

## AFS-NUS Interview

# Student organizations face the press

Interview with NUS fieldworker, Miguel Figueroa, and AFS/FEA Secretary, Don Soucy, in Gazette Office, Saturday, February 5, 1977 by Matt Adamson, Journal Editor, SMU, Stephanie Pinkham, Picaro Editor, Mount St. Vincent and Val Mansour, Gazette Editor, Dalhousie.

**What has been happening with NUS in the past few years?**

**Figueroa:** The development of NUS has been characterized by a growth in membership and a consolidation of credibility among students and among the various levels of government. Membership in NUS has doubled since 1974, and we have become a national voice which is

and provincial and regional organizations and deals with matters which are of federal concern. The federal government is not going to listen to a regional or provincial organization, but it will listen to provincial and regional bodies unified in a national organization.

AFS, on the other hand, is needed to work on more local issues. We in the Atlantic have certain needs and aims which are specifically our own. There is work to be done and information to be shared which is certainly best coordinated here and not in Ottawa.

**Figueroa:** Since the Government is affecting us, we must work together at the appropriate level. Regional decisions must be presented

in nearly every province in the country.

**If a tuition increase is announced, what will you do?**

**Soucy:** Work must be done before they are announced. We have set up meetings with the Minister of Education and AFS has met together to discuss and agree upon our approach.

The tuition increases will be caused by the provincial governments shirking their financial responsibilities to post-secondary education. If they fail to meet the economic needs of the institutions then the institutions will respond by cutting back on various areas and making us pay more if we can afford it or drop out if we can not. Now the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, these decisions have more and more been made on a regional basis. The Administrations, through the AAU, are approaching the government as a regional voice, and so must the students.

On the local level we all agreed at an AFS meeting last November to bring common proposals concerning tuition to each campus; respective Board of Governors. This tactic has paid off by providing us all with a fairly comprehensive region-wide picture of the whys and where fors of possible tuition increases. Through such actions AFS has been able to get information enabling us all to act before the fact, as opposed to reacting after decisions have been announced.

That is not to say that AFS will remain idle if and when tuition increases are announced. On the contrary, we are planning now what we shall do if this occurs. Last year when they were announced, students did not do too

much about it. That makes it all the more easier for them to raise it this year.

If they do raise them, we must protest. With a passive response students will have to expect more increases, along with cutbacks in education which will result in a decrease in quality.

**Figueroa:** The options are in the hands of the students to decide - they have to decide if and how to take action.

It is time to rebuild mass support. We must explain to the community that AFS is no longer a council president's club. It must defend students' interest.

**How will the recent restructuring of AFS help?**

**Soucy:** The recent restructuring of the organization was designed to meet specific ends.

First of all, the executive structure was overhauled so that there is now a better division of labour and clearly defined jobs for the various people to do. I guess the main criterion for choosing and defining the various positions was to better facilitate communication. Each campus is to have an AFS campus-coordinator. She or he will be responsible to see that the information flows in and out from his or her campus to the AFS executive. The executive now consists of a chairperson from each province who coordinates the work of that province. Then there is a coordinating secretary, which is myself at the moment, who coordinates the work and communication between the four provinces and also between the region and other provincial organizations, and, of course, the national union.

There is also a treasurer. The four Atlantic NUS Central Committee members sit ex-officio on our executive so that we are better informed of the national picture.

The reason for this more effective communication, obviously, is to better represent the concerns of Atlantic Students. Through referenda and more student input, AFS will be more directly responsible and accountable to the students.

**How does the average student get feedback?**

**Soucy:** Damn good question. AFS must go out to the students. NUS is presently communicating directly to the student through such means as the *Student Advocate*. AFS just has not had the resources which are necessary for mass distribution of information, through there has been a lot of communication on the council level.

But we see it as a major problem that AFS research and work has not been filtering down to the students. Students have to feel AFS is accessible. The campus coordinators are a good start.

**Figueroa:** The organization is only as democratic as local members are. You must build good councils and make them responsive. We can not lobby effectively in a vacuum without strong local support and initiative.

**Students do not seem to know what is going on. AFS and NUS must communicate more. Who's fault is the communication gap?**

**Figueroa:** Work is being communicated to the Councils by AFS and NUS more effectively than the communication of many Councils to their students. There is a constant flow of information coordinated by AFS and NUS, but it

often seems to get stuck at the Council level.

When students are not being informed, they have a role in demanding that their student representatives shape up.

**Soucy:** The campus media also have a major role to play here. They are constantly dealing with information which is of concern to students and they have a responsibility to both dig out this information and present it to the students.

**How does the \$1.00 per capita fee fit in?**

**Soucy:** Well, when students vote in AFS, they will also be voting to each pay a \$1.00 fee. This fee goes direct to AFS and does not come out of the local council budget. These resources will, of course, be necessary if we are to adequately coordinate our work throughout the region.

In the past, AFS has had to depend on free labour, free paper, free telephones and free by anything else. Translations would be done by every available person willing to be exploited for the cause.

You can well understand how such a shoe string situation as this made it pretty difficult for all of us in the Atlantic to get together and do all the work that had to be done. Adequate communications was impossible, and communication is the crux of an organization like AFS.

**Figueroa:** If most of the campuses in the Atlantic join AFS, there will be a budget of about \$25,000. Now that may sound like an awful lot of money, and it certainly is an awful lot to any of us. But relatively speaking, \$25,000 is not a whole lot when discussing an organization coordinating all sorts of work over four provinces. As you know, most student unions have many times that amount to coordinate the work just on their own campus.

**Soucy:** If referenda are lost, however, AFS will have to carry on with its limited resources. Many Atlantic Students are very aware of the need to work together and will therefore continue to do so. However, there is no denying that with no money to coordinate our efforts, we will have a very limited effect.

**Why was there a defeat at UNB?**

**Soucy:** Students were uninformed about AFS and erroneous information was distributed. The UNB council was in debt and they wanted a \$10 increase in student fees. They didn't justify the increase and students were not aware that the \$1 goes to AFS and not to council.

**If UNB doesn't participate in AFS, wouldn't that have a big effect on the organization?**

**Soucy:** UNB is still a member of AFS until September and will continue to work with AFS. Jim Murray, the new council president there, is a strong supporter of AFS.

**Figueroa:** UNB students will be facing the same problems as the rest of us in the Atlantic. They will be wanting their student representatives to work on these issues. It will become increasingly apparent to them that this work can best be done by working in conjunction with other Atlantic campuses.

**Soucy:** One thing it will mean is that AFS will have restricted finances in the September term. The budget will not be what we hoped for, and this, of course, means that we won't be able to do all that we hoped to do. But we are pretty confident that UNB will have another AFS referenda in the fall and that the students will vote "Yes".

**Since NUS is a national organization, does one defeat in the Maritimes effect the organization greatly?**

**Figueroa:** Certainly NUS' national credibility will not be weakened by one defeat. There was a time, when NUS has a small membership, that any member leaving would have severely crippled the organization. But now there are over 180,000 students in NUS. It is very stable, both in terms of finances and in its position as a national student organization.

This is not to say that NUS will remain totally indifferent to a defeat in a referenda. Naturally we want to maintain active participation by as many students as possible. When any campus leaves NUS, be it large or small, that campus suffers along with every other campus in Canada, for the students' voice is that much less powerful.

**Do governments really listen?**

**Figueroa:** You have to keep the political framework in mind. The national liberals right now are open. They are in a weak position and thus tend to be more responsive.

To lobby the government directly is not always the most effective way to accomplish things. We must build an awareness in ourselves. By gaining public support, we can influence government. We cannot hide behind the university community. NUS supports oriented services. We must relate our problems to the community in general.



recognized by the federal government. Students from across the country have been able to keep each other better informed on their various concerns, and, in many cases, have been able to present a nation-wide unified front when expressing these concerns.

NUS has had increasing contact with various government agencies and also increasing recognition from the opposition parties. NUS has been providing information to those making recommendations and legislation. Many times this information would otherwise remain unknown.

**Soucy:** or conveniently ignored.

**Figueroa:** Right. But when this information is collected and made public by students from across the country it then becomes rather difficult to ignore it. Various aspects of education and accessibility to education are under attack in this country, and students are now more determined than ever to come together and organize on a national scale.

**How do NUS and AFS work together?**

**Soucy:** Though they are 2 autonomous organizations, it should be recognized that the goals of NUS and AFS are basically the same - to provide students with a say in matters which concern our education and our future.

In a practical sense, though, the two organizations each have a distinct role. NUS is a national organization. It co-ordinates work between the various Students' Unions

federally because some decisions are made there. International Students, for instance, are under attack province by province, with the federal government also placing restrictions on them. In 1973, international students had a hard time finding work in the country. It is obvious that such a small number of people in the work force was not the cause of our high unemployment. Certainly the federal government can do better than to hide behind these insignificant acts in dealing with such an important problem as employment. So NUS lobbied the federal government by a presentation on the matter to a joint parliamentary committee.

**Soucy:** When the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design was discussing a proposal to be the first institution in the Atlantic attempting to implement a differential fee for international students, the Students' Union immediately contacted AFS to help coordinate opposition to the fee. AFS in turn got in touch with NUS and together they all came up with a brief which comprehensively gave the local, provincial, regional and national ramifications of imposing such a fee and successfully defeated the proposal.

**Figueroa:** NUS sees provincial and regional organizations as vital if we are to have an effective input into student concerns. This can be seen in the work NUS has done in helping the provincial and regional bodies organize themselves. In 1973 only the Ontario Federation of Students existed. Now there are provincial or regional organizations established,

## Resisting tuition increases at Dal

Rumblings of tuition increases are again being heard across the province. Increases in tuition are directly related to the level of public funding institutions receive. Both the federal and provincial governments across Canada seem to be giving post-secondary education a lower priority in their budgets. When the governments cut back their financing, the students' problems begin.

The financing of post-secondary education is probably the single most crucial issue affecting both the quality of and the accessibility to education in the Atlantic. Government decisions being made now will determine, among other things: the degree of curriculum development, the extent of graduate programs and research projects, the teacher-student ratio, the quality of libraries and other auxiliary services, new building facilities and other capital projects and the level of tuition, residence fees and food costs to students.

During this current period of "fiscal restraint", both federal and provincial governments are seizing upon the opportunity to cut back public support to higher education and other social services. Many of these are far out of proportion to the cutbacks imposed in other sectors of public spending. In the short

run, our governments may consider post-secondary education an easy target for financial cutbacks.

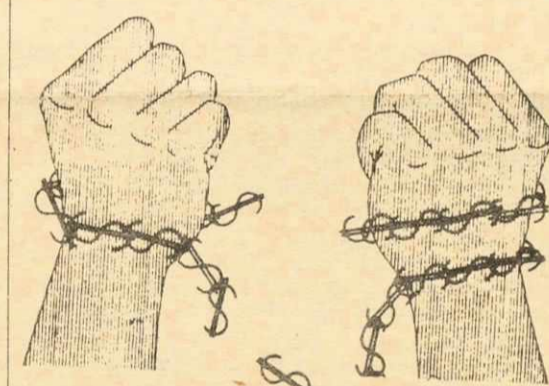
However, the long term effects of this withdrawal of public support may indeed have disastrous consequences for post-secondary education in this province and in Canada as a whole. The Atlantic Federation of Students and the National Union of Students are both working on this problem. AFS is studying the possible and present effects of cutbacks outlined in the Graham Commission Report. NUS has monitored the recent changes in the Fiscal Arrangements Act and the consequences these will have on financing. Both groups are organizing students to fight these cutbacks, in particular to fight any increase in already high tuition fees.

These recent changes in the FAA have resulted in a decreased federal financial presence in post-secondary education. This will have serious ramifications, especially here in the Atlantic provinces. Our "poorer" provincial governments may not want to compensate for the decreased federal funding with increased provincial grants. As a result, the burden of these cutbacks will be passed directly on to the students through continued and increasing tuition fee hikes. At the same

time, we will experience a deterioration of the quality of our education.

Post-secondary students in the Atlantic are already paying higher tuition fees than anywhere else in Canada. Further increases in costs to individual students will place greater financial burdens on all present and future post-secondary students. Post-secondary education, especially at the university level, will become even more inaccessible to the low income sectors of the public. For those who will be able to afford it, the quality of education will not be all that it could, and should, be.

This critical financing situation can be improved through unified student work. It must be recognized that the major financial cutbacks to post-secondary education are not occurring as the result of a uniform "anti-inflation" restraint program. It is rather the result of a wholesale drop in education as a priority of our government's public spending responsibilities, through the AFS/FEA and through NUS/JUNE we can express our concern over this drop in priority. We can inform the public of our positions, gain their support, and demand that our governments justify the actions which they take, if, indeed, they are able.



**Will the staff person be a field worker or coordinator?**

**Soucy:** The main emphasis will be on communication. There seemed to be a general consensus at the last AFS meeting that the person should be mainly office oriented, though some field work will be necessary, especially in the first few months of AFS' re-organization.

**What will happen in the event of a defeat of AFS?**

**Soucy:** Students will suffer.  
**Figueroa:** If students are informed, AFS will not be defeated.

## NUS on women's issues

All women in the university, students, staff and faculty, continue to face discrimination. Women students have greater problems finding summer employment (and lower wages when they find it), are more dependent on student aid (thus graduate with larger debts), face inadequate child care facilities (a barrier for mothers), and generally encounter institutional discrimination.

The National Union of Students has provided a forum for discussion and action around the problems faced by women on campus. NUS is on record as being in favour of 24 hour child care as a basic social right and has spent some time lobbying the governments in this area.

The NUS Women's committee is currently doing a study on the participation rate of women in student politics. They plan to develop a strategy for increasing the involvement of female students in their own governing bodies.

NUS has also been active in pushing for status of women committees on many campuses across the country. This has led to public examination of sexist practices in hiring, firing and rates of pay as well as individual treatment in classrooms and in acceptance into graduate school. Another area brought to light has been the effect of cutbacks in educational financing. NUS found that women's courses and other courses of particular relevance to female students were among the first to be cut.

In placing the status of women in colleges and universities as a high priority of work, NUS has recognized the need for intensive work against sexism in the institution, and provides a base from which to work for change. It has also realized, however, that full equality for women in education can only be achieved when the post-secondary system is fully democratized and educational opportunity is available to all, regardless of sex or other social and economic factors.

The Atlantic Federation of Students and the National Union of Students have been, and must continue to be, active in monitoring and constructively criticizing the student aid systems which are available to us as students. Both organizations strongly support the basic concept of government subsidized student assistance programs to aid students who are in financial need. Such programs should be a step toward making access to post-secondary education more equitable among Canadians.

Concern is rapidly increasing, however, that many aspects of the various student aid programs which are available are not fulfilling the criteria for promoting this equality of accessibility. Low living allowances at a time of rapid escalation in the cost of living; arbitrary parental contribution requirements; forced, unrealistic summer savings, at a time when the country, and especially the Atlantic is facing incredibly high unemployment - these are some of the prime examples of areas in the student aid programs which are more and more forcing low-income people to either mortgage their future or simply not consider post-secondary education.

## Student aid

Students in the past have shown that they can have an effective voice in helping to determine student aid policy. Since student aid is hopefully to benefit students, it seems only logical that we have input into the discussions on it. This input is best achieved by students from the various institutions working together to attain common goals. A single individual or institution will not be as effective as a collective effort and will not be as able to truly represent the views of the majority of the students in the areas.

The Nova Scotia caucus of the AFS and the NUS is meeting with George Mitchell, the Minister of Education next week to discuss recent regressive changes in the student aid program here. Their earlier concern resulted in his delaying the implementation of these changes a full year.

With the advent of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), the Maritime provinces, and possibly Newfound-

land in the near future, are increasingly moving toward unification of educational policies and planning. Student aid programs are more and more looking alike. If this trend continues, as it most likely shall, provincial lobby alone will be ineffective. Coordinated effort, on a regional basis, providing a united front, will soon become the only way to positively influence our governments.

It is important here to remember that many aspects of the provincial student aid programs are predetermined by the terms of the federal Canada Student Loan Plan. The assessment of any award and/or student resources used in determining the amount of the award is based on criteria developed for the C.S.L.P. It is therefore necessary to build a strong student organization in this region which will enable us to co-operate with the other provincial and regional, student organizations and thus provide an Atlantic influence on the decisions of the federally controlled portion of student aid. The National Union of Students is constantly doing research and lobbying the federal government for changes in aid programmes.

## Work on (un)employment

Student employment is a major area of concern for both the ATLANTIC FEDERATION OF STUDENTS and the NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS. Increasing yearly, statistics now show that unemployment last summer reached an all time high, especially in the Atlantic provinces. Many Dalhousie students who depend on summer employment to assist in the financing of their education were unable this year to continue their studies due to their inability to find a summer job.

Many of the reasons for last summer's extremely high unemployment rate are a direct result of decisions taken by our government in regards to job programs. For example, last summer the federal government slashed its Student Summer Employment and Activities program from \$60 million to \$24 million. Such programs were supposed to be geared to assist areas of the country where unemployment was highest. Unfortunately, the Atlantic is one of those areas. In fact, before the program was terminated in 1975, a full 25% of the Opportunity for Youth grants were awarded in the Atlantic. So, it is obvious that a voice for

the unemployed students should sound loudly from this region.

Research given to opposition parties in Ottawa last summer by NUS provided the basis for questions in the House of Commons on student unemployment. The media picked up the story and in their editorials were supportive of NUS's position. This fall the government announced the Young Canada Works program which will provide more than 20,000 jobs this summer. NUS is now trying to ensure that the jobs provided are as worthwhile and practical as possible, and directed at those who need them.

These are, however, only stop-gap measures to soften the otherwise deteriorating situation. There is still much room for improvement. Dalhousie students must join with both the students in the region and with those across the country to insure that future government policies reflect both the long term graduate and summer employment needs of students and, indeed, the needs of all Canadians.