

# On the Presidency and the future of UPEI

On Monday, a woman phoned our office to ask if she could submit a long article on the decision of the UPEI Board of Governors to renew President Peter Meincke's contract for only one year, and Meincke's subsequent refusal of the offer. In the past we have accepted such articles if they are found relevant to the university community, and we will continue to do so in the future if space permits. Authors are asked to keep such submissions as brief as possible, to sign their work, and to submit articles typewritten and double-spaced.

Anna Fraser, Charlottetown  
In making the following remarks, I am disassociating myself from any person or persons. I am speaking out about the termination of President Meincke's presidency and the appointment of a replacement.

Education is not the sole province of educators. To ensure our young people an education second to none, people, young and old, must take an active interest in the educational process. To fail to do so invites situations similar to those existing even in some Scandinavian countries where all decision making, including the content of textbooks, is in the hands of government.

Such could be dangerous, as even the most impartial government might not always reject an opportunity for propaganda. While the U.P.E.I. Board was reaching its decision on the question of the President's extension, and for some time afterward, the silence was deafening. Attempts by media or anyone else to find out what was going on drew a complete blank.

But hints people were given from earlier media reports pointed incontrovertibly in one direction.

Emotions of a small, determined group of faculty that gained control of the Senate, the Faculty Association, and a number of Board members were directed against the new initiatives proposed by your President. It is therefore reasonable to assume that biased judgement, lacking objective treatment, prevailed in the decision reached; the Board adopted an unfavourable view toward his continuing the positive, potent directions began for you and for Maritime Canada.

What was eminently unfair in considering an extension of the President's term was the emphasis the Board placed on the presidential review requested by Doctor Meincke in 1982, but which was not completed until early 1984, just before consideration was given to an extension.

As many faculty were unaware of the Board's impending intentions, they tried to be helpful by offering constructive criticism, as is correct in this kind of procedure. They were stunned by subsequent events.

It is now quite clear we do not deserve the impetus a man of President Meincke's calibre was giving a province that usually lags ten years behind the rest of Canada.

While other universities are attempting to bridge the information gap, your university had opted to bury its severance of a man of profound intelligence, integrity, and capability in a grave of silence.

## THE PRESIDENT

In the few years your President has been here, he has made an impressive mark upon the institution he has served so well. In the future, Doctor Meincke's name will be synonymous with U.P.E.I., especially for the part he played in having the College of Veterinary Medicine here by doing the spadework necessary so that government could negotiate its establishment. He had to see that U.P.E.I. was in a better state of readiness than its chief competitors in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia.

Preceding negotiations, he was instrumental in securing cooperation and input from other contributing sectors essential to its functioning and ultimate accreditation, including the Veterinary Association, the agricultural community, and the academic world generally. It was without doubt his greatest tour de force, involving mammoth investments of time, talent, and energy.

Yet, significantly, the Board has decided that Doctor Meincke will not be here to see it open or greet the first class.

It is a cruel blow to be robbed, for all the wrong reasons, of the joy of completing a project to which one has given so much.

Gone was awareness of the growth of the university under your President; of its resource-based and people-oriented outreach into the community; of the understanding of developments to give Canadians a chance to get a sustainable economy going to meet world-wide needs and challenges.

Only pettiness in the extreme could be at the root of such an action.

Aside from the Veterinary College, he is probably best known for starting a restructuring of courses and departments with results as diverse as the establishment of the School of Business Administration on the one hand to the winning of the AUSA Soccer championship on the other.

Through the initiation of various vehicles, the expertise of faculty could be exchanged for feedback from Island entrepreneurs of what best could be done to enhance the cultural, recreational, and economic climate here. His central theme was making the university a main component of the life of the province.

Contrary to rumour, your President is keenly interested in Fine Arts, music, and good literature. He is in fact deeply committed to excellence in programs in these areas, though in some cases, because of financial limitations, they are structured in a way our small population base can support.

Some might have you believe your President to be less than he is: a born leader, of fine character, with unexcelled qualifications for his position. His credits are staggering. As a Vice-Provost at the University of Toronto, he was responsible for a wide range of areas including Law, Architecture, Engineering, Libraries, Computer Services, and Administrative Information Systems.

To sum, the function of a president resembles that of a high school principal in which on-the-spot involvement in administrative and supervisory capacities is required. But most feel that a president's

role is much different.

Just recently, for example, your President gave a paper at an international conference on "Technology, Innovation, and Social Change" at Edinburgh University, Scotland.

As well, he attended a meeting recently of the Board of the National Institute of Nutrition with chief executive officers of a large number of major Canadian food companies.

It is possible that some students may not understand how much such activities do for your university; but it is tragic when the U.P.E.I. Board apparently does not appreciate their importance for the international reputation of U.P.E.I., and especially for the proposed fund-raising campaign.

In his vision for the future, your President would have continued to push for ways for the university to become more involved with the community.

Ideas being considered were the establishment of an Innovation Centre with infinite possibilities for the development of the Island's potential; and, in cooperation with the Confederation Centre of the Arts, a broadening of summer programs.

The loss of only these two imaginative, positive enterprises is simply immeasurable, both in terms of what they would do for the economy, and of their "soul" value.

## YOUR UNIVERSITY

Your university was born of strife; a judicious president succeeded in uniting factions to the extent that Islanders came to accept the union of two distinct, separate, small universities, and to see the new single university representative of the Island, and a viable institution Islanders could attend.

Yet, dissension was rife even then; and only the wise guidance of the first President and the stabilizing influence of a wise discerning Board prevented extreme reaction.

This time you are not so fortunate. Your university had recently experienced emotion-packed reaction to proposals to streamline its functioning, to implement objectives of your President to bring the University abreast of the information explosion, and to tie these developments in information technology to our Island potential in people and resources.

Through new appointments on the Board, a number of whom are members from a Senate elected through "coercion of the many by a ruthlessly manipulating few," the more experienced, dedicated members were outvoted. As a result, the death knell may have been sounded for the kind of university you and your parents want.

Leading universities in other parts of the world are crossing disciplinary lines and putting technology to work for staff and students alike in both the Arts and Sciences.



They are making at least a working knowledge of computer technology available to all students.

They are striving to make adjustments to respond creatively to a rapidly changing world, with very positive effects on funding, staffing, and enrolment. Those that do respond to these challenges are reaping large benefits as a rapidly increasing percentage of the job market is locked into the information age.

Most Canadian universities are going in every direction, with no co-ordinated effort to establish goals for the good of our students and of our country.

Some universities have pioneered involving business and industry in the research their students do. This research in turn is used by companies who then reward the university with large sums of money or technical equipment.

The list of universities participating in such projects grows yearly. Others are now including such programs in their future planning. At last count, the ratio was four to one in favour of doing so.

The endless debate will soon be over as reality will force universities to choose between autonomy or complete control by government. If the latter, our free system of education will end, and Arts and the Humanities will have even less recognition than they currently enjoy.

No one wants that. They must remain basic to our educational core. There can be little doubt of the value of knowledge about technology at the university level for the informed citizens of tomorrow. The race is on.

In fifteen years time, all but ten percent of our population will be operating some kind of computer terminal.

The public has a right to expect, nay demand, that your University will cut the disparity between overemphasis on past knowledge and the information of today and the future.

A prime consideration of any university is whether it will have the ability to attract top students and funding. The public must be impressed with the esteem in which you university is held before it will contribute to scholarship and other funding.

The Federal Government, too, may have second thoughts about a university that elects one-sided Boards, is not progressive enough to provide new technology information courses in response to the needs of the country, and has limited, somewhat biased ideologies.

This could be scary as most of the funds are obtained federally. There are among faculty those with strong feelings against technology in general. No one denies the "Future Shock" syndrome described some years ago by Toffler, nor the need to be prepared to keep the necessary balances in work, in leisure, in nature.

But we cannot remove ourselves from all change. To do so is to

self-destruct.

We must adapt and employ change to our advantage in all aspects of education as those who have a working knowledge of information technology will surely be able to do.

Universities are expected to be at the forefront of this change; to rethink their role; and to "adopt new policies to meet current and future needs."

## THE BOARD

The impact of the loss of a community-popular President upon the momentum of the university, upon the continuity of the Veterinary College, upon research and fund-raising, and upon its attraction for students near and far cannot possibly be ignored.

Following the old adage, "There are none so blind as those who will not see," the Board did ignore very important signals of public disapproval.

Strong pleas from high-profile people representing a good cross-section of Island business and professional people on behalf of retaining Doctor Meincke failed to influence its intransigence.

It is doubtful that many new public members on the Board over the last few years had much knowledge of Doctor Meincke's vision of the direction the university should take, except as informed by antagonistic faculty members.

Common sense should therefore have dictated a slower approach to the whole vital question of the President's extension until the new members had more time to understand the complex matters involved.

Despite the Board's deplorable lack of broad representation from the community, and the fact that this had to be evident to them, they remained deliberately determined to flout the wishes of people representing the entire community.

Before making such an important decision as that of the President's extension, the Board members should have considered methods which would allow them to discharge their responsibilities in a way that is representative of the widest possible spectrum of Island interests.

By taking the stand it did, the Board should also recognize that it has sent a strong message to the faculty that it will not support a president who is willing to make the necessary hard decisions, and that it will give in to pressures from those who disagree with the directors being taken.

Disagreement in part of life. This is especially true in universities. The trick is to understand and to have a proper assessment of the reasons behind disagreement.

## PRESIDENT-ELECT

Before deciding on a new President, your representatives on the Selection Committee and the Board will need to have a clear idea

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