



Dr. Franklin Shirley has maintained a lifetime interest in politics from the time he grew up in his Kentucky home (left) to today when he serves as a member of the Winston-Salem Board of Aldermen. In the picture of the Board below Shirley is second from the right.



Franklin Shirley:

Professor and Democrat

by Russell Brantley



Dr. Franklin Ray Shirley may be one of the University's most flappable men, but he has built some study bridges.

For instance, he does well with the generation gap, particularly for a man who studied by the light of a kerosene lamp until he was graduated from high school. He developed the University's speech and drama programs to departmental status. And as an alderman of Winston-Salem he is one of the University's prime examples of how "town" and "gown" may have a happy and productive affair. Easily distracted by minor irritations, Dr. Shirley obviously surmounts despairs of the moment, for his accomplishments are sizeable, as is his affection for education and the Democratic Party.

It seems fair to say he inherited both loves. His mother, who had intense ambitions for him, repeated the eighth grade for three years, simply because there were no further grades to attend at the time. She let young Franklin understand that he would go to college, despite the fact that the family lived in a Kentucky community where few people attended high school. His parents were Democrats and he remembers that although a power line crossed their tobacco farm, the Shirleys weren't allowed to get current from it and had no electricity until a new source of power was provided by the Roosevelt administration. By that time Dr. Shirley had graduated from high school and had put behind him the grade school fights he sometimes had with two "renegade" Republican cousins over the question of free trade.

It is easier to see that the world is rushing pellmell down some wide technological path when one remembers that a man like Shirley, who is 54, attended a one-room rural school for the first eight grades and returned from his afternoon farm chores to read by lamplight and perhaps to listen to the dreams of a mother who put a premium on learning.

After graduating from the Sparta, Ky., high school, Dr. Shirley went to Georgetown College for a year and then went back to teach in his one-room, eight grade school



Dr. Shirley confers with Winston-Salem Mayor M. C. Bent and then takes his place at the regular Monday night meeting of the Aldermen.



should be allowed to be controversial and to scold and argue with and needle the administration and faculty, so long as their information is correct and what they say is in good taste and without slander. The pages of the newspaper — and other recognized student publications — should be hospitable to far-reaching proposals for changing the curriculum, for improving weak departments in the institution, for liberalizing social regulations, for altering the institution's most ancient practices. The freedom I would extend to publications I would also grant to other authorized student organizations, including student government: the right, that is, to speak directly to the president, the deans, and the faculty about their grievances and their hopes — with the sure knowledge that what they say will not be summarily discarded and forgotten.

Second, the students should be as active as possible in administering those of the institution's policies that have to do with nonacademic student affairs. I happen to believe in a student honor system in which students — without administrative participation — try and punish offenders, and I also favor the extension of this student government concept to the various areas of campus misconduct. If it is an important principle of campus life that the institution establish basic policies, it is also an important principle, I feel, that the students interpret these policies with regard to specific offenses against them. This division of power obviously becomes impossible to maintain when students are so opposed to a regulation that they can no longer condemn a violation of it, but until such an impasse occurs the institution does well, I think, to trust students to evaluate and to pass judgment on each other. In my experience student groups are no less likely to exhibit either compassion or justice than their counterparts in faculty and administration.

Third, students should be allowed — perhaps they should be invited — to establish committees which parallel in function the various committees of the faculty: student life, academic standards, curriculum, buildings and grounds, even admissions and scholarships if through them any worthwhile purpose can be served. These student committees should be listened to and conferred with and allowed representation on comparable faculty committees under whatever conditions the faculty might impose. Deciding how much of a share in the work of faculty committees students should have is a highly complex business, but it is worth discussing, and again the institution itself must establish its own principles of control. My own conviction is that there is a point beyond which administrators and faculty members must meet alone, must talk alone, and must vote alone. Up to this point, however, students should be welcomed, treated with every respect, heard with sincerity and good faith; afterwards those who have final responsibility for the institution (that is, the administration and the faculty) must act alone — in accordance with their own judgment and their own obligations to those whose representatives they themselves are. Ultimately, the responsibility for making policy decisions cannot be surrendered to students who, in spite of their intelligence and charm, are transient, if not quixotic participants in the affairs of an institution.

Fourth, the institution — through its appointed spokesmen — should always be prepared to state, to restate, to clarify, and to defend its policies. Even though students may not be given the right to change policy, they should be given a chance to understand it. The reasons that tired administrators must sometimes give will seem unconvincing and trivial to the impatient young, but there are reasons behind any policy — if not, surely it ought to be abandoned — and most students will listen, though fretfully, to them. For the institution to take students into its confidence is to show them a measure of respect and to preserve the means of communication with them without which all other efforts to maintain campus harmony will be in vain.

Underlying most of what I said throughout my remarks is a conviction that an institution should not change its policies *against its own judgment and against its will*. If students, with whatever support for their arguments they can find, can persuade the institution that a policy is wrong, and if the institution — honestly and deliberately and with full regard for the long-range consequences of its decision — can accept the students' case for change, then surely the change ought to occur, and the institution ought to admit thankfully its indebtedness to those students who have shown it the way. If, on the other hand, the institution remains unconvinced in the face of all opposing arguments it should reaffirm its commitments and announce its determination to stand by them. To be overcome by superior logic is to concede with grace and goodwill. To surrender in doubt and confusion is to be irresponsible and weak. We cannot let ourselves be either.

Is there hope that, even in a permissive society like ours — to borrow *Newsweek's* recent terminology — a respectable balance of power such as I have described can be maintained? I think so. We cannot succeed if we are unavailable to students when they want to see us or if, when we become available, we are evasive or devious with them. Students are quick to detect deceit or trickery or lack of logic and good sense, and most administrators who have ceased to have support among students have done so not because they have stood by principle but because they have lost their temper or their manners or because they have equivocated or cajoled or — let's face it — themselves behaved irresponsibly or gracelessly.

I trust students. I think we should admit them, when we can, to our councils and to our confidences. We should be fair and honest with them; we should respect them enough to listen to what they think and to tell them what we think. When necessary, we should inform them what, in spite of their disagreements, we intend to do. And, to the extent to which it is humanly possible, we must — through the long process of debate and decision — ourselves avoid every remark or attitude that is false or mean. If our dedication to principles is evident, then perhaps the principles themselves — and the need for them — will be equally evident, and we will have made allies of those very young people who alone give us reason to be what we are and to do what we do.