

CUS and the general meeting

executive position

The decision of the students' council to withdraw the U of A from the Canadian Union of Students is a decision arising from a basic concept of the rights of student government and a basic principle of the right of the individual to represent himself.

The disagreement in principle is strengthened by criticisms of the actual effectiveness of CUS which has become an unrealistic and unrepresentative organization—unrealistic in terms of its program and unrepresentative in terms of its policies.

The principles:

There are seemingly two polar positions in the CUS. One group of students feel that students have a responsibility to reform society. This approach is to a certain extent acceptable to us.

We feel that students do indeed have a responsibility as individuals within society to examine the problems of the community and nation, to have commitments, to express opinions. However, it is not the right and responsibility of student governments to make partisan policy statements on behalf of students whom they have been elected to represent only on student affairs.

The representation philosophy of the CUS is unacceptable to students' council for two reasons:

1. Student officers are elected within certain terms of reference and have two main responsibilities: first, to present coordinated programs to supplement the formal learning process, and second to represent students on student affairs. Student leaders are not elected on the basis of their positions on Viet Nam or capital punishment because these are not issues of students as students but for students as citizens. Just as it is beyond the responsibility of provincial governments to make stands on international issues for which the federal government has responsibility, so it is beyond the sphere of student governments to proclaim on issues outside the realm of student affairs.

This is not to say that student governments should not be political, that they should organize dances and do little else, but rather that student governments should be deeply involved in the kinds of

political issues which affect students, such as education financing, and democracy in the university.

2. Membership in the students' union is compulsory; each undergraduate must pay his fees and become a member. He cannot opt out of the organization if he disagrees with partisan policy statements which are made on his behalf.

Student leaders of compulsory student societies should not extend their limited representative privileges to state personal partisan opinions on issues and purport these to be the views of all students.

The role of the students' union is to provide opportunities for the discussion of issues, but if students wish to take stands, they should do so through voluntary associations of people who share their views.

If student leaders at the individual universities have not the right to make stands on behalf of all students on issues which are peripheral to student concern, what right has CUS to make stands on behalf of the entire student community in Canada?

CUS—an unrealistic organization:

CUS has become divorced from the realistic aspirations and interests of the average student and thus has little meaning or relevancy for most students. This is due to the over-extension of CUS involvement and the failure to limit CUS concerns.

Not only is the CUS unrealistic in terms of its programming and policies, but it is also financially unrealistic. Technically the organization is bankrupt because it incurs deficits without having a reserve fund to fall back on.

No provision has been made in the current budget to take care of last year's deficit. Instead, the Congress has endorsed more programs and also authorized the purchase of an \$80,000 house as the CUS headquarters. This, surely, is unrealistic financing.

The Congress:

Each of the problem areas, already outlined above, is weakening the effectiveness of CUS, but though the U of A brought these problems to the attention of the delegates at the Congress and outlined their implications, the Congress reaffirmed CUS as it now exists.

Instead of tackling these problems, the Congress spent considerable time discussing water resources, defence policy and other unrelated matters on which the CUS should not be taking partisan policy stands.

The U of A delegation acted responsibly and sincerely at the Congress. It was our hope that we would be able to redirect the organization to make it relevant to and representative of the student community.

However, the denial of the principles which we feel must guide the organization and which were endorsed by the students' council before the Congress, has made our continued membership in the CUS hypocritical. As Doug Ward, President of CUS, has stated, if we believe these principles, then we are "being honest in leaving".

Action at the U of A:

Upon returning from the Congress, the U of A delegation (Branny Schepanovich, Marilyn Pilkington, Al Anderson, Owen Anderson, and Bill Miller) recommended to students' council that the students' union withdraw from the Canadian Union of Students. This recommendation did not take councillors by surprise as the council has been examining the CUS since last May and is familiar with the problems within the organization. After hearing the reports of the five delegates and the remarks of interested students who were permitted to make representations, the council voted to withdraw from the Canadian Union of Students. The council realizes that CUS withdrawal is an important issue, and thus it has made provision for a referendum to be held in conjunction with the general elections in March in order to determine whether the students' union would rejoin CUS or remain outside the organization.

Ultimately, then, the decision rests with the student body who must decide the issue of the rights and responsibilities of student government and who must judge the CUS assessing the judgment of those who have become deeply involved in and aware of CUS operations and objectives, who have examined CUS in study groups, worked on CUS local projects, and seen CUS in action at the Congress.

The alternate program:

The delegation which attended the Canadian Union of Students' National Congress, working with the CUS Study

Committee, has made a number of recommendations to the students' council. They are intended to provide new opportunities for greater participation in student union activities, and to make resources available to the committees which will be established to replace the CUS Committee.

Some of the recommendations have been accepted by the council, including the withdrawal of our membership in the Union for this session, and the provision of a referendum, which will be held next March, allowing ample time for reviewing the issues.

The remaining recommendations include replacing the former CUS committee with an external affairs committee, and instituting new programs which will or should include:

- choosing and sending delegates from this campus to various seminars throughout the nation;
- organizing a series of study groups which will be able to bring prominent speakers and authors to the campus to discuss a wide range of subjects;
- other groups will encourage and participate in seminars, teach-ins, debates, and other similar activities;
- services which have been provided in the past will be continued, including exchanges, cooperation with various other groups, and direct services such as charter flights;

The objective of the program would be to provide both the facilities and the resources necessary to enable large numbers of students to increase their understanding of subjects studied, and extend their fields of interest. The program would be, in a word, educational.

Policy decisions, and any action which may appear desirable after study of these questions, will be decided by the individual student, who in turn may decide to further some particular end through voluntary participation in other organizations either outside or within the university community.

Conclusion:

The action taken by the students' union was taken in the best interests of the students at the University of Alberta by elected representatives who examined with care the objectives and operations of CUS.

In view of the uncertain date of the general students' meeting required by the presentation of the pro-CUS committee petition presented to council, The Gateway, in an effort to present both points of view on CUS and the withdrawal question, asked the students' union executive and the pro-CUS committee executive to submit articles of 150 60 stroke typewritten lines (approximately 1,500 words). Both sides were given equal opportunities, however, one article is shorter than the other by the author's choice, and in no way reflect any discrimination on the part of The Gateway.

pro-CUS position

Since the formation of the Pro-CUS Committee there seems to have been considerable confusion about our objectives, though we believe they can be very clearly stated. We do not propose to enter upon a discussion of the merits or faults of CUS nor particularly of the desirability or otherwise of the students' union of the University of Alberta withdrawing from the CUS.

We are opposed, not primarily to the withdrawal per se, but rather to the manner of the withdrawal. That is, there are individuals within the Pro-CUS Committee who are opposed to membership in the CUS. Others favor membership.

But we all feel that the issue is of such significance that it ought not to be decided except after it has been referred to the students. The University of Saskatchewan has considered withdrawal from the CUS. This now appears unlikely, but even so, the U of S council has stated that the issue will be decided by referendum. Similarly at Bishop's and at McGill (when they considered joining UGEQ).

Surely the withdrawal of 11,500 students from the only "national" student body in Canada is sufficiently important to be decided by all students, not just 12 councillors.

Council, by scheduling a referendum on

this question for March, 1967 has indicated that the question ought ultimately to be decided by the membership. We feel that the decision should be made by the membership now.

CIRCUMSTANCES

Let us also remember the circumstances of this decision. The motion to withdraw was adopted at the Council meeting of Sept. 19. There had been no previous campus publicity. No Gateway had appeared by that date. In fact, the great majority of students had not even returned to campus, and could not know what was happening.

They certainly could not discuss the issue with their councillors, nor could councillors discuss the issue with students. The situation is analogous, we feel, to Paul Hellyer rising in the House of Commons, and without any prior warning to the people of Canada, moving to abolish the armed forces. No one could argue the validity, but would we appreciate the ethics?

On what information did your councillor base his decision? Did he speak to the members of the delegation, at length, about their Halifax experience? You should ask. Certainly he did not know what resolutions had been adopted or defeated in Halifax.

He did not know what any other delegations had said at Halifax. And he did not know what the President of the CUS, Doug Ward, had said. Because by Sept. 19 none of these things had been printed and distributed.

DECISION FORCED

Most councillors were forced to base their decision on what little they may have read in The Calgary Herald, and on what they heard for the first time, the evening of the meeting. Can this be the basis of a wise decision? We think not.

We do not allege that there has been any overt breach of the constitution of the students' union. However, we do suggest that by making a pronouncement on withdrawal from the CUS, council was essentially committing the heresy that they were unable to condone in the national organization.

That is, council purported to take action in its representative capacity on an issue which is basically political. Council condemns CUS for making pronouncements in political affairs and yet it sees fit to do so itself.

It has been stated that the decision to withdraw was not a political decision in the view of council. That may well be so and we certainly do not accuse council of a hypocritical attitude.

However, we do maintain that political considerations are inextricably involved in the decision to withdraw and that the political connotations and consequences of such an action must not be overlooked or disregarded.

GET MOTION

In view of this, it is the object of the Pro-CUS Committee to get the motion of students' council, by which we were withdrawn from the CUS, rescinded so that the student body as a whole will have an opportunity to study the issue for themselves, to make a decision on the basis of this study, and to express this decision in a referendum. Council has claimed that the student body cannot be educated in a month or six weeks.

Our first reaction is that if the student body needs to be educated it is because council, and more particularly the CUS Chairman, of this and past years has failed in a job. Our second reaction is that this lack of information is the problem of those who want to stay in the CUS. It will not work against council's decision. And if we are willing to fight from this uneven ground, why does council protest?

Let a general meeting of the student body rescind the motion of council. Let both sides then go to the students. In an issue such as this only the students should decide.