

# "I'd bury it myself" -- Ward on CUS

By DOUG WARD

Should the University of Alberta withdraw from the Canadian Union of Students?

Should we dissolve CUS?

Certainly I would hope that in the Canadian student movement we have moved beyond the position that a national organization should be maintained simply because a national organization is a nice thing.

If CUS has ceased to serve the students of this country then I will be glad to be among those who help to give it a decent burial.

Actually it is not that Branny and the Council have announced their intention to withdraw from the Union that is so disturbing. It is the fact that the reasons which they have put forward to justify this withdrawal indicate the complete acceptance of the view that a student and his colleagues are passive consumers of facts with no capacity to act upon their academic community, the wider society of Canada, or the world.

Branny argues that he would like to see students involved with economic and social questions as individuals, but as students they should concentrate solely on their studies and other immediate and particular concerns.

This is an attractive argument until one realizes it emasculates the student community, which, in an age that has opted-out of direct social responsibility, is an immediate form of community which can be instrumental in re-invigorating a national involvement.

Over the past two or three years the CUS has attempted to become an organization relevant to the problems of Canadians. Canadian students, people who should be Canadian students, and the society which sustains our present educational system.

The Congress just held in Halifax was especially valuable in this regard and the vast majority of student associations there affirmed that the Union would push for accessibility to higher education, not simply for the class of students presently enrolled in universities and technical schools, but for the thousands of young people with great ability who for reasons of finance or background do not make it.

This is the core program of the Union.

We have the Inter-regional Scholarship Exchange Program (ISEP) which enables students to travel and study in Canadian centers away from their homes.

We have life insurance available to members of CUS at very reasonable rates. In fact, just this year we have cut its cost from \$3.50 to \$2.60 per thousand—an incredibly low rate.

But financial advantages for students should only be gained on the basis of our mass buying power, and not by forcing companies and governments to aid us at the expense of the rest of society. This is why we will not lobby indiscriminately for "more" for students.

When CUS fought for, and won, the right for students to deduct fees from taxable income, we did so because of the obvious need for students to work during the summer to finance their university education.

That wasn't enough. We need adequate student aid for the present student population, and we will need even more to attract non-middle class young people to university.

We are also working to encourage student co-operative residences, because they save everybody money—the student, the government and society—and because we are convinced that they have a contribution to make to the life of the campus.

The Canadian Union of Students has adopted as its first priority universal accessibility to higher education.



DOUG WARD

... writes his thoughts

—Errol Borsky photo

This means we believe education should be a right for all who can contribute and benefit by it, and not a privilege to be enjoyed by the few lucky to come from the "right" kind of financial and social background.

At the same time we are beginning to ask some hard questions of the institutions which we are trying to make accessible.

If we find it necessary to try to represent the people who did not make it to the university by calling for universal accessibility, we also try to encourage students presently in attendance to work to improve the quality of education in our universities.

There is not much point in making our universities more accessible if they do not become better places for the exchange of ideas and for the development of disciplined and liberated minds of men.

Branny has argued that Canada does not need an activist student group like CUS.

He suggests that the Union is over-extended in areas like international affairs and domestic policy. Thus he implies there is no role for the student as a member of the student community to promote social reform.

But even from a strictly selfish point of view, the integrity of the university cannot be secured by working strictly within the hallowed halls.

To be concerned for the future of the university one must accept the responsibility to act upon the social and economic systems which sustain or threaten teaching and learning, openness and relevance.

This means involvement, and it means involvement on the part of the university and student community if it is to play a viable role in our society.

If people are starving in Malawi—not just Malawi students but Malawi citizens—then the Canadian student community should be working on programs to confront Canadian students, the Canadian government and international agencies with the need to respond with speed and determination.

If people are living in slums around Edmonton, the student community should be confronting it; and if students at U of A have serious emotional problems, the student community should be tackling that, with considerable resources and intellectual application.

The most immediate community that the student can become involved in is the student community, and this is the place of his immediate concern. But the student cannot allow himself to adopt such an elitist position as to see all his concerns ending with the immediate.

The Canadian Union of Students is primarily concerned with questions directly relating to the Canadian student community, but we are also concerned with the scores of other social problems which in some way come out of an understanding of so-called student problems.

One cannot draw a rigid line between a student problem and another kind of social problem. The problem of poverty on an Indian reserve and the problems facing the Indian student in first year university are part and parcel of the same societal concern.

To admit otherwise is to contend that our society is a collection of ticky-tacky boxes—unrelated and unrelating.

But what of specific points that Branny, Marilyn, Owen and the other members of the delegation have made?

If our disagreement is over the fundamentals I have attempted to outline above then Alberta is wise to question its involvement with fellow student associations in a national organization.

The matter bears much debate—and the vote of the students.

If however, the disagreement is about the specific points raised by the Alberta Council so far then I would very seriously ask you to consider the following.

First of all, CUS is not some pure and inviolate creature. CUS is an organization of 160,000 students, most of whom are presently indifferent to its reality.

CUS is also the bureaucratic ex-

pression of a student movement which has decided upon certain principles and is engaged in the exciting task of bringing those principles to life.

If you want to be part of democratizing and enriching the university then we need you in this movement and in CUS.

But to the specific points.

1. **OVEREXTENSION**—there is no doubt that this has become a CUS problem. But I have asked for a mandate for the Union to "pull in its horns" and stop trying to write a brief for the sake of verbosity to every Royal Commission and Court of Inquiry that comes along.

This is not the function of a small national secretariat. This year we intend to have this Union focus on the problems of and challenges to the Canadian student where he is, and from there to develop the logical extension of his problems and responsibilities.

2. **POOR COMMUNICATIONS**—again this problem has plagued CUS just as it has plagued every national organization in Canada—and every student council.

This year for the first time we have hired a full time Associate Secretary for Communications who is working on ways and means of reaching the student, and of making sure his ideas get discussed and acted upon.

A national newsletter is being initiated with a much wider circulation and livelier style than previous attempts. It will help to overcome geography, if nothing else.

In addition plans are going ahead for a 1967 National Student Newspaper which will be editorially independent of CUS but which will keep all students well informed about the national student scene.

3. **CUS IS TOO SOPHISTICATED FOR THE AVERAGE STUDENT**—The Congress passed greatly increased travel budgets for all CUS program staff to enable everyone in the Secretariat to get out in the field and find out what the students are thinking, and to help build programs relevant to these concerns. Our only problem will be finding that elusive "average" student. But it is a beginning to closing the gap between the student and his union.

4. **NOT ALL CANADIAN STUDENTS ARE IN CUS**—It should not be a mammoth aggregation of people without a purpose, but a task force of student associations which have made clear some common and basic areas where work is needed.

Two of the universities which withdrew this year did so in order to join UGEQ—which is considerably more activist than CUS.

5. **NATIONAL OFFICE CANNOT SPEAK FOR CANADIAN STUDENTS SINCE IT DOESN'T AT ANY GIVEN TIME KNOW THEIR THOUGHTS ON A PARTICULAR ISSUE**—this is the eternal problem of an organization trying to seek modern forms of democratic expression, and even the Alberta Student Council, judging by the results of the poll on the withdrawal, has yet to solve it.

At present the CUS Board of Directors is conducting a study of CUS structure and memberships which may shed some light on possible solutions to the problem.

We need the constant vigilance of an involved membership—and this has been one of the strongest contributions of Edmonton's campus in recent years.

In essence the central issue is one of involvement. If Alberta had withdrawn from the Union because the organization itself is feeble or irrelevant then all of us should send our congratulations and follow suit. But we are led to believe that the Council withdrew because of CUS' deepening concern for educational and social issues.