

# THE THOUGHTS OF CHAIRMAN MAX

an interview with Max Wyman in the last academic term of his presidency

interviewer, Terri Jackson  
photographer, Peter Johnston

**JACKSON:** As I recall, Dr. Wyman, one of your first actions when you became president was to insist on student representation on various university bodies. How successful do you think student participation has been during your term?

**WYMAN:** I don't think it's correct to say that I insisted on student representation. I think it would be more accurate to say that I supported student representation on all bodies of the university. In the time that you are talking, 1967-68, the Students' Union wanted more or less observer status rather than to be members of bodies, but to participate and so on. I think their argument was that all they wanted to do was influence decisions. If they really became members of these committees, they also had to take responsibility for the decisions that were being made and I think it was quite prevalent in university circles at that time. I think that was changed by the student body and they wanted to have actual voting representations. And certainly I supported this fully. I believe it was necessary to bring out the student view of the university. I think there was a great deal of complaining going on at that time about universities in general, and this university in particular. The students' complaints, at this university at least, were more or less in small groups complaining among themselves that nothing was coming out for open debate and I think that we have representation in large numbers, really, in all major committees and I think it has been very successful.

**JACKSON:** Another emphasis of your presidency has been the opening up of the university. Are you satisfied with the degree with which the university has opened up?

**WYMAN:** I would hesitate to say that there aren't avenues to do more along this because I am just not aware of them. But I am satisfied that the philosophy of this university is to have an open university and that we would like to have the decision making process brought out into the open and that we do want to allow the various constituent groups in the university to influence, and not just to react to them; not just having someone say, 'well, here's the decision - react to it'. I think that's always a difficult position to be put into, because those who make the decision will try to defend the decision. It's far easier if constituent groups are allowed to influence the decision before the decision has taken place. This is not complete yet, by any means. But I think the desire is there and I think the mechanism of trying to do this is still to be devised. Particularly, for example, in the budget.

**JACKSON:** That was my next question - the budget. Why are these procedures not applied to the budget?

**WYMAN:** Well, I think it is because the desire was there but I think I made a serious mistake in the last two years in the way I tried to get the influence there. The last two years I did the following things: First of all, I held a meeting of department chairmen and I explained the situation to them and then asked them, in turn, to discuss this situation with their members of faculty and I also discussed it with the Graduate Students' Association and any other groups that were interested in discussing it with me. The second thing that I did was to make a suggestion at the same time of how we could cope with the situation. Now I think that in retrospect

both of these were mistakes on my part. Because I think I should have talked to the decision makers and not sent emissaries. Instead of talking to chairmen of departments I should have been going to faculty councils - talking to a much broader spectrum of people, and this I'm doing this year, incidentally.

The second thing was that even though my motives were impeccable that these were truly suggestions for people to try to influence and change. I don't think that people believed - I think that they believed that they were in a situation that they were reacting to decisions that were actually made. Now I'm not doing that this year too. What I've done is to prepare the revenues that we've had - the kinds of expenses that we are facing and I'm making no suggestion to how it should be remedied, and so I have held my first meeting with the Faculty of Education and I will spend the whole month going through all faculty councils this year and I will also be speaking to student groups, to the library, there's the staff association, budget committee. I'll speak to any group who wants to speak to me during the month of January. The month of February will be the decision-making month. Now whether this will be successful or not, I don't know. At least I feel that I've made a mistake in the last two years. I want to try something else to have this openness and to have the influence of various constituent groups make its weight felt in the budget procedure.

**JACKSON:** I would be cynical enough to say probably that every faculty's priority is getting more money.

**WYMAN:** Yes, I wouldn't doubt that you are right. But, I hope that you are wrong. I won't know until the end of the month. If every faculty says we don't care what happens to the other faculties and we need more money and if somebody else gets hurt - we don't care - then I truly wonder why are we under one roof? Why shouldn't we just simply say "all right each faculty becomes an autonomous unit and let them argue with the government." Unless I do find that kind of thread that, say, in the Faculty of Arts where enrolments are going down, if the rest of the university is not prepared to help these faculties (and they are not alone - Education and Engineering) then I really truly wonder why we are housed in one institution. That kind of argument isn't satisfactory to those groups who are still growing, for example.

**JACKSON:** In the Board of Governors recently there have been a number of attempts to move the university into a situation of determining priorities. Now obviously, that's particularly important when you're talking about the budget,



because the budget actually determines your priorities in one sense or another. What do you think of this idea of setting priorities for the entire university?

**WYMAN:** Well, I don't believe in it myself because I think that the priorities that are set will not ever receive a consensus approval. In other words, if we what to give a small group the right to set priorities, it will be their priority. It won't be the university's priorities in the sense that everybody agrees on the priorities that that group will come with. I believe in something quite different in the sense that I believe in the decentralized form of decision-making. What we try to do is try to get as much money as from the government as we can for our facility, to try to divide it up on some kind of equitable basis - all in dollars - until it reaches the department. There's the place where I think the wisdom lies in making a good university - within the department. And they should be allowed to take whatever dollars they have and spend them in the way they see fit. This is a simplified kind of thing, but it's what my fundamental belief is, because I don't think there is such a thing as a set of priorities for this university that cannot be attacked, and attacked with some reason. I think that what we should do is still have good faith in our staff and students and say as far as we can, the priorities for this university should simply be the sum total of the priorities of the departments.

**JACKSON:** You raise the question of the university's relationship with the provincial government. I have recently begun to sense a real reluctance or perhaps, it's a re-emphasis in the provincial government's priorities, a reluctance to support post-secondary education, as it had once been supported. Is that your feeling as well?

**WYMAN:** Well, it depends on what you mean of course. During the 60's for example, our university budgets were going up by 25% a year, but most of that, of course, was justified by about a 12% increase in enrolment and about 2½% in inflation and then the rest was to improve the university. If you talk about that magnitude, there's no question it's over, and it's over everywhere, because no country could maintain a 25% increase a year for very long. I would say that if the university budgets go up at a rate of somewhere from 8 - 10% that that would show a reasonable growth and good support. Because as long as our student populations are static we can't expect that 12% growth, I mean that would be exactly equivalent of reducing the 25% down to 13%. Quite frankly, at the moment I'm optimistic. I think that possibly last year we hit the nadir in

Canada and that we will now be going back up in our financial support. I might be wrong of course.

**JACKSON:** What do you see as the greatest problem faced by you in the last five years as president of the university?

**WYMAN:** Oh, I think there's no question that the financial problem was the greatest one by far.



**JACKSON:** And what problem do you foresee as the greatest problem to face your successor in the next five years?

**WYMAN:** I don't really know, I haven't really thought about it.

**JACKSON:** Is there any question that you wanted me to ask that I didn't ask?

**WYMAN:** Nothing really. I hadn't thought of it in any particular way. I would like you to bring out that this was a decision that I made right at the outset. I'm not leaving it because I've become disenchanted or anything like that - there's nothing in that at all. In fact I feel that even knowing what I know now, I would have taken the presidency because I think it made a better person of me. I have a far better understanding say of the interdisciplinary nature of the problems of society than I would have, say, if I had just remained a mathematician all my life. I have a far better understanding of some of the problems of the different faculties and their disciplines which I think have helped broaden me as a person in a way that I don't think I could have attained if I hadn't been president. The reason that I hope you'll stress it is - if people are nominated for the position of president, I hope that they will let their names stand and that they shouldn't be frightened of the position, because so much has been written that it's a terrible job and no sane man will take it and things like that. It is just the opposite of that I think.