

EDITORIAL

Changing the guard

by Kwame Dawes

Usually, the period of transition between two regimes is at best disquieting and rarely free of uncomfortable hitches. Organizations, more often than not, assume the character of their leader/s and this process of transformation entails breaking old patterns and discounting former assumptions about how things work. The new leadership, particularly if it comes from one who has not been a part of the organization in question, has to become fully acquainted with the new environment and allay natural suspicions and fears that the old workers may have. In the political world, the trauma that this adjustment period creates results in the firing of old staff with the replacement of a new breed of workers. This ensures that subordinates who are of the conviction that their more impressive track record of years-in-the-business do not try to sabotage the attempts by the new leadership to assume authority. Naturally, such a system is fraught with abuses, excesses and vitriolic politicking because it entails the exercise of power. But immediate subordinates are not the only ones who may regard leadership changes as uneasy events. Groups and organizations who have to do business with the unit must realize that the old way of doing things, complete with unstated understandings; transactions done in-faith or under the table; and long standing arrangements that can be appreciated only if the history of the relationship is examined, are all in jeopardy of being disregarded. On going projects which may have been of particular interest to the old regime may become relegated to the peculiar and dispensable quirks of an old regime. New ones will take their place.

But these internal problems are further complicated by the actual circumstances surrounding the transfer of power and the challenges that the inevitable changes in society will have on the productivity of the organization. For instance, 1990 has seen this process of power changes all over the world. Europe's upheaval has been equalled by the situations in Nicaragua, South Africa, Panama, Ethiopia and Mozambique (the latter two being heavily influenced by the changes in Eastern Europe.) Many have died in the process and many have lost their jobs. New regimes are now forced to contend with the world market of the 1990's and the rapidly evolving political climate. Each nation is faced with very distinct problems which have all to do with new approaches to old problems faced by the same people.

Closer to home, UNB is now faced with the prospect of a new President. The Search Committee has come up with a candidate whose credentials are quite impressive - but then that is to be expected. Dr. Armstrong is coming from the University of Toronto with high praise for his openness to fresh ways of solving problems. He talks positively about students' rights and wisely declares the prospect of his getting the job as quite an honour. Notwithstanding this, a number of groups and organizations are trying their best to see what they can get Downey to do before this new fellow comes in. The reason? Quite simply, Armstrong will not have the kind of historical perspective on many of the issues in question that Downey would have. What, they ask, would he know, for instance, about the infamous Bosnitch years and their impact, both negatively and positively, on the nature of student government at this university? And remember the old CHSR question? Well, goes the argument, far too much has gone under the bridge concerning that issue and only someone who was here to see the flow would be able to give a learned response to it. Of course, there is an element of naivete involved in these sentiments particularly because most of those presently involved in the issues will still be here after Downey is gone. But the concern is a real one.

Ultimately, if Armstrong is appointed, he will have quite a bit of work to do concerning a number of very important issues related to this university. His position on a number of issues should be made clear as soon as possible. What for instance is his position on the gender question in the hiring policy of Canadian universities? It would be useful to understand his thinking on student government and the place of the media in student life. His plans for the expansion of this university and the related questions of student fees and Government assistance in financing tertiary education are also important issues to be addressed. International students would be especially interested in his position on differential fees and any collaborative efforts with international universities. It would be useful, also, to discover if his credentials as Dean of both the Faculties of Arts and Sciences at U of T are a true reflection of his ideas about the importance of both areas in a University's programme. Certainly the growing concern about the apparent partiality among modern university administrations to the sciences when it comes to funding of research and the implementation of new programmes will have to be addressed. There is as well, the question of the place of the Creative Arts in the university. Many groups are waiting to discover what his feelings on these issues are.

The 1990's should therefore prove to be very interesting here at UNB. Downey has done the necessary job trying to keep the university on a progressive track over the past ten years. UNB remains one of the top tertiary institutions in Canada. I have been here for just over three years and I have found that students show respect for Downey when they do talk about him. His has been a fairly low profile in the realm of student life, but it is clear that he has given attention to student concerns through channels other than press-releases and communiques. Will this style work in the 90's? The questions will continue for another few years, but we hope that Armstrong will find time to answer a few of them while he is on campus this weekend.

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