

Tales from the BOG

By DAVID BYRNES

York's Board of Governors consists of some of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the business community, broadly representative of Canada's elite class, and for better or worse they are the supreme governing body of the university. The decisions they have made have created and shaped York.

New BOG members are chosen by the existing Board, which looks for people whose external involvements and expertise will contribute to a better informed and more effective decision-making body. Ideally, the Board should be a group of people whose collective expertise will result in wise decision-making, and therefore a better university.

Critics of the BOG often point out that Board members, who are essentially business people, have a tendency to be too "business-minded," and to make decisions as though they are running a corporation instead of a university. A university, they insist, must not only be a profitable business but should have an intellectual "life" and a sense of identity to succeed.

In consideration of the unique social and academic needs of the university, York's 32 member board now includes two student reps, two faculty reps and an alumni rep, who together with the President of the University air the views of academia and affect the decisions of the Board.

Under Fire

York's Board of Governors came into being in 1959, when the York University Act was formally passed by the provincial government. At that time there were just seven members.

For the next five years York was closely affiliated with the University of Toronto, an affiliation which gave York the essential status and support that it needed to get started. With the help of that support, the BOG was able to procure \$15-million to spark York's building fund, and shortly afterwards, when government support failed, another \$16-million in loans. A 1971 study of York's BOG (*A Study of the Board of Governors*, William Dolman, ed.) concluded that, despite controversies surrounding the very necessity of the Board in the 1960s, its early work was "essential" to the very existence of York.

As the days of student unrest and rebellion came to York in the 1960s, however, the Board became the object of a great deal of public criticism because of its elitist and secretive nature. The question of whose interests it really served—its own individual

and group interests or the interests of the university community—became a contentious issue. The question of misrepresentation and indifference towards academic needs fueled unrest in 1970, when the BOG cut funding to a Senate Scholarship Committee so drastically that the committee resigned.

In 1975 the BOG came under fire again when work began on York's chapel, the money for which was donated by one of the Board members in memory of his daughter. The Board went ahead and built the chapel despite the fact that a student referendum held to decide the issue voted against construction of the building.

Perhaps the most frequent complaint against the BOG during the 1960s and early 1970s was that, although the decisions they made affected the entire academic community, their function was secretive—Board meetings were held in camera, and the minutes were not made public.

In 1975 a CYSF President, Paul Axelrod, published a paper in which he attacked the Board's policy of secrecy, which he saw as a major cause of student unrest and alienation at York. In his paper, *Towards Democracy in the University*, Axelrod argued that the openness in York's decision-making body was

needed before a healthy academic community could exist, and that "this atmosphere of privacy and secrecy (especially within the ranks of the top governing body) created an unhealthy aura of mistrust and suspicion in the university."

Although York's governing body never became an amalgamation of the Board and the Senate (consisting of one third students) as Axelrod predicted, it did become less secretive in the late 1970s. Board meetings and minutes are now made public.

A legacy of underfunding

A burden hampering the efforts of the BOG almost from the beginning of York's history has been the problem of underfunding.

In the 1950s, when the idea to build York University was conceived, the Ontario government was pouring money into universities, recognizing that the "baby boom" generation was maturing and threatening to overload the existing university system. Also, the government's planning at that time was based on the philosophy of the Massey Report, published in the early 1950s, which justified spending a large portion of the public purse on education because of the payoff in highly skilled, productive workers the investment would produce.

Under conditions of government encouragement, and even pressure, York's BOG made a decision that has caused a constant headache ever since—the decision to make York a huge multiversity instead of the small Liberal Arts university they had first envisioned. Then, with the Keele Street campus only partly completed, government reversed its policies and cut back drastically on university funding.

In 1980, after several years of pruning back York's budget, the BOG decided they had two routes to choose between. One route was to continue cutting the budget, but that was hardly an option. As Mel Ransom, the secretary of the Board, remembers, "There was not much left that we could cut."

And so the Board opted for the alternative route. Encouraged by a government funding scheme that funded universities on a per student basis, it opted to increase the university's income by expanding enrolment.

Since then, however, government has once again cut back on funding, so that today there are about 9,000 "unfunded units" (i.e. students) walking around York, and a corresponding \$15-million deficit.



BOG meeting bummed out in '74 by streakers protesting board secrecy.

Coming up: The BOG and York's Future

Who they are

Irving M. Abella B.A., M.A., Ph.D. Faculty rep. from York's dept. of History. Joined Board Nov 12/84.

John E. Akitt B.Sc. Vice President of Imperial Oil Limited and President of Esso Chemical Canada. Joined Board Sept 11/84.

Harry W. Arthurs B.A., LL.B., LL.M. Barrister at Law. President of York University. Joined Board Jan 1/85.

Sonja Ingrid Bata LL.D. Director of Bata Limited, headquarters company of the Bata Shoe Organization. Joined Board Sept 13/76.

Roy F. Bennett F.C.A. Bennicon Limited, formerly president of Ford Motor Company of Canada. Joined Board March 11/74.

R. Bruce Bryden B.A. (Chairman of the B.O.G.) Investment Vice President of Confederation Life Insurance Company. Joined Board Jan 11/71.

Sheldon N. Caplan LL.B., M.B.A. Pre Fab Cushioning Products. Joined Board July 1/83.

Samuel L.G. Chapman B.A. Former Director of York Country Board of Education. Joined Board Oct 10/72.

George A. Cohon B.Sc. S.J.D. President and Director of McDonald's Restaurants of Canada Limited. Joined Board Nov 8/82.

Gregory Cooper B.A., LL.B. Bastedo, Cooper & Shostack, Barristers & Solicitors. Joined Board June 11/74.

Wallace B.S. Crowston B.A.Sc., S.M., M.Sc., Ph.D. Faculty rep. from York's faculty of Administrative Studies. Joined Board July 1/83.

Allen E. Diamond B.Sc., P. Eng. President of Whitecastle Investment Limited. Joined Board July 1/84.

William A. Dimma B.A.Sc., P. Eng., M.B.A., D.B.A. President of A.E. LePage Limited. Joined Board May 10/76.

Anne R. Dubin Q.C., B.A., LL.B. Partner in Tory, Tory, Deslauriers & Binington Barristers & Solicitors. Joined Board Oct 15/73.

John Craig Eaton Chairman of the Board of Eaton's of Canada Limited; President of Cresta Canada Limited; Director of Eaton/Bay Financial Services Limited. Joined Board July 1/80.

Pamela Fruitman B.A. Student rep. Joined Board May 1/82.

Ellis S. Gareth B.A. Alumni rep. Account Executive with Dominion Securities Ames Limited. Joined Board July 1/81.

Harold Anthony Hampson B.A., M.A. President and Chief Executive Officer of Canada Development Corporation. Joined Board April 7/75.

Edward J. Kernaghan B.A. Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Thomson Kernaghan & Company Limited. Joined Board Nov 8/82.

Michael M. Koerner S.B., M.B.A. President of Canada Overseas Investments Limited. Joined Board May 13/68.

Martin Zarnett Student rep. Joined Board May 1/83.

Philip A. Lapp B.A.Sc., S.M., Sc.D. President of Philip A. Lapp Limited. Joined Board July 1/80.

John D. Leitch LL.D. Chairman of ULS International Limited. Joined Board July 1/80.

Leonard G. Lumbers Chairman and Director of Noranda Manufacturing Limited. Joined Board May 7/62.

Hugh Macauley B.A. Chairman of Canadian Tire Corporation. Joined Board July 1/84.

Lino Magagna B.Eng., M.A., Ph.D. Senior Auditor (Operations) of Ontario Hydro. Joined Board Feb 14/72.

David Morgan B.A., M.B.A. Chairman of Morgan Trust Company of Canada. Joined Board July 1/84.

John S. Proctor LL.D. (Honorary Member of the BOG) Honorary Director of Mutual Life Assurance of Canada. Joined Board Dec. 2/59.

Malcolm W. Ransom (Secretary of the BOG) Secretary of York University.

Frank Stronach Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Magna International Incorporated. Joined Board July 1/84.

James C. Thackray B.Sc. President and Director of Bell Canada Limited. Joined Board Sept 12/83.

J. Tuzo Wilson C.C., O.B.E., B.A., M.A., Sc.D., Ph.D., D. Sc., LL.D., D. Univ., F.R.S., F.R.S.C. (Chancellor of the BOG) Director General of the Ontario Science Centre. Joined Board Sept 1/83.