



# One hour with Robert

***New Minister of Education talks about students, loans, rights and—the pub in SUB***

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What kind of a man is Robert Clark? He's what you would call an ordinary man. He went to an ordinary high school in Carstairs, and then to the equally ordinary universities of Calgary and Alberta. He was a teacher. He is 31-years-old. But the thing that makes him extraordinary is that, since his election to the Legislative Assembly (1960) and his becoming Minister of Education (1967), this quick, yet quiet and personable man, is in charge of all public education in Alberta. That means that some of his decisions control you, the cog in the machine here at the Multiversity of Alberta.

That is why this man's opinion on the major issues on campus are so important.

## **Mr. Clark, is university a right or a privilege?**

He seemed to think it was the right of anyone with the academic capabilities. Of course, fees and student assistance became the topics of discussion.

"Last year, there was a 113 per cent increase in student assistance. This year we are going to introduce legislation to have student assistance handled more by the banking institutions in Alberta. Up until now, we have been using only money from the General Revenue Fund of the province."

The new scheme would operate much like the federal system of aid to students, and Mr. Clark estimated that in the next ten years, \$99 million would be lent out to university students.

## **Do you have plans to remove fees entirely?**

"No, I prefer to think that no deserving Alberta student will be denied the privilege of post-secondary education simply because of a financial barrier."

The minister was then asked what he thought of the abuses of the Queen Elizabeth Plan that had been brought to light in a recent *Gateway* article and on the television public affairs program *D 7*.

"I've only had two or three letters since I became minister from people who have had loans turned down. I'm not saying we don't make mistakes—we do every day—but our department is always open to a review. We have never turned one down. But if the people who are dissatisfied don't come to you, you can't really write to them and say 'are you satisfied'."

"It's these people who lie on their application forms, and then re-invest the money, that force us to make the regulations so bloody tight for the persons who have a legitimate need."

In any case, Mr. Clark was hopeful that the situation would improve when more money became available through the chartered banks.

## **How would you answer people who charge that Indians and Eskimos are barred, finan-**

cially and sociologically, from attending university?

"I suppose such people would be very critical of what goes on in the Northlands School Division. Sure, you can say that some things being done up there are horrible by Edmonton standards—and they may be: I'm not that familiar with the situation to comment—but the province is doing something to help. We are making arrangements with the Federal Government to handle the education of native people in Alberta. We are also thinking of re-writing the curriculum to make it more suitable to the needs of these people."

Mr. Clark was careful to point out that the government is not yet satisfied with the situation, but that progress was closely tied to other financial priorities.

"It's somewhat a matter of relativity, too. In some parts of Canada, the Northlands School Division would be considered quite a forward step." Fortunately, Alberta educators are not satisfied with being a bit better than the worst there is. At this moment, Mr. McKinnon, a former education minister, is chairing a committee looking into not only native education spending, but also the health, welfare, and recreational services needed to make this expenditure on education worthwhile.

"We are striving to improve the situation, but I think a lot will depend on the reaction of the native organizations."

## **Why should the Universities Commission of Alberta have to make a public appeal for a \$25 million building fund?**

"There's no question what the number-one priority of the Alberta government is: It's education," replied Mr. Clark. He cited the fact that there is no other province with a higher per capita investment in university capital buildings.

But the minister was not too hopeful that the \$25 million would be raised.

"I think it's very unfortunate that the situation at Sir George Williams has developed. I think the people in a position to contribute money might look at this and reconsider, rightly or wrongly so."

He thought that many contributions would be made, but that recent unrest made it unlikely that the goal would be achieved.

## **What would you do if Sir George Williams were repeated here?**

"I don't anticipate it's going to happen. If it does, I think you'll have to look at the circumstances at the time. Don't try to use any 'pat' answers."

Mr. Clark said that, unlike some states in the U.S., the provincial government had no emergency program prepared.

"We don't plan to move the government to Penhold or anything," he said with a broad grin.

## **Do you approve of a "Pub in SUB"?**

"I support the idea," was his reaction. He said he could give no hint as to whether the government had plans to lower the drinking age to 19, which would make the idea even more popular at the U of A.

Comparing the provincial voting an drinking ages, he said, "I do think that if a person can vote and can go to war, they should be responsible enough to have a drink when they want."