

Newfoundland students' dream comes true

By JOAN SULLIVAN

THE YEARS OLD DREAM OF uniting Newfoundland's post-secondary institutions was

realized Feb 3 at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of students was founded in St. John's by 17 colleges, trade and vocational schools.

Amid confusion over Robert's Rules of Order and sometimes confusing debate on student issues, a constitution was passed, a nine-member executive elected, and a fee base of \$2 per full-time student was decided on.

Uniting the institutions against a poor quality of education is the first priority of president Elizabeth Walsh, from the Carboneer District Vocational school.

Poor resource materials, unqualified instructors and the dismissal of one delegate from his student union were the major

topics of discussion.

"These issues are winnable and they're universal, and can be fought with cheap campaigns," said Margot Bruce, vice-president (external) at Memorial.

The new federation did not focus on such political issues as student aid, but that is not a problem, said Judy Guthrie, Atlantic Fieldworker for the Canadian Federation of Students.

"They're just beginning to learn how to lobby," Guthrie said.

"Many of the delegates are just beginning to understand what a

provincial organization can do. First they'll look at local issues — such as the transferability of credits.

"There's a lot of room to grow," Guthrie said.

It is very important to mobilize students at a grassroots level, she said.

CFS puts a priority on this — helping people organize locally." As the provincial government As the provincial governments decide what to do with federal education funds, lobbying on a provincial level can be more effective and successful than on a federal level, said Guthrie.

Only Alberta, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island are without provincial organizations.

Autonomy was another issue discussed at the conference, and Guthrie said it could cause some problems for the new organization.

Many of the student councils are administration controlled, through a faculty advisor who sits on the council and has complete veto power over their decisions.

Guthrie hopes delegates will use their experience from the conference to put together their own constitutions.

All institutions attending the conference are considered prospective members of NLFS. Most plan on holding a referendum next fall to vote on going for full membership, with a fee of \$2 per student per term.

A fee base will help the organization become solid, Guthrie said. A grant has paid for one executive meeting, but after that there are no funds left.

The money from fees will be used for executive honoraria, postage and travel. There was some talk of hiring a staffperson in the future, but delegates were wary of getting "too grandiose ideas," said Guthrie.

The biggest threat to the new organization is the lack of continuity, said Bruce and Guthrie.

Many of the members are schools with one year programmes, and the turnover rate for delegates and executive is expected to be high.

Bruce suggested some executive be elected in the fall, the rest in the spring, and a monthly newsletter was also mentioned as a way to keep members in touch with each other.

Communication at each college about the federation should be a priority, said Guthrie.

Newfoundland's geography makes travel expensive and difficult, and this may create communication problems, said Guthrie.

But organizers were impressed with the high turn-out for the conference — 17 out of a possible 21 institutions were represented.

"It's amazing," said Guthrie. "I hope the excitement and drive continues."

The federation has already covered a lot of ground, said Guthrie.

"The Student Alliance (New Brunswick) is still at point A. These guys (NLFS) are already halfway through the alphabet, Guthrie said. CFS chair Beth Olley attended the conference as an observer. The next conference is scheduled for November.



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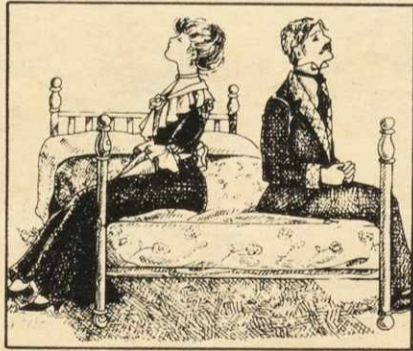


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