

NSFS?

In Halifax this weekend, students will have the opportunity of witnessing the demise of a unique experiment in student history; the end of the Atlantic Federation of Students (AFS), Canada's only regional student organization.

The AFS was born out of the need for cooperation amongst Atlantic students given the highly regionalized forms of economic and educational planning within the Atlantic. Bodies such as the Council of Maritime Premiers, The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) and the Atlantic Association of Universities prompted students into founding their own regional organization.

Because strong student organizations did not exist in any of the provinces prior to the founding of AFS the task of forging strong links between the provinces was made doubly difficult. Not only did students have to build a regional organization they had to found strong provincial caucuses. Unfortunately the latter task proved to be too formidable.

Since the AFS organizational drive began two years ago only in Nova Scotia have the characteristics of an organization emerged. The small number of post secondary institutions in both PEI and Newfoundland, and the language and cultural barriers that divide New Brunswick, have been impediments to organizing that weren't overcome in the time people were willing to allow.

In Nova Scotia, however, the last two years have seen emergence of an active student lobby. The successes of the AFS, in fact, have been directly tied to the role of its Nova Scotia caucus. It has provided both the leadership and direction for the Federation throughout its brief history. From such tangible results as the institution of student representatives on several government committees (the most important of which was the recent designation of a student seat on the MPHEC) to raising student awareness on the issues of quality and accessible education, the Nova Scotia caucus of AFS has shown itself to be a progressive force.

Unfortunately for some of the reasons outlined above (and others) a similar experience did not occur in the other three provinces. The failure of viable student organizations outside Nova Scotia, however, does not mean that the Nova Scotia experience has been wasted. The executive of the AFS have prepared a document for the membership which calls for the dissolution of the federation and the creation of a provincial organization on the foundations of the Nova Scotia caucus. The document will be presented to the remaining AFS membership (8 of 11 being from Nova Scotia) at the organization's fall conference at St. Mary's University this weekend.

Hopefully the Dalhousie delegates to the conference recognize how vital the existence of a solid and progressive student organization is. Only positive contributions on their part will insure that Nova Scotia students have a voice in the planning of post secondary education.

WE AMERICANS JUST LOVE YOUR TRADITIONS - BAGPIPERS TOWN' CRIERS, POSTAL STRIKES...



Letters

To the Gazette:

On 25 October all Dalhousie students will have the opportunity to cast their ballot for or against retaining their membership in the Atlantic Federation of Students. Whether one votes YES or NO it will hopefully reflect their understanding of AFS's role, purpose and effectiveness.

As one of the delegates to the founding of the AFS (only 4 years ago) in Truro, I feel that the concerns expressed by Atlantic students at that time are still with us. The desire to form an Atlantic federation was based on the need to cooperate on issues such as, student representation on governing boards,

student aid, educational rights, access and equality of Post-Secondary Education (PSE), housing and other problems demanding research and action. Have these issues faded away? The AFS since its inception has fought these problems. We now have student representatives on the Student Aid boards and now a student on the MPHEC. Tuition fees have been frozen. Such actions speak to the effectiveness of an Atlantic student voice.

Since 1976 and particularly since early 1978 another more serious question has reared its head, that of cutbacks. The problem of cutbacks has threatened to undermine the whole of university education. The federal government's commitment to PSE has decreased in proportion to its other social commitments. With Ottawa's move to pro-

vincial block funding (and the abolition of cost sharing), the Atlantic governments are no longer forced to maintain a reasonable level of PSE funding. The result of such moves will be felt more and more each year, as the general quality and access to education declines. The widening of regional disparities which these cutbacks will exacerbate will have to be addressed. How can fragmented student bodies effectively tackle these crucial regional issues? Won't the governments play one student body against another? **DISUNITY IS OUR OWN WORST ENEMY.** The AFS has demonstrated in the past that it is the only effective student grouping which can challenge governmental spending cuts. It is ironic that when we need to act regionally on issues there is a move toward individual action. **DIVIDED WE WILL BE CONQUERED.**

The structure of the AFS provides for student input, and what student input receive from AFS is directly proportional to their input. AFS is only as strong as student unions' commitment to regional student issues. The crunch is coming, declining enrollments and cutbacks are hitting us now and it will get worse in the not too distant future. Who will suffer? The student is the one who has suffered in the past and it is doubtful that a miracle will save us this time. On 25 October vote for your own self interest and that of future students and vote YES TO AFS.

Sincerely,
Bill White,
President, Dalhousie
Association of
Graduate Students

the Dalhousie Gazette

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The deadline for advertising is the Friday noon preceding publication. Articles and letters are due Monday noon. No unsigned material will be accepted but anonymity may be granted on request. Letters should not exceed 500 words and must be typed on a 64 character line.

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