

Compelling conclusion to...

Election II '82 round table discussion...the adventure continues.

When we last left our intrepid politicians they were furiously debating methods to lobby the government for more post-secondary education funding.

The players once again are Mike Walker, president, Jeff Reading, v.p. internal, Walker Slate; Gord Stamp, president, Martin Schug, v.p. internal, Stamp Slate; Robert Greenhill, president, Raymond Conway, v.p. internal, Greenhill Slate.

As we return to the blue smoke filled, mirror laden back room of the Students' Union Building we find Mike Walker responding to a question from Gord Stamp: "What are you going to lobby the government for?"...

Walker: Oh, lobbying the government....

Stamp: What are you going to lobby them for?

Walker: Adequate funding, an accessibility study to determine what kind of impact costs and rising costs and the student aid system are having on students being able to attend university, a freeze on tuition fees until that study is completed, the replacement of the current loan - remission student aid program with a grant loan program - which amazingly enough was endorsed by the U of A Board of Governors at its last meeting. Adequate levels of funding is at the centre of it all of course - these things the U of A's students union and the U of A's student union president can't do in isolation. I think it's necessary to cooperate with student groups across the country, and I think that the things like the march prove that although the majority of students were from the U of A, they proved that the U of A students, when they are working with other students from institutions, they can be more effective.

Greenhill: Can I just jump in here...it seems that Mike's definition of cooperation would be working together with other student groups in a confrontationalist approach to government, and I think that in the fight against cutbacks, actions like the march are useful and necessary, but insufficient in themselves. I think that you should also look, at the same time, that you are confronting the government directly to make your concerns known across the country. You should be cooperating with other groups who have similar interests, cooperating with business groups outside of campus who need to see high quality graduates, cooperating with the Board of Governors on campus.

Mike seems surprised that they agreed to the loan-grant program. I think that it is no surprise, I think that it is indicative of the fact that the Board of Governors does care about the students too, and while there are times when we have to necessarily oppose the Board of Governors decision, for instance to do with tuition increases, there are other times when we can effectively use them and work with them to lobby the government together, and I think that the cooperative aspect of lobbying is something which has been left out this year and which we'd work to bring back into the anti-cutbacks program.

Conway: Especially with respect to ACT, I think that a group such as ACT, while I agree with what they are trying to accomplish, I think that they are going at it only in one way and that is kind of taking a confrontational aspect.

Gateway: O.K. maybe we can get into the whole question then of where the various slates stand on the Federation of Alberta students and whether they'd run a pull-out referendum.

Walker: I'd like to mention a couple things about what Rob said first. The Board of Governors can be very useful. The Board of Governors can be useful in endorsing positions like the call for a grant-loan student aid program, but we shouldn't fool ourselves - nine out of nineteen members of that Board of Governors were appointed directly by the minister of Advanced Education, and those nine out of nineteen, many of them are political appointments

and I think that's been established in the past. So the job of student representative can be very difficult at the Board of Governors. It's not simply putting forward a position and asking for their cooperation.

The Federation of Alberta Students is dedicated to fighting cutbacks, and so are we. I think that's fairly straightforward. FAS is referenda based. Three times in the last six years there have been membership referenda on this campus, and each time the referendum has passed. I don't plan to initiate another referendum on the Federation of Alberta Students, I think U of A students have shown that they support it. I think that organization can provide the kind of research, the kind of information from government, the kind of coordination and planning that is necessary. It can provide the lobbying that is necessary. The Federation of Alberta Students representatives meet every year with the Students' Finance Board to set student loan guidelines, they meet with the minister of advanced education, they meet with MLAs. This year the Federation's executive met with the minister I think four times - generally whenever the federation wants to meet with the minister and he's willing to. They like to wait until they have something to speak about, and there are times when the minister wants input from students he'll call the federation, and as long as that avenue is open to the U of A Students' Union, we plan to take advantage of it.

Greenhill: So do you think that FAS represents the views of students on campus then?

Walker: Oh, not always. It's primary function is to....

Greenhill: Generally?

Walker: Oh, generally I think like I said: they are dedicated to fighting cutbacks and I think students on campus would agree with that, and I think FAS is dedicated to fighting for an accessible education system and I think students on this campus would generally agree with that.

Gateway: Where do you stand on FAS, Robert?

Greenhill: Well, I think that FAS, in its role in fighting cutbacks is very useful. I question however, when we spend many thousands of dollars here supporting a FAS Anti-Cutbacks Team directly on campus, and that we should also be spending seventy thousand approximately seventy thousand dollars on other organizations which seem devoted to a conflictual approach or a conflictual solution to cutbacks. I think that like I've said before a conflictual approach is necessary up to a point; I don't think it's everything, and I think we're fooling ourselves if we think FAS is effectively representing U of A students right now.

I think that for instance a free tuition policy is really unrealistic. I think it's a poor bargaining position and I think it doesn't reflect the wishes or the best interests of the majority of students on campus, and I think there is a real problem in organization, which we form almost half of and yet only have one twelfth of the votes in, and I think that FAS, while a good organization in principle, and while I support it - the idea of it - I think that we are going to have to really look at more equitable structuring, the votes on FAS, perhaps per capita representation. Otherwise we're going to have the situation where the majority of students in Alberta aren't being properly represented.

Walker: Can I point out a couple of things?

Gateway: Sure - we'll give you one rebuttal and then go over to Gord.

Walker: Well, I wouldn't call it a rebuttal. I'd like to clear up a couple of misconceptions. The Anti-cutbacks team is a Students' Union group; it's I believe a registered club with the Students' Union, and not a FAS group at all.

Greenhill: What's its status?

Walker: Well it has club status; its applied for a grant to external affairs board. External affairs Board gave it a grant - that's fairly straightforward.

You know, you talk about FAS being conflict-oriented. Well, I'm glad you agree that sometimes students have to take strong positions and not back down because governments are taking a strong position - the provincial government took a strong position with the budget that came down last night - they said you're getting 12 per cent and no more. That's got to be responded to strongly and I think that the Students' Union and any student group has a responsibility to react strongly. However, the Federation of Alberta Students meets with the minister regularly, they meet with the Students' finance board. Last year the Student Finance Board's guidelines reflected directly the input of the Federation.

I should mention that whenever I've been present when FAS representatives have talked about tuition with the minister, they've called for an access study and a freeze on fees until that study is completed, and so the free tuition policy becomes I think a....

Greenhill: You're denying a free tuition policy exists in FAS?

Walker: Well the policy is there - it's on the books for anyone to see. The point is that on a practical political level when there's lobbying going on, when a position is being put forward, whenever I've been present, FAS has put forward a position calling for an access study and a freeze on tuition fees until that's completed.

Greenhill: What's your position on FAS? Do you hold an executive position?

Walker: No, I once was an executive member.

Gateway: Gordon?

Stamp: OK. First of all, FAS put together that march a week or two ago and they had those cards we were signing that said we want to freeze tuition, and they want more money for the university which is completely unrealistic because the students are not willing to pay more for their education. The students are not going to get money for the university from the government or anybody if we're not willing to pay more for education. How do we expect a better quality of education?

Walker: Are you in favor of a 25 per cent fee increase next year?

Stamp: I am in favour of a fee increase as long as we get guaranteed student loans so students can afford to go to university, because we're going to have to start paying more for university. FAS is saying that they want more money for students and we're not willing to pay it for ourselves which I do not agree with, and a lot of people who signed those cards do not agree with that.

Walker: They shouldn't have signed them, then, should they?

Stamp: They signed them as a form of protest. Sometimes you have to join in a protest you do not believe in. But as far as FAS is concerned it has nothing to do with the Students' Union, it is being funded separately. They are not being funded by the Students' Union, the Students' Union really doesn't have too much to do with it. And I feel that if I find out FAS is not doing their job properly, I will hold a referendum to close them down.

Gateway: O.K., maybe we'll get away from this area of discussion now as well. To the v.p. internal candidates: how would you assess the women's centre's first year and would you continue to support them next year?

Schug: Who're you asking?

Gateway: Who wants to start - do you want to start Ray?

Schug: Let him start.

Conway: Sure, I'll start. I don't think anyone can deny the fact that a women's centre on campus is a good thing. Nobody will deny the fact that women have to be given an opportunity to express, well, to work towards goals of achieving more equality on campus, and increasing women's awareness on campus. However what I don't agree with is - and I've come to this conclusion because of personal relationships with the women's centre, with my inter-action with the women's centre - and I believe that the women's centre is beginning to act in a quasi-partisan manner and it is taking stands on positions. It's not an open centre. If you're a woman who supports one kind of ideology that's fine, but if you don't support their ideology then you are kind of an outcast.

I tried to get a co-speaker once with the women's centre and they said they would not because they did not agree with what she said. I think that the fact that she's a woman and she has an opinion gives her the right to be hard, regardless with whether they agree with what she says or not. Unless they are trying to just give one side to the women's argument, I can't accept them just giving one side of the argument, I think they have to be honest and show both sides, and for that reason I think that we should not question the existence of the women's centre on campus, but question the way its being run right now!

Walker: Can I ask a real short question?

Gateway: Sure.

Walker: Does that mean that you plan to do something about it or is it a personal kind of philosophical argument?

Conway: I don't think that as v.p. internal I'm going to interfere at all with the internal workings of a club - he asked me what I felt about the women's centre....

Walker: I just wanted to clarify that....

Conway: ...and I'm not going to tell them what to do, it's up to them - if they want to stay that way it's fine, I'm not going to do anything.

Gateway: O.K., Martin?

Schug: Well, the Women's centre definitely plays a role in society, campus society, but...I'm fully supportive if they want to hold a cabaret to raise money to help support a wife-battering shelter, we're fully supportive of it, or if they want to lobby for tougher rape laws I mean I totally agree with that. But when they start going ahead and infringing on other people's rights such as the magazine controversy with *Heavy Metal*, and that I find rather undemocratic.

Gateway: O.K., and maybe you'd like to respond to Mike's question as well, would you work to change any of this as a member of the executive?

Schug: Well, in serving the students wants and we have to question both sides and weigh the benefits and costs, and derive a plausible answer. There is no panacea to the whole thing....

Conway: You're getting into politics really good aren't you....

Everyone: Laughter.

Schug: Right, well it just depends on what the situation is, I mean you just can't take a biased view because of their....

Everyone: More laughter.

Schug: ...past activities. That is undemocratic. So you have to work with them and not against them.

Gateway: Alright, Jeff?

Reading: As v.p. internal I would like to stay away from specific issues within clubs - I think the Students' Union should allow clubs to remain autonomous within