

Clink, clink...

the Gateway

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1981

whistle, whistle.

Founding Conference Congrès d'inauguration

Canadian Federation
of Students

October 14-19,
1981

Carleton University
Ottawa

Fédération canadienne
des étudiants

Du 14 au 19 octobre,
1981

Université Carleton
Ottawa

by Dave Cox

Canadian students have a new national organization to represent them.

The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) had its founding conference in Ottawa last week, October 14-19. Students from campuses across Canada met to found the new organization and make known their unified stand against cutbacks in funding.

Student delegates said they were pleased with the policies and structure of the new organization.

CFS and CFS Services are designed to supersede the old National Union of Students (NUS) and Association of Student Councils (AOSC).

There were problems with the old organizations. They were unequally developed, different in structure, had discrepancies from province to province and NUS. This led to competition between the groups and confusion.

A greater amount of provincial representation is given in the new system. It is a federation, and provincial student groups will be merging with the national body to form one united movement.

For example, the Federation of Alberta Students (FAS) is to become CFS Alberta.

The conferences also hammered out policies on a number of key issues. Most fall under the umbrella of a program called "Stop the Cutbacks - Grants, Not Loans".

When the federal government's Established Programs Financing (EPF) arrangement came into being, it facilitated provincial cuts by guaranteeing a certain level of funding. This allowed provincial governments to reduce the share they were contributing to post-secondary education.

Larger problems arose when the federal funding level also began eroding because of inflation. Proposed cuts of up to 11 billion dollars in the next five years have been mentioned by Liberal Justice Minister Jean Chretien.

This would mean a drop in the quality of education, and reduced accessibility. Social Services would also suffer, since they are part of EPF.

Accessibility was the keynote for the conference.

"Socio-economic status is a prime

barrier to education," said John Doherty, Executive Director of NUS. "Less and less lower income people are attending post-secondary institutions."

"Lower income students' values clash with the 'on to University' mentality, and that turns off teachers" Doherty said.

The federal government's proposed cut of \$1.5 billion from post secondary education, to begin in the upcoming budget, would "change the face of education as we now know it," said one delegate.

The conference adopted the motto, "Access, not Axe Us," for the upcoming winter campaign. This reflected the concern that cutbacks and inadequate student aid pose a real barrier to education.

The problem with loans is that they create a large debt load, which acts as a disincentive to attending university. Student grant assistance should be an incentive.

Concern was voiced that particularly people from lower-income backgrounds, faced with the prospect of amassing a substantial debt, would simply forego higher education.

"Need should be considered," said Bruce Tate, NUS researcher. "There should be reduced costs in absolute terms for poorer people."

In a very good paper entitled *From the Perspective of Equity*, conference coordinator Jeff Parr made the case for an all-grant program of student aid.

"Post-Secondary education is a right," said Parr. "Underprivileged students shouldn't be denied access."

Women students have even more serious problems, since there is a greater bar to women entering university. Cultural bias and upbringing, difficulty getting good jobs and meeting savings requirements all act against women.

Women with children may need day-care facilities, as well, which also become scarce if social services are cut.

Delegates reacted angrily to the government's proposed "voucher system." Under this proposal, the government would give "vouchers" to students who enter certain targeted areas.

Unfortunately, this would allow administrators to raise tuition as high as they want. As a result, students would be steamed into certain areas, mainly professional and technical.

Quotas in professional faculties are university administrations' response to government attempts to stream students into these faculties, and out of the academic core.

"Government has a very short-term outlook on the purpose and value of education," said Mike Walker, incoming CFS treasurer. "They need more long-term planning."

Workshops decided that changes in the taxation system were needed. "There are problems with the current 'block-funding' approach as well," one delegate said.

Due to a recent Cabinet decision, the federal government now uses an "envelope" budgeting plan. Post-secondary

education goes into the "economic development" packet.

Education is therefore only evaluated by how many jobs it will fill.

Not only political issues were discussed at the conference, however. A new services organization was created to take over from the APSC.

In 1977, NUS and AOSC affiliated to increase their profiles, stop duplication and clarify roles, and get better representation.

With the creation of CFS and CFS Services, students will be served by a national body which fills both the political and services roles.

Previously, NUS had been responsible for lobbying government on behalf of students and AOSC had provided the Canadian University Travel Service (CUTS) and various other services.

CFS Services will carry on and expand the Travel Service, the Canadian Programming Service, the combined CFS membership - International Student Identity Card, and a national student union telephone directory.

The Travel Service is expanding rapidly. It is highly popular with students, and one of the fastest growing offices is here in Edmonton. Just last summer, the local office expanded its operation to meet demand.

Canadian Programming Services is a speaker's bureau, with potential to expand into entertainment and selected films.

continued on page 7

