes that role serious. I think they are concerned about the status; in contrast to the whole nation they would concentrate more of their resources at the state level, where I don't see the College of Engineering doing that. So the burden is on the statutory colleges. Even though it is the whole University that is the land grant institution.

Colman: Well, what else – what else do you know that one might not find in the record of the President of the University or the Dean of the College of Agriculture or other administrators. No researcher is going to go through every piece of paper that happens to be in the archives and you were a witness and a shaper for ... How about – we didn't talk at all about personality and the effect of personality. And you mentioned Dale Corson being a force in the Biological Sciences. But other than that, you sort of talked about the tradition and the inheritance of a pattern and how behavior is shaped by that pattern and then in terms of opportunities and how capital gets attached to opportunities. Personalities may be different. You've sure seen a lot of them come and go.

Cooke: Well, of course, they always do ... Make differences. People's attitudes towards things do change the way they operate. But I don't see many Liberty Hyde Baileys recently – that have very forceful personality to – that did things that they wanted to do and fought everybody who was opposed to them. That's a mode that's kind of disappeared and I don't think we can have those strong people in universities anymore. It's not the mode; they're too restricted in the power that they have. And, you know, if you think who are the strong personalities in the University that really did something different? Boy, you don't have a very long list. Can you think of any?

Colman: Oh, I think Hollister did.

Cooke: Hollister did, yes. But don't forget, that goes back a way in times, too. I'm just trying to think of ...

Colman: Stewart, maybe, in Botany ... At least in his own little ...

Cooke: I never knew him, Gould. When was he active?

Colman: Oh, he was active in the '50's and the '60's and was a very strong minded person, who, in effect, had to be set up – or seemed to have to be set up in his own department. And was not willing to be the sort of good soldier type that you're referring to in the College of Agriculture. Kicked over the traces and went right to the President of the University if he didn't get a satisfactory answer.

Cooke: Of course, that again is some time ago – maybe twenty years or more. Think of somebody in the last twenty years who ...

Colman: I agree, it's hard.

Cooke: ... had a very forceful personality that really accomplished something. Oh, it's hard to think of – at the moment I can't even think of one person. I think you might mention Bob Morison in the Biology Division, Bob

[Robert L.] Sproull in setting up the Material Science Center ... It's a damn short list, Gould! Who in the College would you -- in the last twenty years -- say was a really forceful personality that did something. You know, we've had forceful personalities ...

Colman: But they haven't necessarily done much.

Cooke: Stewart was a very forceful personality. I don't think he ever did much with it and was never able to accomplish a great deal. The system kind of reacted to him and swallowed him up and nothing much ever happened. You name some.

Colman: Yeh, well ...

Cooke: Maybe it's the sign of the times.

Colman: Well, we're talking -- you'll be interested to know that Liberty Hyde Bailey was appalled by -- he did not resign for the reasons that he said he did, but he was appalled by how the system dominated the individual in 1913, and decided he could spend his life better elsewhere and got out. And here we are seventy years later!

Cooke: So what you're saying is it's always been true.

Colman: Well, he perceived it that way, but he was an unusually perceptive person.

Cooke: I suspect it's become more restrictive than it was in those days ... could be independent ... More so than now.

Colman: And now independence is discouraged and system maintenance is encouraged and the product is the result of moving past a number of work stations and the idea is as Braverman says in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, there's a sort of a deskilling of the individual. But the skills lie in the hands of the people who create the system, the Bob Sproulls and the Morisons. That is, the system creates the product.

Cooke: I don't know why it's become more restrictive. At least I envisage it as being more restrictive. First of all, it's pretty hard to do things in an individual basis anymore. First of all, you need a committee. But that's not new. I have a quote from 1903 where a professor was complaining about the large number of committee meetings he had to attend and all the paperwork and whatnot. It's probably not new, but increased. But it's very hard to take action unilaterally. It's probably more a part of the democratic process. Also, the administrators don't want to get caught out on limbs anymore. So this whole growth of the committee system had a major influence on individuality. And we don't even decide our budget anymore without input from committees. That's all new. And it restricts unilateral action of the kind we're talking about where people went off on their own and did things. It doesn't happen anymore. Everybody has more input and power than they used to -- as a whole -- the system does. But the system is the people in the system, of course. They want that influence. So we don't have those giants anymore. At least in universities. I presume the business sector still has people who go out and do unusual things and build up organizations and sometimes destroy them. But there's a leveling in the universities that makes that much less likely anymore. The fact

that we can't think of any people in the past twenty years who we would classify as – you know, even Morison and Sproull go back fifteen or twenty years.

Colman: Well, this is a big thing in your mind -- this leveling process.

Cooke: Yes, and the decline of leadership because of restrictions.

Colman: Yeah, leadership doesn't have much meaning anymore, does it. We still abuse it. That is, when somebody's review comes up, some administrator being reviewed, then an inquiry of what kind of leadership he has shown, but it's sort of ... That's one of the questions one is supposed to ask. It doesn't have much ...

Cooke: I think they only have the opportunity for limited leadership. Sometimes I think the way to run the system is to do away with a lot of committees, let the President and the administration run the institution and then every five years have a vote of confidence among the faculty. That's an impossible system. It would never be implemented. Everybody wants to be involved in the decision-making process, which absorbs an awful lot of time of an awful lot of people.

Colman: Huge, huge...

Cooke: One person I might think of is Andy [Andrew] Schultz. Andy Schultz is a big kind of influence in the Engineering College. He and Dale, over a period, really changed it. I think more in the research operation ... But even then it was part of a national trend in any event. You know, you can't single those two people out and say, well, they really accomplished that; because it was something that was happening in all engineering colleges.

Colman: So you're saying that there really isn't much difference between Cornell and a lot of other places ...

Cooke: I think that's right.

Colman: They don't have Lake Cayuga down the road ...

Cooke: I think all universities of our kind are probably in the same boat.

Colman: And one couldn't have – one wouldn't have said that in the 1920's. There was still very distinctive qualities about Cornell. And even in the thirties.

Cooke: I think that's probably right. And we're probably becoming more homogenized. Well, the fact that we're so aware of what's happening in other institutions is one thing. There's so much more communication, so much more meetings these days that we are aware of what's happening, probably more so than we used to be.

Colman: One of the things that occurred during your tenure here – the huge growth in the support staff and its organization and its development of a national organization itself. Business managers, now, go off and have their conventions.

Cooke: Oh, sure. No, there has been a growth in the support staff – enormous growth that compares to the size of the institution, the number of students we're teaching, for example. I don't think that's unique to Cornell. I think it's true not only in universities but in businesses and part of it is regulation, no question. On

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the other hand, I think Parkinson's Law does prevail. And the administrative system feeds on itself and keeps adding and adding. A lot of it just to take care of its own administration system. I think it's inevitable. The beautiful table in Parkinson's book – I can't remember the numbers exactly, but it points out in 1914, you know, when England had the largest navy in the world, they were managed – the Admiralty staff was something like five thousand members. And in 1975 when the navy had disappeared, the number of ships had declined by a factor of ten, it took thirty-three thousand Admiralty staff to run a navy that didn't exist. I think that's a phenomenon that's prevalent everywhere. I don't agree with all of Parkinson's reasons for it, but certainly the phenomenon he observed is correct. We've grown – I looked at a 1951 telephone book and looked at the number of offices in Day Hall. The only one that disappeared – two, really – is the Proctor's Office has disappeared and the Dean of Women has disappeared. All the others are still here, plus an enormous number of others. Day Hall, for example, became filled. We now have people – a lot of operations have moved out into other buildings. Bureaucracy does increase and it just seems inevitable. There doesn't seem to be anything anybody can do about it. Overhead keeps increasing.

Colman: And yet you remain optimistic.

Cooke: Well, perhaps the one thing that could sink us would be in the bureaucracy, in the paperwork ... But it's not only universities, it's our whole national society, where bureaucracy is becoming more prevalent. I understand we're better off than most countries where it's even worse – say, Italy and France where the big government bureaucracy is enormously more difficult to deal with than it is ours. Perhaps it gives people work to do, I suppose. It's a real problem and I see no signs that it's going to change. I think we'll continue to add people. Although the Federal bureaucracy, as far as number of people, has actually leveled off. It has not continued to increase, the number of Federal employees has leveled.

Colman: Now, you better think of something else to say because we can't end on that pessimistic note! [Laughs].

Cooke: Well, I don't know ... I think it's the sort of thing that the system will somehow digest, it will make us, the universities less efficient. But I just think we'll survive it, anyway, Gould, and absorb that problem as we have absorbed many other problems.

Colman: Period?

Cooke: Period!

[End of Interview]