

National student federation challenged by Alberta pullout

OTTAWA (CUP)— Canada's national student lobby group has lost its largest member but representatives say the move will not spell the demise of the deficit ridden organization.

University of Alberta students voted in a strong majority Feb. 7 and 8 to reject membership in the Canadian Federation of Students, which is carrying a \$65,000 debt-load this year. The U of A pays more than \$80,000 in membership fees.

"We're not near bankruptcy yet. We have financial difficulties but we have a stable budget," says CFS Chair-elect Barb Donaldson, a U of A student working on the CFS "yes" committee.

"We tried to be too much for too many for too long. It's time to face up to a lot of criticism," she said.

Of the more than 7,000 students who filled out a ballot, 64 per cent cast a "no" vote and 36 per cent cast a "yes" vote for the federation. About 27 per cent of the university's 24,000 students voted.

Along with Donaldson, CFS chair Beth Olley insists the stinging loss will not force the organization to cut services next year.

Olley says savings made through the combining of CFS's political and services executive boards — a move decided upon at its November general-meeting — will take care of at least \$20,000 of the lost revenue.

The chair, who is sorely disappointed with the referendum's results, says the organization can also scale down next year's budget from about \$480,000 this year to \$420,000. She says the reduction can be made because CFS does not have to budget for a \$40,000 surplus to pay off part of the deficit next year. Both Olley and Donaldson deny the loss will delay debt repayment.

The remaining \$20,000, which goes to CFS-Services, will be taken care of in its own budget. Olley says CFS-Services is expecting to save money on the combining of the two boards and can budget accordingly.

"With a little bit of innovation, it can be solved easily and with no conceivable reduction in services," Olley says.

"It's a problem we have to deal with but it's not insurmountable. We are not anywhere near going bankrupt and never have been. It's simply not the case."

Donaldson and Olley say the decisive vote hurts the

federation's morale, coming shortly after the University of B.C. students voted overwhelmingly to reject CFS. But they say the results have not dampened their optimism for upcoming referenda at the University of Victoria and University of King's College in Halifax in mid-March.

Olley says the University of Western Ontario is interested in becoming a prospective member and could bring in substantial revenue to offset the U of A loss. Western has more than 18,000 full-time students.

The U of A referendum was run simultaneously with student council executive elections. Ballot box irregularities plagued the elections but Donaldson says the suspicious results will not affect the decision on CFS. She and other scrutineers were recounting executive election ballots at press time.

Paul Alpern, U of A student vice-president external, says he thinks the majority rejected the organization because of its policies calling for Canada to pull out of NATO and NORAD and supporting Chilean and El Salvadorian peoples' fight against their countries' repressive regimes.

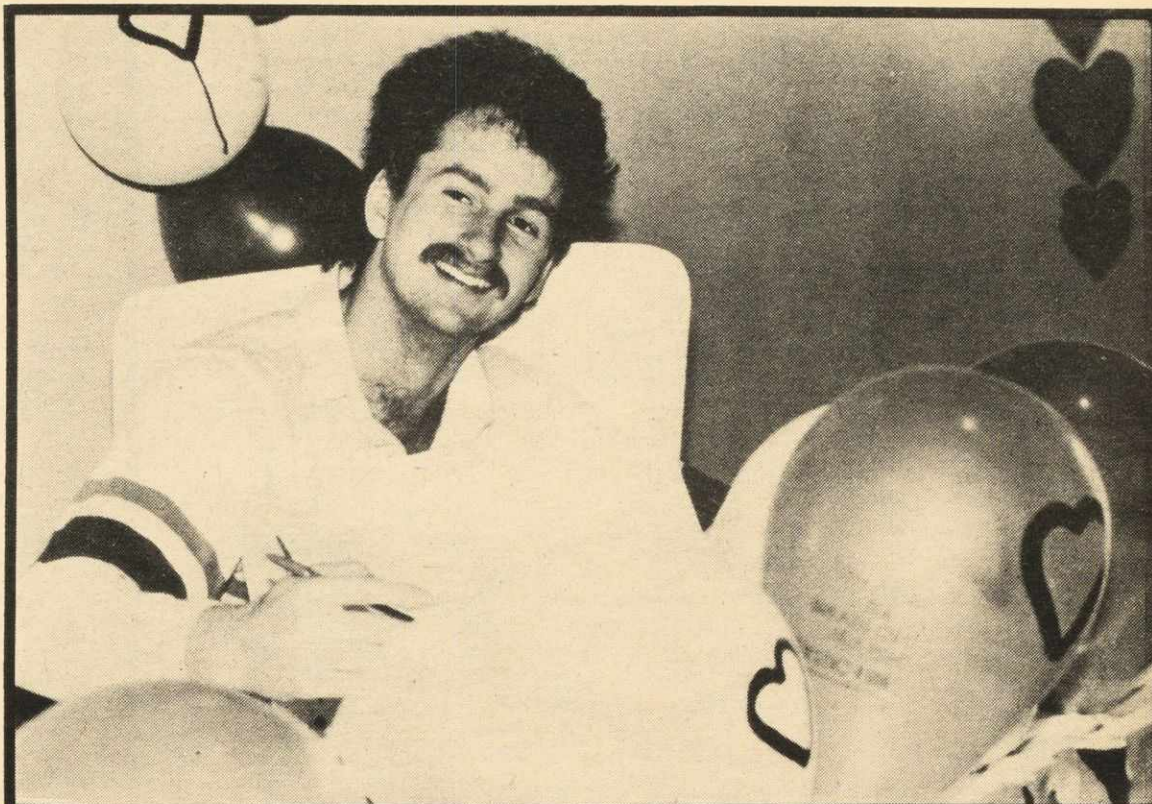
Concerns about the organization's finances, its ineffectiveness as a lobby group and failure to respond to members, he says, were also factors.

Four out of five executive slates in the council elections did not support CFS. Alpern says a "no" committee, which plastered anti-CFS posters over the campus, was active in influencing students' vote.

"I felt there was a lot of questions and frustration with the organization," he says. "Why weren't we getting any feedback from the national organization? Why did a national rep not visit its largest member before the referendum?"

Donaldson says, however, Alpern and council president Floyd Hodgins and vice-president internal Gord Stamp refused to co-operate with CFS representatives on campus. She says they were involved in the "no" CFS campaign.

Alpern says the big schools such as the U of A and UBC may begin to organize an alternative federation of students that would replace CFS and foster more communication between students at the country's largest institutions.



"Kiss me, you fool," begs DSU vice-president Rusty James. The Dal Arts Society sponsored a kissing booth in the SUB Green Room to raise money for OXFAM. James' desperate efforts brought in \$2.00. The starving masses of the world will be truly grateful. Happy Valentine's Day, Rusty. Photo: Mary C. Sykes, Dal Photo.

Dalplex defends "deadly" fibres

By ERIN STEUTER

ASBESTOS. IT'S A WORD that evokes images of choking miners, wheezing workers, and contaminated school children.

In recent months its spectre has loomed locally as complaints by patrons have forced health authorities to defend the use of asbestos in the Dalplex.

"There is no risk to the users of our facilities," says Dalplex manager Tony Martin.

He maintains that the pressed asbestos board found in the saunas and the asbestos tiles that line the foyer ceiling pose no health hazard as long as the surfaces are sealed.

"The surfaces are constantly monitored," he says. "There is no danger."

However, two Dalplex members remain unconvinced. A professional couple in their 30s say that they first noticed what they believed to be asbestos peeling from the ceiling in the Dalplex foyer a few months ago.

"We made a few inquiries and not only did they (University health officials and Dalplex management) refuse to answer our questions, but they lied to us about what it was."

The couple, who are reluctant to use their names for fear of recriminations, are disgusted at the reaction they encountered.

"First they told us it wasn't asbestos, then it was, then it wasn't; it was Mica, and finally that it was asbestos but it was safe."

"This kind of attitude could be expected from some multinational but we expected Dalhousie to take some kind of responsibility in providing us with answers and information."

"Instead we were basically told, 'if you don't like it, don't use it.'"

University health and safety inspector, Dr. Joe Johnston, is annoyed by their accusations.

"I have given them (the couple) all the information we have but

they only seem to be satisfied if the tiles are removed. Not only did the department of health and safety examine the material, but I checked it out personally. It is perfectly fine. There is no need to remove it," he says.

Once praised as the 'magical mineral' because of its indestructible nature, asbestos is now considered one of the most dangerous substances known, allegedly causing 17 per cent of all cancer deaths.

Inhalation of its fibres is thought to result in cancer of the larynx or lungs. Prolonged exposure leads to progressive and debilitating lung diseases such as asbestosis and mesothelioma.

"Asbestos is the only cause of mesothelioma (cancer of the lung cavity)," says environmental engineer Duncan MacKay.

"As little as one exposure can kill you," he says, "but it may take twenty years to show up."

T.A. Mejzner of the N.S. department of occupational health and safety, says that the kind of asbestos used in the

Dalplex is only carcinogenic if the surface is inadequately sealed and the asbestos fibres are free and airborne.

He says that there are extensive tests and indexes to check the safety level of asbestos, but adds, "even the best material can break down and then there is a risk of contamination that may not be justified."

Martin however maintains that the asbestos is an appropriate and necessary fire retardant.

"We were instructed to install it by the Fire Marshall and do not consider it a hazard," he says.

Nevertheless, the concerned couple say that they are unsatisfied with the answers they have received.

"We live in a country that gave government assistance to people to put Urea Formaldehyde in their homes when it was known to be dangerous and banned in the United States," they note.

"After that, you're supposed to believe what the 'authorities' tell you?"

DSU elections coming soon

By BILL MITCHELL

VOTING IN DALHOUSIE STUDENT UNION ELECTIONS will be held from March 13-15.

Many positions are up for grabs, including president, vice-president internal and members of the council.

The closing date for nominations is Feb. 25. No candidates have put forward their names so far in the annual contest.

"But this is not unusual at this stage," says Kevin Drolet, DSU chief elections returning officer. He says two years ago Tim Hill and Susan MacIntyre submitted their nominations one minute before nominations closed. They were elected president and vice-president.

"The unusual thing is that all the other positions will not be contested by present student politicians. All the old guard are leaving," says Drolet.

The DSU elections will be covered in a special March 5 *Gazette* election supplement which will examine the candidates and the issues.