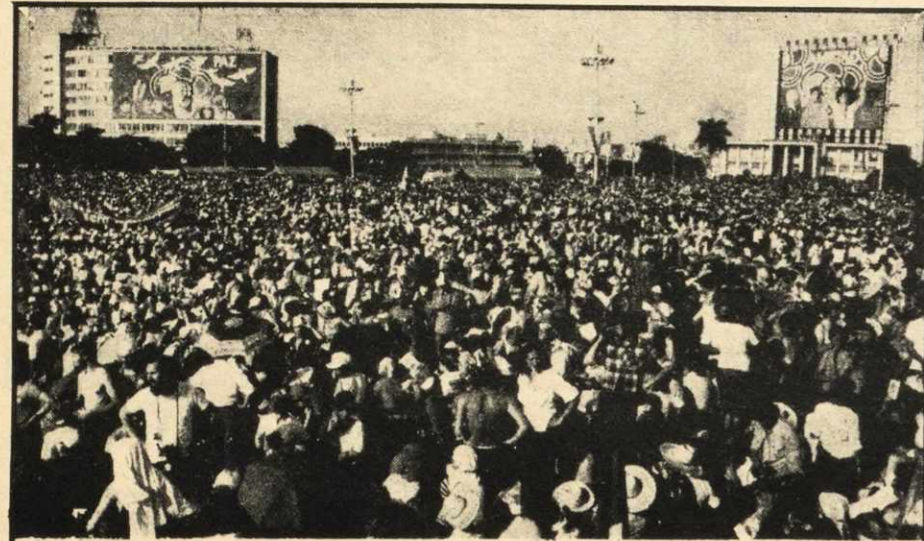


U.K. students face similar problems



Last summer over 18,000 young people from around the world took part in the Eleventh World Festival of Youth and Students in Havana, Cuba. One of the many facets of the 8 day festival was bi-lateral meetings between interest groups from different countries. The following is a transcript of a meeting between Canadian Students and representatives of the National Union of students of the United Kingdom (NUS/UK). The meeting was recorded by Marc Allain of the Gazette, who was there as a member of the 240 person Canadian delegation.

NUS Canada: Are students in the United Kingdom faced with government spending restraint and the accompanying cutbacks?

NUS / UK: Very much so. The starting point for both developments was 1974.

Essentially about that time the inflation rate in Britain was particularly high. The solution that was put forward by the government was to make a significant cutback in the area of public expenditure. It did that not only in education but launched an offensive of that nature within the national health service, public transport, and also in housing.

What that meant in the education sector, and I'm talking solely of higher education, although similar examples can be quoted for lower / primary education, was a huge cutback in the budgets both at the national and regional levels. The first real effects came in the academic years 75 / 76 when the government decided to make massive cutbacks in the number of trained teachers. The reasons that they gave for that was demographic data.

According to the statistics that they've compiled they predict a sharp downturn in the specific age group

politics?

NUS / UK: Well in the teacher employment campaign that was certainly the case. We saw tens of thousands of students involved in that campaign. For instance, the occupation of my college had regular attendance of over three hundred students.

But I think it's important to point out that these attacks that the government is waging plus the general unemployment situation in Britain is having a demobilizing effect on the student body. People are becoming more and more concerned not only with getting a degree but with getting a high class degree because youth and student unemployment, especially graduate unemployment, is extremely high. People are seeking what I would term individualistic solutions to the social problems that are confronting the student body rather than collective solutions.

I think it's fair to say that there has been a considerable downturn in mass activity within the NUS in the last year. That's been reflected in bad attendance at general meetings in the local unions and very poor turnouts at some of our national initiatives.

For instance we can expect to have

simultaneously.

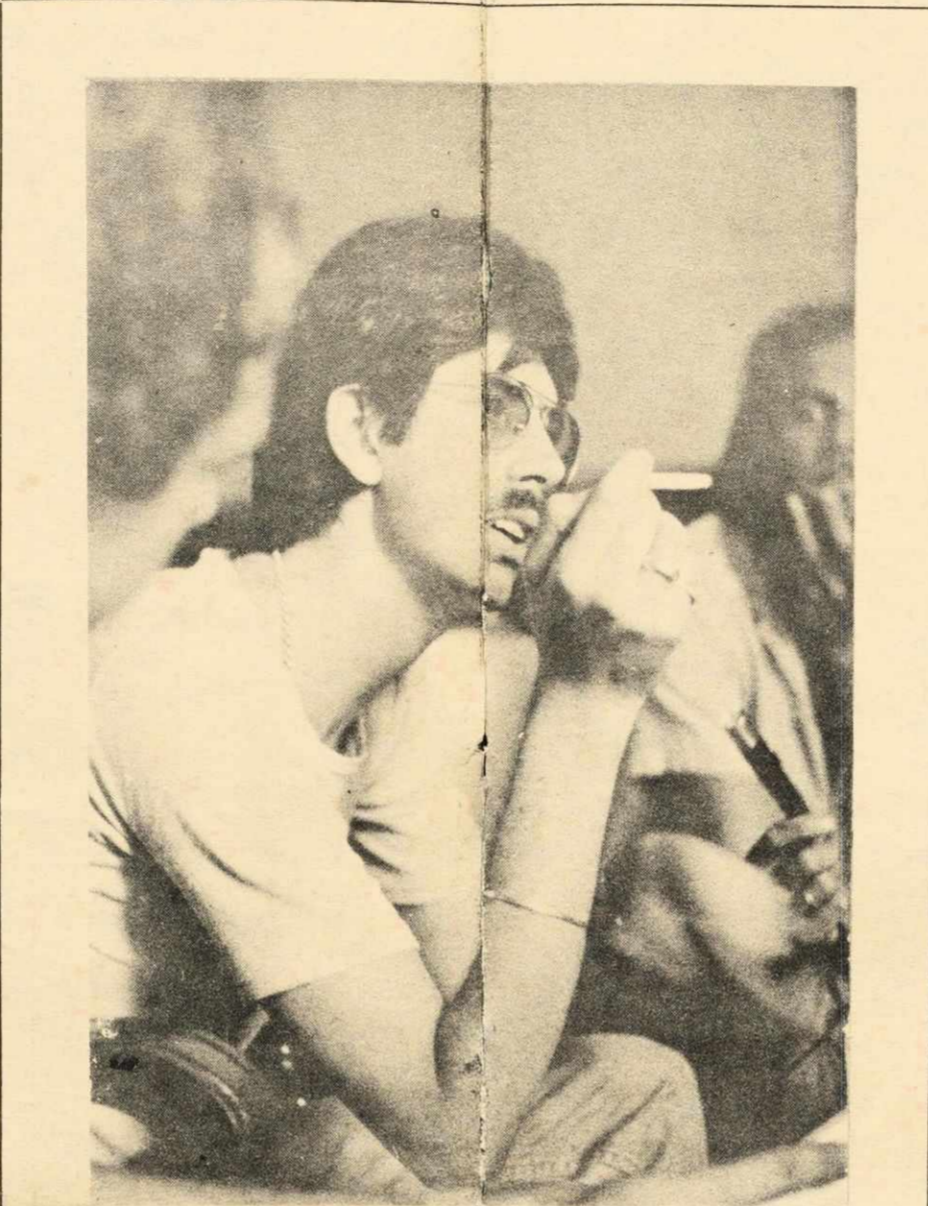
I think it has to be said that that campaign didn't meet with a great deal of success. There certainly wasn't any response from the government in terms of their employment strategy. The only thing that we've been able to do in terms of the colleges to date is to retain the number of colleges that they were going to close down, for alternative purposes within the educational system. So I don't think that it can be termed a major success in terms of the teacher training program itself.

The other attacks that we are facing are particularly aimed at overseas students who are studying in our country. Of the total student population about 10% or 55,000 are overseas students. The government has decided to reduce these numbers to forty four thousand by the year 1981. Now in the year '76 to '77 and again this year there were fantastic increases in the tuition fees.

That's not a problem for a home student because if you're going to school on the basis of a grant from the government it's a paper transfer no matter what the fees cost. But for self financing students and primarily overseas students it's a major burden to get into education.

The fees increased for overseas students in one year to over three hundred percent. At the same time the government sent around a circular to implement a quota system as they call it to reduce the numbers of overseas students in the colleges to the 1976 figures. The path has been set for the colleges to gradually bring about that reduction by 1981.

In certain colleges particularly in the London area something like 47 percent of the students were from overseas. There are in fact colleges in London that have seventy percent overseas students. These are specialists colleges that study oriental and African studies. The impact of these policies could mean that these colleges would be closed creating yet another loss of teaching jobs. So we expect to wage a



Mike Archer, an executive member of NUS/UK talks to Canadian students about the British student movement at the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Havana, Cuba last summer. Representatives of NUS Canada, the Ontario Federation of Students, (O) the Federation of Alberta Students, (FAS), The British Columbia Student Federation (BCFS) and Canadian University Press (CUP) were at the meeting.

major campaign on this issue in the coming year opposing any form of quotas and calling for a freeze of tuition fees at their present level.

NUS Canada: The NUS / UK seems to have a fairly progressive series of policies developed in the international area. What do you attribute this to?

I think that those are the two major domestic campaigns. There are other ones around, for instance the decision of the department of Health and Social Security to pass policy which would deny students the rights to claim social security benefits during the summer. Which is a right that students have in Britain at the moment. Again it's a significant saving in the area of public expenditure.

Those are the main bread and butter domestic issues. Obviously there are others like campaigns on racism, campaigns on more nursery facilities and more international policy.

The benefits we see in international work. . . . We are presently reviewing our international role. The decision of Britain to join the Common Market has its problems for us. We have to accept that de facto it means a whole process of political, social and economic integration with the common market countries and inevitably that will have repercussions on the structure of education in Britain. There's going to be a certain amount of influence from the European Council and the EEC generally within that sphere.

We recently had a member of the international department, who resigned to go to another job, and we've redefined the job description for that position to allow that person to amass material on the Common Market and on the operations of the EEC in relation to education.

We also have a policy on Northern Ireland although we don't tend to classify that as an international question within NUS / UK.

To sum it up I guess you can divide our international work into two categories: the campaigning issues on the one side and on the other side the task of looking at how our involvement in supra national bodies like the EEC is going to have impacts on education in Britain.

NUS / UK: Well they date from a shift in NUS / UK that occurred during the late sixties. During the 1950's the NUS was controlled by a fairly dominant conservative element. There even was a provision in our constitution which forbade discussion of overtly political issues. I think it's generally accepted that the real issue that smashed that sort of restriction asunder was the Vietnamese war and the mass involvement of students in the late sixties in anti-war protest.

So it's essentially since that period that NUS has developed its international work. We organize in all areas although we don't have a very

"People are seeking individualistic solutions to the social problems rather than collective solutions."

extensive mandate. Our mandate on international issues is established at our national conferences and because it is an extremely contentious area we avoid at all times adopting positions at an executive level without involving the membership fully in developing that policy.

At present we are acting on policy on South Africa, which is obviously a major issue for us because of British involvement in Africa both historically and presently through its part in negotiations in Zimbabwe and involvement in South Africa itself.

We also have policy on Chile, which, again, is in part for historical reasons and recently we made an appeal to a local union to send a representative to Chile at the time of the Hunger strike that was going on there. We collected enough money to send our deputy president who went across to Chile. There he met with various underground and official organizations, church bodies and will be making a full report to our conference.

What we try to do when we are

making our visits abroad, including our participation at this festival, is regular feedback to the membership to inform them of exactly what we are doing. Otherwise it's very easy for the membership to think that all their full time officers do is climb on and off airplanes to different exotic parts of the world. It's important to break that down.

NUS Canada: Your international campaigns appear to take on an educational function in terms of focussing on the political situations that exist in countries like Chile and South Africa. Are you involved in any fund raising campaigns around these issues?

NUS / UK: Yes we are involved in fund raising. South Africa is probably our best example because it's our best developed campaign and traditionally the one we've been operating on longest. We operate on the boycott issue primarily. We oppose any sport or cultural exchanges with the South African regime and there are strong ties in these areas with Britain.

Probably the most developed area over the last year has been the disinvestment campaign. There are quite a few universities that have large amounts of money invested in South Africa and we've waged disinvestment campaigns on the individual campuses as part of the overall anti-apartheid movements spanning British industry as a whole.

That's been relatively successful. We've been able to get several million pounds invested in South Africa disinvested. We also operate a boycott on Barclay's campaign because Barclay's is one of the five major clearing banks in our country that has large stakes in South Africa. It is the largest British bank operating there. At the beginning of each academic year, as a means of raising the issue, we call on new students looking for a bank to boycott Barclay's. We've managed to push Barclay's from the first bank in the student field down to fourth or fifth. So now they really try and flirt with NUS / UK in an attempt to get us to stop the campaign.

Iranian student says

Shah didn't modernize - he oppressed

by Ron Norman

In response to a request made by the Gazette, an Iranian student at Dalhousie agreed to provide some background to the current situation in his country. Abbas Naini, a graduate student in economics, pointed out that he was speaking as an individual and did not claim to be representative of Iranians in general, nor of any particular faction.

Q. Why did the people wish to oust the Shah?

A. During the 37 years of his regime, the Shah has come increasingly to represent the source of the bureaucratic corruption and political oppression from which the Iranian people suffered.

Q. But the Shah has been represented in the Western media as having transformed Iran into a modern and stable country with a progressive technology and flourishing economy. Do you deny this?

A. Certainly there was great economic growth during this period, but if by 'modernity' you mean the imported American Coca-Cola culture, and 'stability' is achieved only at the expense of the freedom of speech and press, then the value of either to Iran is dubious. The Shah's regime was essentially a dictatorship. In assessing the achievements of his regime, the transgression of human rights, suppression of all political opposition, and the torture and imprisonment of people who criticized the government, together grossly outweigh any points in the Shah's favour. It now materializes that the Shah has assets exceeding \$20 billion deposited in foreign banks, money acquired over the last three decades when many Iranians continued to live at subsistence level.

This hardly complements your portrayal of a humane and unselfish leader of the nation.

Q. Why has there been such a strong anti-American sentiment in recent demonstrations?

A. Since the 1953 coup, when the popular leader Mossadeq was crushed and the Shah returned to power with C backing, the Iranian people have regarded Americans as self-interested supporters of tyrant. Much of the revenue from oil was chafled back into the USA in the form of massively heavy contracts for armaments. Advisers persuaded the Shah that these men would help maintain his position. The people felt the military budget was disproportionately high and that more money should have been spent on social welfare. American involvement in Iran was perceived as yet another example of imperialism from which the national interests of Iran suffered.

Q. Why has Islam been such an effective rallying point for those opposed to the Shah?

A. Well, Iran is a Moslem country and Islam is central to our cultural identity. It was impossible for people to form political parties as such since, as I have already mentioned, no opposition was tolerated. The mosque became all the more significant as a place where people might assemble and the feelings of unity might be nourished. It has been clear all along that there were different interest groups active in Iran but that they united in their opposition to the Shah. Reps from Iran in the last few weeks confirm that there are groups whose priorities are identical with those of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Q. Does Khomeini command the confidence of the majority of Iranians?

A. At the moment he commands great respect and admiration for his consistent opposition to the Shah which led to his exile fifteen years ago. No one, I think, would question his sincerity or his devotion to the interests of Iran; many, however, are unprepared for the strict interpretation of Islamic law which they think Khomeini may recommend. Khomeini himself claims that he has assumed leadership only so as to pave the way for free elections: I hope he will do this.

Q. Do you yourself regard Khomeini as a suitable leader for the future Iran?

A. Do you mean in religion or in politics? Clearly the Ayatollah is neither a professional politician nor an administrator. I believe his value lies in being a kind of moral watchdog, ready to reprimand any political misdemeanour but not actually taking political office himself.

Q. Do you think that the instigation of traditional Islamic law would be appropriate in Iran now?

A. This depends on what is meant by the term Islamic Republic, a term which Khomeini has used but has not yet clarified. Iran has neither history nor experience comparable to Saudi Arabia or Libya, for example. It seems to me that any attempt to enforce a very strict Islamic code might well spark off further resentment and unrest; this should be avoided. We must wait. Iran needs time for people to settle down, to establish political platforms and organize genuine elections. Perhaps this will be achieved in the future, but it is a huge task.

"the general unemployment situation in Britain is having a demobilizing effect on the student body."

that enters higher education by the mid 1980's. They argue that with the general decline in the birthrate it is not necessary to have that many teachers.

They've since closed down something like forty teacher training colleges in the last three years and reduced the total number of teachers that were being projected until 1981 by over fifty percent. Now that led to a massive campaign in 1976 not simply around the projected downturn in the number of teachers but also around graduate unemployment. As part of this policy a lot of teachers that were qualified to teach when they left college weren't getting jobs. I myself know people who've left teacher's college two years ago and who haven't found a job teaching yet. They're still driving trucks.

NUS Canada: When you speak of mass campaigns do you mean massive participation? Are the majority of British students politicized and do they take an active part in student

