

EDITORIAL

CFS and "Student Issues"

by Lynne Wanyeki

This week, the *Brunswickan* received several copies of *The Student Advocate*, a newsletter published by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). The newsletter contained several interesting and well-done articles, which sought to create awareness of the kind of issues facing students today. They also sought to clarify CFS' position on many of those issues, inviting comments from students across the country. The move to produce a newsletter of this kind is commendable - and rather appropriate, given the internal dispute occurring within CFS at this time.

What should the mandate of a nation-wide student organization be? CFS was initially intended to be a lobby group representing student concerns at the federal level of government on issues such as post-secondary funding for education and student aid. However, as the organization has evolved, questions have arisen as to whether or not other issues should be addressed. An article in *The Student Advocate* attempted to sum up the potential range of such issues:

Accessibility to education goes beyond financial issues. Students also want to ensure that their campuses are safe, open, and healthy environments for everyone to learn in. Thus, your student representatives have asked for campaigns which deal with important campus issues like academic racism, date rape, homophobia on campus, campus safety and AIDS awareness.

[...] Many elected student representatives want issues like free trade and the corporatization of education, or taxation and available funds for universities and colleges addressed because the links are there.

And finally, student are citizens of society in general, and are therefore affected by everything which goes on in the world. For many students, this means that we must have a student presence on issues like the Gulf War.

The Student Advocate, page 2

The UNB Student Union's representative at CFS is Tammy Yates, the Student Union V. P. External. She feels that CFS should return to its original mandate, and deal primarily with the budget freeze on funding for post-secondary education, and accordingly, tuition and the quality of teaching on campus. Why? In her mind, CFS is spreading itself too thin. Only two officials at CFS are paid, full-time employees and the rest are volunteers, many with agendas and commitments on their own campuses apart from CFS, and many bearing full course loads. This being the case, the multi-faceted agenda proposed above could not begin to be addressed effectively. In her words, "CFS would end up doing a poor job of everything, rather than a good job in one area."

While this argument could be said to hold some weight, it is for another reason that I would hesitate in opting for the direction that CFS seems to be taking. I do not see the debate in terms of either/or, where one issue necessarily takes precedence at the expense of another. For at certain universities, there are already structures or organizations in place that could share in the formulation and implementation of policies to deal with the wide range of activities proposed by CFS. At this time, however, even attempting to deal with an agenda of this scope at UNB, would be much akin to working in a vacuum. Policies cannot come from the top down if there is nothing at the bottom to sustain them. And at UNB, unfortunately, I have seen very little that leads me to believe that students are indeed ready: to work on these issues at all; or to work on these issues in the CFS forum.

It is this lack of involvement with CFS at our own student body level which reduces the issue to either/or. For example, CFS is running two campaigns on February 14th. One, supported by Tammy Yates, is the If You Love Education Campaign. The second is the Pink Triangle Day Campaign, to commemorate the internment and deaths of gay men as well as the institutionalization of lesbians as such during the Second World War. This she would have delegated to GALA - had GALA been operative this year. Another example, which occurred early last term, had to do with the overturning of the Rape Shield Law, which CFS wished to take a stand against. At UNB, a campaign around this could have been delegated to the UNB Student Women's Committee. I do not know whether the Committee was ever consulted on the matter, but even if they were, would they have opted to deal with it through CFS, or would they have used the channels already open to them through the National Action Committee on the Status of Women?

I was somewhat surprised at my own reaction to this, wondering at first if I had inadvertently moved into a new and uncomfortable conservatism. But I am not at all in fundamental disagreement with the aims of CFS. I am taking into account the reality of this campus, which is characterized on the one hand, by quite widespread apathy towards anything non-hedonistic and on the other hand, by low awareness of how to utilize CFS in tandem with organizations already present (if only constitutionally) on campus. If we as students want CFS to go beyond a purely financial mandate, we have a responsibility to get up off our collective butt and do something about it.

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