

New SRC by-law causes demise of petition

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A petition to make student fees optional was called off by its organizers last Wednesday in light of a move to change the by-law regarding petitions at an emergency SRC meeting held February 17.

In a surprise move, council gave notice of motion to invalidate all referenda which are not voted on by two-thirds of the student body. "It's obvious they definitely wanted some way to stop this going to a binding referendum," said spokesperson Allan Hildebrand.

SRC executives denied the motive behind the emergency meeting was to stop the petition from being voted on. Hildebrand, however, who showed The Brunswickan copies of the petition with 298 names on them, said the new regulation would make a "mockery" of it.

He accused the SRC of changing the regulations in the middle of a protest and said SRC and student union executive meetings require only fifty per cent of their members for a forum.

Hildebrand said he did not believe two-thirds of the campus would have turned out to vote, so that the referendum would have been a waste of time and money. The referendum would have cost

around \$600.

"He said this regulation would make the SRC the only place where 'substantially important decisions can be made.'"

"In other words, it creates an oligarchy, he said.

Hildebrand substantiated this allegation by referring to a statement by student union president Jim Murray last Monday that a decision by council, "whose members are presumably more knowledgeable than the uninformed student, is of greater value than a referendum among the student body."

"At the meeting, I told him I thought he put his foot in his mouth," said Hildebrand.

Murray said he was "not surprised" by Hildebrand's move, but denied any allegation of wrongdoing.

He said he did not want to stop the petition from coming to a vote, but said that a large number of students should vote on a decision of such large import.

"I did not consider adding that regulation unethical because there were loopholes in our constitution, and this was one of them." He said if only a small number of students voted on the petition, a "majority of the minority" would be "dictating" to the rest.

He said that a small number of people should not be able to

"destroy the union".

Murray said he believed there was no reason why two-thirds of the campus might not have voted on "an issue which concerns each and everyone of us here." If it had passed, "We simply would have accepted the decision of the students without any questions."

Vice president external Alex Kibaki Muriithi agreed with Murray, saying "With the proper information, I think two-thirds of the campus would have come out and voted."

He also said there was a "loophole" in the present constitution, and that a substantial number of students should vote on issues of fundamental importance to the student union. Kibaki Muriithi said students should "decide their destiny and not allow a simple majority to decide that destiny for them."

Vice president internal Jan McCurdy said she was "kind of

disappointed he would bring it this far and not bring it through."

She disagreed with Hildebrand's assertion that two-thirds of the students would not have voted.

McCurdy said she agreed with Hildebrand "in principle but not in fact." Students should "indirectly" have input into union decisions, but a few hundred voters should not be able to make major decisions.

She claimed the notice of motion was not intended primarily to stop the Hildebrand petition but once again, they were "filling a loophole."

"The SRC wasn't running scared," she said.

"Alan showed up the loophole," claimed McCurdy.

"I hope he doesn't take it as a personal grudge because I don't think it was meant to be."

Comptroller Bryan Pryde, not present at the emergency meeting said he doubted that two-thirds of

the campus would have voted on the petition and pointed out that the best election turnout in recent years was around 32 per cent.

Hildebrand said he still wants to have section 8, subsection 2 of the student union by laws changed, which says all students taking more than three courses have to pay fees.

He said that some students, including those in fourth year education, who are away from campus practice teaching for a whole term, do not benefit from the union. If a student does not benefit from the union, they should not have to pay fees, he said.

He pointed out that his petition garnered 91 names in two days at the education building.

The notice of motion was carried into effect at another special meeting last night.

Fee increase a possibility

UNB's comptroller warns that if there is no increase in the provincial operating grant to this university then there will either be cutbacks on this campus or a combination of cutbacks with a fee increase.

After the provincial Legislature opens this March first, UNB should have a clearer picture of their financial situation when budget estimates pertaining to educational allotments are released.

In January the Association of Atlantic Universities said that "tuition fees will have to rise if the government of the Maritime Provinces do not grant post-secondary institutions in the region and average increase of 12.5 per cent in operating grants."

UNB is asking for an allotment of about three million dollars over last year's figure of \$25,102,000 in operating grants.

Comptroller Sam Mullin told a Brunswickan reporter that "it was tight" this year; in reference to the status of UNB pertaining to revenues and costs. Mullin could not comment at this time on the possibility of fee increases for the next academic year.

A tabulation of capital expenditures was not available but Mullin said that about 4.3 million worth of tuition monies were gathered last year. But he added that if there was no government grant to make up for the desired operating grant increase of about three million that there was "no possible" way this total figure could be made up through tuition increases.

In a press release of January 25 Association of Atlantic Universities chairperson Ronald Barker said that the increase would be necessary to meet rising costs of more than 20 per cent and wage increases for faculty and support staff "within the AIB guidelines."

Barker said the 12.5 per cent increase was the minimum needed for institutions whose tuition fees, comprising about 20



per cent of revenue, "are already the highest in the country".

In October of last year Canada's provincial education ministers met, having nothing to say then on the effects expected from changes in the federal-provincial cost sharing agreement which was being discussed. Under the Fiscal Arrangements Act, due to expire in April 1977, the federal government matches dollar for dollar what the provinces spend on their respective post-secondary education systems.

Negotiations held then revealed the federal government will abolish that system and replace it with a transfer of tax points to the provinces. The smaller and poorer provinces have said their small tax bases will mean decreased financing for education when the

new system comes into effect this year.

Estimates of planned federal government spending in fiscal 1977-78 tabled in the House of Commons this year show that the federal contribution to post-secondary education may rise slightly, with the provinces receiving more cash instead of tax point equivalents.

A finance department spokesman said that roughly 2.1 billion dollars would be available in cash and tax transfers. But as recent payments to the provinces have been on the basis of about one third cash and two thirds tax point transfers the government is substantially increasing the cash contribution to meet a 50-50 balance.

STUDENT TV COVERS FEES DEBATE

"In Focus", a bi-weekly news magazine format series will feature this week the STUDENT FEES DEBATE, an expose of the SRC fee debate, including on the spot video taped interviews with students as well as the people involved, Alan Hildebrand and Jim Murray. Produced by the News Department of UNB Television.

To be aired Sunday, February 27 at 5 p.m., Channel 10.

AFS referenda:

Five stay, one leaves

OTTAWA (CUP) — The Atlantic region's student organization has carried three Halifax universities in a Feb. 16 membership referendum, and the National Union of Students is in at two Atlantic schools.

Students at Mount St. Vincent University voted 484 to 102 to pay a dollar each to the two year old Atlantic Federation of Students (AFS); at St. Mary's the vote was carried 611 to 41; and at Dalhousie University students voted 1318 to 904 to join the federation.

The National Union of Students gained members at Mount St. Vincent, where the vote was 409 to 107, while Dalhousie students favored NUS membership 1655 to 560.

At St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, students favored AFS membership 565 to 249, but failed to turn out the quorum of 40 per cent required by the student union constitution to make the results binding.

AFS recently suffered defeat in its first referendum at the University of New Brunswick.

University of New Brunswick voted 863-692 against a fee increase for the Atlantic Federation of Students (AFS) in a referendum Feb. 2. It was the first referendum in the AFS campaign to increase its fee to a \$1 per capita direct levy.

AFS chairperson Don Soucy blamed the loss on a lack of communication with UNB students. Soucy said that he did not

expect the UNB loss would greatly affect the results of the coming referenda. He said "we are getting information out to students and we have stronger organizations on the local campuses."

The UNB loss is expected to affect the organization's finances in the coming year. Soucy said that AFS would likely have to re-examine some of its priorities to accommodate the loss in expected revenue.

Students at Memorial University in St. John's will vote on AFS membership Feb. 23.

The referenda are part of a series to be held throughout the Atlantic provinces this spring as a result of an AFS conference last fall, where delegates decided to approach students directly for funding and membership in the federation. The organization has been based on the membership of student unions, which pay fees of about 50 cents a student.

With the increased funding the federation hopes to increase its efforts in fighting against tuition fee hikes and for better student aid, and hire one full time staff person for its office. NUS regional fieldworker, Miguel Figueroa, has been helping AFS in setting up the referenda.

Universities across the Atlantic region have been raising tuition fees this year, and recently the 20-member Association of Atlantic Universities told the Council of Maritime Premiers that fee hikes could be expected next year if a minimum standard of funding is not forthcoming from the provinces.