

# UNIVERSITY NEWSBEAT

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## The President Reports

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Last week an unsigned circular was distributed on the campus which misinterpreted the events of Tuesday, September 26. This circular referred to a rally which was attended "by over 700 students from York and Glendon campuses", and stated that I "refused to show up and be accountable for the Administration's position".

In fact, a memorandum was delivered at my office late on the preceding Friday afternoon inviting me to attend the rally to receive a petition. I replied that I would be chairing an all-day meeting of the University Policy Committee about the strike and other urgent matters of University business. I was then asked if I would delegate someone from "the Administration" to attend in my place. I replied that I would be pleased to send the Assistant Vice-President for Student Affairs. He would read a full statement of the present position of the University in the current labour dispute.

About 1.30 p.m. I was asked if I would step out of the meeting to take a call from one of the rally organizers. He indicated that the students had a number of questions they wanted to ask and that they wanted me to receive a petition.

Since the Policy Committee meeting was not scheduled to conclude until after 3.00 p.m., I suggested that he make a record of the various questions to which the group wished answers, and to choose a small delegation to bring the questions and the petition to me at the conclusion of the Policy Committee meeting. It did not seem reasonable to expect the whole group to await the conclusion of the Policy Committee, but I would be prepared to postpone my other meetings for the rest of the afternoon in order to meet the delegation.

I was then advised that a large number of students had left the meeting and were waiting in the corridors of the ninth floor where they would like to meet. We considered the matter in the Policy Committee and I asked my colleagues if they would be willing to disband our meeting and join me with the students who were waiting outside my office.

I arranged for the University Senate Chamber to be available as a convenient location. A large number of students did come to the Senate Chamber but others were unwilling to do so and preferred to meet in the crowded corridor - a site scarcely conducive to easy discussion or conversation. Nevertheless, I was quite happy to delay the large meeting in order to meet with these students in the corridor and to receive the petition. I again invited them to join the larger meeting which many did. That meeting provided nearly three hours of discussion over a wide range of issues and involved members of the Policy Committee as well.

My reason for concern about this misinterpretation is the relationship which I have enjoyed with our student body over the past four years. I have made it a practice to accept every invitation from a student group unless I was

already committed to some other function. Each year I have made a point of asking to be invited to Orientation activities, and to various student parties and events. I have endeavoured to follow closely student activities in our various artistic performances and sporting events.

In addition, I have made myself available for any group of students who wished to discuss any subject at any time, even on those occasions when our legal advisers suggested that to do so might involve a breach of our collective bargaining process. My reply has always been that the president of a university should be willing to talk to any group at any time on any subject, and that has been my practice. I know that is well known to my colleagues and to many students of the University.

In the course of the meeting, I realized once again the immense gap of understanding about the University's current position and the difficulties it faces, notwithstanding the efforts we have made through all the means available to us to communicate the facts of our situation. This is not, of course, either a novel or surprising condition. Only a relatively small number within the large community are involved with the full-time operation of the University. Those who teach and those who learn have a full-time programme of academic commitment. For that reason, I believe it is worth repeating the process by which the University arrived in its present position.

Last winter, following the announcement of provincial funding for 1978-79, the University entered into exhaustive examination of its budgetary options. I indicated that in order to have a salary reserve that would provide increases anywhere near the current rate of inflation, the University would need to reduce its base budget by some 5.7 million dollars.

This prospect concerned us all because of its implications for the "quality of education." Throughout the winter there was a great deal of concern expressed about the possible consequences of such a large cut for our academic programmes and our basic academic services. Consequently, the budget reduction was finalized at 3.8 million, after supplementary assistance to Glendon College and the Faculty of Arts as a result of deliberations in the Senate's Academic Policy and Planning Committee. However, it was made known to all members of the university community that this would permit a reserve for salary increases of only 4% across-the-board.

I recall that in my first speech to Senate on budgetary matters in 1974, at a time when we were also facing serious financial constraints, I suggested that the broad options were between academic programmes, jobs, and salaries. This University has always given a preference to the maintenance of jobs and the preservation of academic programmes, with the result that our salaries have tended to lag behind other Universities.

Some members of Senate attempted to initiate a debate last winter suggesting that salaries be frozen for a year or increased only minimally in order to preserve academic programmes and the jobs that go with them. That approach, however, received little encouragement. The fact remains that the academic programmes of York University are relatively high-cost compared to other universities in the province. Of course, York can pay higher salaries if it is willing to reduce the number of positions and experience further contractions in its basic programmes.

At that point voices are always raised saying: "go to Queen's Park and ask for more money", or, "operate on a deficit".

On the first point, no university has been more vigorous in pressing its case at Queen's Park or in public. Last winter, the Board of Governors passed a resolution urging the Government of Ontario to moderate its constraint programme in order to give the universities an opportunity to phase in to new conditions.

The Chairman of the Board of Governors, the Chairman of Senate, the Dean of Arts, and I arranged a special meeting with the Premier and the Minister of Colleges and Universities to stress the plight of our institution and to seek some relief from the stringency of provincial funding. At the risk of sounding immodest, I know of no University President who has devoted more time either at Queen's Park or on the public platform to stressing the importance of universities to society and the need for universities to enjoy a higher priority in public finance. I regret that these efforts have yet to be rewarded.

On the subject of deficit financing, the Board of Governors considers that it would be unwise to add to the present accumulated budgetary deficits of some 3.0 million dollars in view of the announced intentions of the Ontario Government for funding over the next few years.

Incidentally, the funding outlook for universities has recently been confirmed and emphasized by the Government's advisory body, the Ontario Council of University Affairs. We must continue the fight and we must never give up the struggle for the university in general, and York in particular; I certainly have no intention of doing so. However, that does not change the reality of our current circumstances.

Along the way, a great variety of rumour and inaccurate commentary flows through the University. What is so disturbing about much of it is that it takes place in defiance of the practice which we insist upon in our academic scholarship and research. We live by the process of digging out the facts first and coming to conclusions later; if we are uncertain of the facts, we normally ask someone who may have them at his or her disposal.

However, in so much of the political and policy discussion within the University, allegations seem to be made, or conclusions

are drawn, before any effort is made to ascertain the facts or even to discuss the situation with someone who might have some light to shed on the matter at hand.

On Monday morning, for example, an information sheet was handed out to people crossing the picket line in which a number of professors made statements in support of the strike. One of the paragraphs in this signed message stated that the University's offer to YUSA was a straight 4 per cent total compensation package. That was not true. The University's offer of 4 per cent was for salary only, with benefits in addition. The total package offered YUSA before the strike was called was for approximately 4.6 percent when you include benefits above the 4 per cent salary offer. This misrepresentation of the facts, which could have readily been avoided by a telephone call, only caused more confusion.

The repeated suggestion that the University is about to appoint three Vice-Presidents is a similar case. That suggestion continues to recur no matter how many times the facts have been stated. There has never been any intention to appoint three Vice-Presidents. The two senior positions under consideration are the direct result of recommendations by the University's senior academic body, the Senate.

In the case of one office - the Dean of Research - this will consolidate functions presently being performed within the Office of Research Administration and the Office of International Services; it does not involve a new position, nor any major additional cost.

In the case of the proposed Vice-President for Academic Affairs, I repeatedly indicated in the debates in Senate that this could not be done if it involved additional cost. I am the last person who needs to be convinced that the load carried by the Deans and Vice-Presidents would be relieved somewhat by an additional Vice-President.

However, as I indicated in the Gazette to all members of the University community, that position could only be phased in while other activities were phased out, so that there would be no net additional cost to the University.

That situation also illustrates one of the great difficulties this University faces in its organization and its process, particularly where the faculty is concerned. The thrust of recommendations emanating from the Senate is often directly opposed to those emanating from the various labour unions, although both are drawn from the same community.

In turn, there is a contradiction in the behaviour that is expected of the University under the York University Act, which treats the University as a single community, and that of the Ontario Labour Relations Act, in which members of the University are divided as between "management" and "labour".

This contradiction is particularly apparent in the dual role that is expected of the President of the University. Under the York University Act, his function is to

bring the various sectors of the University - the Board of Governors, the Senate, the Faculties, and all those who work and study here - into happy harmony. Under the Ontario Labour Relations Act, he is designated as a member of the management responsible for carrying out the Board of Governors' policy in labour negotiations.

We have attempted to overcome that apparent contradiction by using the University Policy Committee, which is made up of Vice-Presidents, Deans, and several others, as the group which seeks to reconcile the academic requirements with the budgetary constraints. Out of that Committee comes the balancing which has led to our present position. Whereas it may be comforting for some to treat "the Administration" as the whipping boy, that does not change the fact that everyone in the University, by the preferences he or she expresses, has a part to play in the ultimate determination of policy.

The current strike poses for many people the unpleasant choice between competing responsibilities, for example, those who find a conflict between a desire to support the strikers and the wish to serve their students.

This became particularly marked in the case of the attempt to open the Bookstore one evening. At the beginning of the strike, the Policy Committee felt that it would be important to give priority to the operation of the Library and the Bookstore.

It is a well-established practice for management personnel to provide essential services under strike conditions and we considered those two operations to be both essential and primary. However, on the advice of the Director of Libraries, it was decided only to open the Reserve Room of the Scott Library because of the complexity of its operation. Similarly, it became clear that it would be difficult to operate the Bookstore with management personnel and with some students from the Bookstore roster of part-time employees.

However, the first week of the strike was also the first week of Atkinson classes and we were under tremendous pressure from the students of Atkinson College, as expressed by the Dean of Atkinson, to open the Bookstore to serve their needs. Somewhat against our better judgement on the labour relations front, we decided to open the Bookstore one evening to meet the criterion of student need. It is unfortunate that the desire to serve students led to unhappiness and misunderstanding on the part of many of our colleagues. There are always such dilemmas and some do not have an easy resolution.

The task of finding a way to reconcile our conflicting priorities in a rational manner remains the main challenge to this University. Certainly we have no absence of established procedures for dealing with our problems; the real challenge is to accept those procedures and to use them effectively.