

Meet the pres

David Slater has homework to do

By BOB ROTH

David W. Slater, York's new president, can thank the university senate for his present job — and he knows it.

Last year a power struggle between York's board of governors and the faculty dominated senate over who was to select the new president resulted in a virtual senate victory when the academic body forced James Gillies, the board's favourite candidate, to withdraw from the race.

Although Gillies, York's dean of administrative studies, was the board's choice for president, the senate made it clear he was not their's and Gillies, apparently not wanting the job without senate support, dropped out, leaving the position open for Slater, whom the board eventually picked over the remaining candidates.

Slater, former dean of graduate studies and research at Queen's university, obtained his undergraduate degree in economics from Queen's before going to the University of Chicago for his M.A. and Ph.D.

He has lectured at Stanford, edited Canadian Banker, served on various royal commissions and is presently a director of the Bank of Canada.

Board of Trustees

In an EXCALIBUR interview, Slater made it very clear that the senate will become the top governing body at York under his administration.

"The board of governors more and more may very well act as a board of trustees rather than a board of governors," he said. Trustees, he said, "generally speaking... don't initiate." The board will still have "a kind of a keeping of the trust role to play" but "other functions may be of lesser importance."

Slater says he is in favour of more openness and a greater dissemination of information than York has seen in the past. He wishes to publish a weekly or biweekly booklet of all minutes of the senate, senate committees and faculty committees.

Although a senate man, Slater is apparently not prepared to pick up the old hot potato of open board meetings. Asked if he would open the meetings and publish the presently censored minutes, he said:

"To be perfectly frank, I haven't myself thought through all of these questions about openness." The board situation, he said, "hasn't really been looked at seriously... Ultimately this is a question for the board to sort out."

Slater admitted that even the senate "has certain rules about when material may be released" and "I couldn't unilaterally change those rules." He said he is in the process of "reviewing what those rules are."

The 'sad' Edwards affair

Shortly before Slater came to York he managed to get himself involved in a political fiasco at Queen's concerning a radical graduate student named Chuck Edwards.

Edwards, a doctoral student in chemistry, had been a constant critic of the role of Queen's scientific research. Because of his left-wing tendencies the RCMP started an investigation on campus and Edwards subsequently charged that his academic freedom was being violated. He accused his doctoral supervisor, Henry

Becker, of political blackmail after Becker allegedly told him to choose between his studies and his politics.

When a university investigating committee found Becker innocent Slater, according to Canadian University Press, introduced a motion in the Queen's senate requesting "that Mr. Edwards be taken from the registration of Queen's."

The motion succeeded in enraging Edwards' supporters who broke up the meeting and forced the senate to adjourn.

At the next meeting Slater toned down his motion and asked the senate to merely "censure" Edwards.

Looking back on the event Slater said, "It's a very sad affair for Edwards and for the other people who were deeply involved in the thing. They get hurt..."

"I just deeply regret seeing anybody get caught in this sort of thing... but what came out eventually was fair, open, as compassionate as one could ever get out of a thing of this sort."

The Edwards affair is probably the major reason behind Slater's desire to quickly set up a court system at York. He has already discussed the matter with members of the Council of the York Student Federation.

The liberal approach

Slater has also looked at the Laskin report on campus discipline which was drawn up at York last year and calls for such a university court. The report came under attack last year because it called for the application of specific penalties, such as expulsion, for student misconduct, but did not recommend any penalties for administration misconduct.

Slater was unable to adequately explain why the Laskin report had been written in such a way but said, "For many of us I think it's a hangover from a rather deeply engrained liberal approach to these things," where harsh penalties are not often used because the student is usually given "the benefit of the doubt."

Americanization

Slater was also questioned by EXCALIBUR on U.S. domination of Canada and Canadian universities.

He said he is opposed to a "buy back Canada approach" to the problem of foreign economic control.

"I'm much more interested in what's going to happen in the future rather than trying to unwind some of the things of the past," he said.

He says too much emphasis has been put on the question of foreign ownership by some people. There are many other economic problems in Canada besides foreign ownership, he claims.

"Educated, trained, skilled human beings really are of much greater significance as a form of wealth as a contributor to economic productivity than real things," he said.

Foreigners "may own real capital and certain productive organizations, but they don't own the collectivity of human beings."

He admitted, however, "that the kind of activities and opportunities you get is to some extent influenced by the corporate side of it... but it's not totally so."

As for the Canadian university, Slater acknowledges that we have imported American methodology.

"I think that in certain fields... the basic fact is that the new methodology in the

social sciences has been to a greater degree an American stimulated phenomenon than a European stimulated phenomenon."

"If you wanted to have a contact with the forefront of the methodological development you were almost inevitably going to be finding yourself in contact with the American experience."

Slater also suggested that this U.S. methodology has swamped Canadian universities.

"In political science, for example, there was a tremendous rush to get on board the behaviourist bandwagon and anybody who wasn't a behaviourist — who was an institutionalist or something — they didn't rate."

This methodology is now being challenged in the U.S., itself, Slater said, "and it may very well be we have a kind of cultural lag in this sort of thing, but I would expect that there would be a challenge in this country."

The importation of many non-Canadian faculty occurred because there were not enough Canadians to fill the universities, Slater says. Asked why we consequently imported mainly Americans he said:

"I'm not sure that that's so... My impression is that there's been drawing especially on Britain, some Australian,

New Zealand, quite a bit of European, quite a bit of Indian and Pakistani and Japanese and so on, as well as American."

Canadian universities must expand their graduate schools to train more Canadian professors, he said. Asked how we would get Canadian professors if we kept filling the graduate schools with non-Canadians, he said, "I'm not sure that the situation is as bad as you say." He said, however, he would have to check the statistics. (Doctoral students in York's sociology department, for example, are 92 per cent non-Canadian).

It appears that Slater has a lot of catching up to do on York. He is especially weak on the question of Americanization. But he will also have to give more thought to the Laskin report and people's hostility towards it.

These two issues will probably be the hottest he will have to handle this year and with student reports coming down within the next two months on both these topics he hasn't much time to waste.

It would not be overstating the fact to say that a president who does not deal with these areas in an adequate way will be getting off on the wrong foot around here; David W. Slater may not be writing exams this year, but he had better start burning the midnight oil, nonetheless.



David Slater, York's new president, feels that the Senate will be York's main governing body.

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