

Preparations underway

Discussion and fun to highlight student day

By TED MUMFORD

On November 9 post-secondary students across Canada will gather to discuss tuition hikes, student loans, cutbacks in all social services and other topics.

November 9 is National Student Day.

National Student Day (NSD) was created by an unanimous vote at the annual conference of the National Union of Students (NUS) in Winnipeg last May. NUS is the national organization of post-secondary students in Canada. Its membership of 350,000 includes most students at York.)

According to NUS, National Student Day's purpose is to allow students to learn about and discuss issues which concern them in a critical year which may see these issues come to a head. The NSD "declaration" which NUS has distributed to all Canadian campuses reads in part, "The time has come for the students to hold a National Student Day and begin to search for a just and wise future for post-secondary education... On November 9 students will consider increasing tuition fees, rising unemployment, regressive student aid changes and cutbacks in education and other parts of society."

DISCUSSION DAY

NSD organizers have described the day as one of "discussion", "education", or "awareness"; the word "protest" is never used. NUS information officer Len Taylor told Excalibur, "Unfortunately, some of the NUS delegates do see it as a day of protest".

The majority of NSD organizers wince at the idea of the day appearing to the public and press as a "protest". The importance NUS places on positive and thorough media coverage is reflected in the date change for NSD. It was originally called for November 3, but NUS feared there would be little attention paid to NSD if it coincided with the day of national elections in the United States.

The national co-ordinating committee for NSD has striven to make it a grass roots affair. The committee has left the topics for discussion open and distributed a manual of suggestions for local NSK planning. NUS is not holding any pan-campus events; instead it is working to prevent isolation of events and has distributed NSD posters and leaflets across the country.

ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE

On November 9 each of the provincial and federal governments will be presented with a statement of students' concerns by NUS.

The response to NSD has been enthusiastic both at NUS member schools throughout Canada and also at non-NUS schools including Queen's, Western, Trent, Ryerson and Atkinson College, to name a few in Ontario. Most campuses are

planning programs of workshops, speakers and panel discussions, and some, such as Queen's are building up to NSD with preliminary events. No mass demonstrations or marches have been planned at any campus, and only a handful of student unions have asked students to boycott classes. Some have asked that classes be cancelled for all or part of November 9 or that no tests be scheduled.

TWO NAYS

Only two institutions have voiced opposition to NSD. According to NUS executive secretary Dan O'Connor, Red River College in Manitoba and the Corner Brook campus of Memorial University in Newfoundland chose not to participate in NSD because, "they thought it involved a class boycott or protest."

The faculty association at the University of Manitoba has voted to support NSD.

The regional student organizations have also been active in the preparations for NSD. The Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) is helping in the day's co-ordination and has conducted preliminary workshops. A tentative meeting has been arranged between representatives of OFS and the Ontario cabinet on November 9.

OFS has added "academic concerns" such as the quality of education and control of institutions to the list of discussion topics outlined by NUS.

Murray Miskin, chairperson of the OFS executive committee has described NSD as a "festival and celebration" as well as a day in which students "will express concern for those that cannot afford the education that should be a right".

ACADEMIC CONCERNS

In Ontario there have been no calls for class boycotts, but an OFS representative said, "That may change if a tuition hike is announced before the ninth". Some schools are already in favour of following NSD with a more active demonstration of students' feelings. Len Taylor of NUS told Excalibur, "Carleton's next project after NSD is a huge rally". Taylor also commented that if a tuition increase is announced before the ninth, OFS itself, "might decide that it's a day to let it all hang out."

Toronto and Vancouver are the two cities that have formally organized themselves for NSD, mainly for the purpose of better media coverage. The Toronto NSD Co-ordinating Committee will distribute a press release on the ninth and attempt to get as much radio and television exposure as possible.

At York, CYSF has asked President MacDonald to cancel afternoon classes on the ninth, when CYSF's NSD activities will

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take place. CYSF also plans to ask York's staff association (YUSA), faculty association (YUFA) and the Graduate Assistants Association to support NSD. CYSF's speakers will include Liberal MPP and critic for Colleges and Universities John Sweeney, Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis and the President of the University, H. Ian MacDonald. These and other CYSF activities (such as workshops on various topics) will concentrate on the theme of universal accessibility to post-secondary education.

CYSF's activities are being organized by an open committee which any student may join or approach with ideas.

The next committee meeting is

this Tuesday, October 26 at noon in the CYSF offices, room 105 Central Square.

The Atkinson College Students Association has arranged for political science professor Danny Drache to speak on "The Student in the Community". Other activities are still on the drawing board. Everything will take place before seven o'clock, when Atkinson classes begin. ACSA vice-president for external affairs Jack Gazan told Excalibur that a number of Atkinson professors plan to discuss NSD topics in their classes.

The Glendon Student Union will also bring in a speaker and hold workshops. They have not requested classes be cancelled.

The University of Toronto's Students Administrative Council (SAC) took NSD to the grass roots level by asking each of the faculty and college councils to participate in NSD by holding their own events. "I think about half of them will come through", said SAC President Shirley French, "they'll be having forums and workshops in the morning".

The SAC organized activities will begin at noon with a debate on the role of students in post-secondary education. A dozen workshops will follow, dealing with topics suggested by the NSD declaration and others such as "international students" and the "student in the community".

In the late afternoon SAC hopes to hold an open discussion with speakers Shirley French, U of T

president John Evans and Minister of Colleges and Universities Harry Parrott. Parrott cancelled a speaking engagement at York on NSD, and has not yet committed himself to the U of T appearance.

By a happy coincidence, Anthony Burgess, author of A Clockwork Orange, will be speaking in the evening and he has agreed to talk about some aspect of education.

SAC has asked that students not be penalized for absenteeism and that there be no test or assignments due on the ninth. President Evans has supported this request.

The Board of Governors, the faculty and staff associations and the Academic Council at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute have all voted to support NSD.

The day's activities are being organized by the Student Union (SURPI) and will begin with SURPI's semi-annual general meeting at 2:00. A seminar on NSD will follow, with 14 speakers including RPI President Walter Pitman and representatives of faculty, staff and students.

Late in the afternoon guests will speak on employment, academics, financing and the community, and consecutive panel discussions will be held. Finally, SURPI is treating all the participants to a buffet.

SURPI's external vice-president, Kevin Schwenker, told Excalibur, "We've asked for conditional cancellation of classes. Profs will be asked to reschedule classes." Schwenker thought that if all classes were cancelled, "everyone would just go home".



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