CFS bombs out with federal politicos

OTTAWA (CUP)—After a summer spent seeking out the three political parties' stance on post-secondary education, Canada's national student lobby group failed to muster up politicians' concern for student issues.

The Canadian Federation of Students asked each party leader to participate in a national debate on the issue of university and college funding and respond to a questionnaire on student areas of concern. But the federation's attempts yielded few constructive results.

CFS chair Beth Olley says only NDP Leader Ed Broadbent agreed to a debate. Prime Minister John Turner declined the request and Progressive Conservative Leader Brian Mulroney said he did not have the time.

Though the NDP and the Tories responded to the questionnaire Olley says the student organization held off mailing the answers to its members until it received the Liberals' response. It never came.

Olley said the Liberals' failure to notify the federation that the party would not respond meant CFS' 66 members—about 450,000 students—were not fully informed about the parties' education commitments.

Olley, however, says the federation did pass on the questionairre to local student unions for use in their ridings. Student unions in every province tried to raise the issues of education underfunding, youth unemployment, student aid and decreased accessibility with local candidates, she added.

CFS also alerted the chief electoral officer about the problems facing students who wanted to vote but were moving out of their home ridings.

Hundreds of students returning to school did not know where they could vote or were too busy on Sept. 4 with registration and classes to cast their ballots, Olley says, even though CFS and the returning officer encouraged them to vote early.

"We know the chief electoral officer was far more concerned about getting students to vote after we talked to him," she says.

Although some issues troubling students such as youth unemployment were already prominent in the election campaign, Olley says her interviews with local and national media as well as research papers and pamphlets sent to CFS members helped them become more of a priority.

"We did a little bit of kicking along the way."

Olley says now that the Tories have swept into power with a majority of 211 seats, lobby groups

such as CFS must ensure the federal government does not renege on its election promises. Two of these include a commitment to maintain education funding levels and a proposal to provide potential employers with incentives to hire young people.

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